

**The Indian "Act": Postmodern Perspectives on
Native Canadian Theatre**

by

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Abstract**The Indian "Act": Postmodern Perspectives on
Native Canadian Theatre****Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre 1999****Robert Appleford****Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama****University of Toronto**

Since the explosion of theatrical activity by Native artists in Canada since the 1980s, Native playwrights and performance artists have written and performed challenging representations of identity, representations in which irony, self-conscious manipulations of form, and investigations of subjecthood play a large part. It is of value to understand these works as contingent constructions, ones which foreground their own ontological premises the better to subject them to scrutiny. Native performance intervenes in representation by reminding us of its formal constraints. In its playful manipulation of form and identity, it can be seen to have both sympathies with and divergences from the aesthetic/philosophical discourses known collectively as "postmodern". The conjunction of postmodernism and Native performance permits a

mutual transformation of means and ends, where the ideological agendas advanced by Native theatre make use of the tools of deconstruction to reinvent a "new" (yet immanently "traditional") conception of Native subjecthood. Similarly, this project calls into question whether the tropes of power implicit in postmodern theory are contingent or necessary.

This thesis explores the ways in which postmodern theory selectively illuminates aspects of Native theatrical expression. Chapter 1 outlines the relative strengths and weaknesses of postmodern theory as an affirmative tool for Native explorations of identity. Chapter 2 begins a discussion of the potential ways Native theatre is perceived by an audience, and the tactics employed by Native performers to subvert the process of reification. Chapter 3 focuses upon the body in plays written by Native women, and how its materiality is both constituted (in part) and threatened by dominant discourse. Chapter 4 explores the affinity between postmodern ideas of history and the synchronic formulation of the past in Native performance. Chapter 5 extends the concept of trickster discourse to examine Native

plays that interrogate the ideological underpinnings
of narrative form.

Acknowledgements

There is an old Russian sailor's proverb: "Pray to God, but row to the shore!". In the course of researching and writing this thesis, I have engaged in both activities, particularly when experiencing severe intellectual headcramp or general loss of heart. Many individuals have either answered my prayers or shouted encouragement from the riverbanks, and it is to these people that I owe my deepest gratitude. First on this list would be my ever-supportive supervisor, Richard Plant. Without his constant encouragement and perspicuity, this thesis would never have been completed. (I am also grateful that Richard introduced me to the utterly civilized practice of serving tea and biscuits to his graduate classes, a tradition I plan to continue.) I would also like to thank my committee members Michael Sidnell and Krystyna Sieciechowicz for their comments and support. The entire staff at the Drama Centre, University of Toronto, deserves kudos and heartfelt thanks for the ever-ready help sent my way. One remembers pearls of wisdom dropped almost off-handedly. During my writing, I often thought of David Blostein's deceptively simple warning to me that as an academic, one should open up a field of study rather than close it down. If I have followed this advice with any consistency, I count the thesis a success.

I also need to thank the many people who, on a personal level, have supported me as I prayed and rowed. I am deeply grateful to the many Native scholars, elders and artists who have, over the years, both challenged me with their ideas and egged me on to greater realization of what these ideas really mean. And last, and most important, I thank my wife Liana Shannon, always whip-smart and cute as a button, who has helped me in ways she may never even know.

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In 1876, my grandmother was only a small child. Still, she understood the implications of the *Indian Act*. For her, it meant for the people to act, and in some respects, they have been acting ever since. They have been acting Indian!

Dennis H. McPherson

Coyote went east to see the
PRIME Minister.
I wouldn't make this up.
And the PRIME Minister was so HAPPY
to see Coyote
that he made HIM a member
of cabinet.
Maybe YOU can HELP us solve the
Indian problem.

Sure, says the Coyote.
WHAT'S the problem?

When Elwood tells this story, he
always LAUGHS and spoils
the ending.

Thomas King

INTRODUCTION: THIS IS NOT A (PEACE) PIPE

. . . . not merely does the public stage appear to operate as the political platform which, iconographically, it resembles, but it offers a model of group strength, of imaginative purpose and of a confident identity the vertiginous excitement of theatre the sense of genuine risk, is liable to be closer to the experience of a threatened group than is the aesthetic closure of film which is about the process of being rather than becoming.

C.W.E. Bigsby

During the period in which I was engaged in the final revision of this thesis, I was invited to play in a nine-ball pool tournament organized by the university department in which I was teaching.

Being knocked out of the competition early (I was neatly dusted by a congenial fellow who was the university's director of finance), I had time to chat with a colleague (also eliminated in the first round) about my thesis. I told him that I was using postmodern theories of literature and culture to explore Native theatre. My colleague, who had some familiarity with both postmodernism and Native literature, looked at me with a measure of polite doubt. He offered me an analogy that I think bears reflection. Consider postmodernism to be an electrical outlet, he said. It permits only certain things to plug into it. Native literature can fit, given its qualities of formal

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experimentation, but it lacks other, more intrinsic elements that permit a sympathy of design, a current, to be shared. I will return to this analogy later. (The tournament was won by an anthropology professor with uncanny bravado; I learned never to play pool with anyone whose business is the study of popular culture.)

I began my study of Native theatre quite simply because I perceived a distinct lack of scholarly material on the subject. When I started reading up on the subject (early 1991), there were only a few scattered articles, mainly on Tomson Highway, and no book-length investigations of Native theatre. Having seen a number of Native plays staged in Toronto, I felt that something interesting, even unique was going on, something which I wanted to explore in greater depth.

Because I have always been interested in the critical reception of theatre, and am often stimulated in my scholarly investigations by an examination of performance history, I first turned to the reviews of the plays¹ I had enjoyed to determine whether my own impressions were shared or contradicted by others. I quickly began to discover that in many cases particular performances

¹ I will offering examples of these reviews in extended

that I had felt warranted praise were being evaluated according to criteria very different from my own, resulting in appraisals often lukewarm in their enthusiasm. At the time, all I could surmise from this discrepancy was that the critics were lacking an essential framework which would enable them to access the material and engage with it. I felt that this missing framework was of an historical and cultural nature, involving the absence of specific knowledge about traditional tribal philosophy and aesthetic practice. For example, knowing something of Cree social dynamics pre- and post-contact would help to "explain" Tomson Highway's own vision of Cree culture. Given this premise, my conceived task as a scholar became one of mediation, researching the specific aspects of each playwright's culture and producing a cross-cultural gloss on individual works.

As I proceeded along with this premise in mind, I quickly began to realize that the lack of enthusiasm I had discerned wasn't a simple case of lack of information. During my research, I was asked to write a survey article detailing the history of Native theatre in North America. My editor required that I provide the nation in

discussions throughout the thesis

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parentheses of each artist I profiled (eg. Cree, Nez Perce, etc.). This practice made for much-needed cultural accuracy, but it also caused me to reflect upon the manner in which Native identity is institutionalized: how does the artist's nation determine what he or she produces? A familiarity with the aboriginal heritage of a Native artist is undeniably essential, and furnishes valuable critical analysis grounded in specifics of culture. For example, Shirely Hauck's reading of Highway's play *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* is informed by knowledge of Cree bilateral social systems, where she argues that the men's sexism in the play should be understood not in relation to a generalized loss of property and power but to the traditional friction caused when Cree men in the precontact period were obligated to live with their wives' families usually until the birth of their first child (296). However, having said this, I will argue that the understanding of Native art solely in relation to nation also serves to set boundaries on how and what the Native artist can create and still be considered "Native"².

² Understandably, the issue of aboriginal naming is highly complex. For example, recent attempts have been made by Native people to renovate the term "Indian" in Canada and posit an original Latin derivation *in deo* ("of God") which they believe was mistakenly assumed by later historians to refer to Columbus' professed destination (Jonnie, 42). Dyck

In the case of Highway, a knowledge of Cree history and tradition is useful, but what of his experiences at the University of Western Ontario as a music major, or his experiences living in the United Kingdom, or his experiences as a gay man? Significantly, few of these issues are ever raised in scholarly examination of his work. Similarly, the poet/playwright Daniel David Moses is a Delaware Native Canadian, but he has also held a government job where he processed numerous legal and cultural documents relating to diverse Native groups, allowing him access to a range of Native Canadian cultural experience. Jimmie Durham, whose artistic and critical work has been seen by many critics as vitally extending the concept of Native American art³, is legally unable to claim Cherokee

(1980) argues that the term "Native" is a product of the nation-state's centric ideology of assimilation, and its generic quality serves to efface the fundamental differences which help strengthen aboriginal groups both culturally and politically (36-38). For my part, I have chosen to employ the term "Native" in this study despite its problems since the majority of Native peoples in Canada seem to have accepted its validity, though I do feel that its homogenizing tendency needs to be kept in mind.

³ In my study, I make use of several key American Native sources, including Durham, cognisant of the fact that the experiences of Native Americans and Native Canadians are not synonymous. Native American philosophies and aesthetic practices are in large part determined by cultural and historical circumstances unique to the U.S. (such as the Public Law 101-644 determining the legal right to claim artistic products as authentically "Indian," or the use of blood quanta to ascertain Indian status). However, I do feel that many of the issues confronting Native Canadians relating to identity, and its constitution within resistant and dominant discourse, are shared by Native Americans. Many Native groups themselves refuse to recognize the American-

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ancestry due to restrictive U.S. laws determining Native status (McMaster, 88). This problem of categorization becomes even more complex when one considers the material conditions under which Native plays are performed in Canada. If a play containing "traditional" Native motifs and ceremonial dancing is written by a Toronto-raised Native playwright and performed by actors who are part of the city's theatrical scene, should the work be evaluated as ethnological artefact, religious ritual or as a product of the arts community of urban Canada? Or all three? As I reconsidered the reviews I had puzzled over, I suspected that their unfavourable critical positions were less a matter of cultural incomprehension than of the difficulties inherent in reception. Because the work was being viewed as the transparent expression of specific cultures, cultures with which non-Natives are mostly unfamiliar, it was invariably received as cultural fact, with the playwrights being seen as playing the role of amanuensis and not of the artist engaged in recombinant creative manipulation of cultural threads. In the case of Native reception,

Canadian border as a determination of separate identities. Thus, within this limited context, I believe any insights provided by Native Americans are valuable.

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these plays are frequently understood in relation to developing (and hotly contested) notions of Native identity that are in themselves highly political and diverse. Given these preexistent standards of what it means to be Native, Native performance, rather than experimenting with new ways of representing culture, was often being judged against largely normative and internalized ideas of what Native stories should be like, both in terms of form and content. If Native cultural background was introduced into this discussion (as I had believed necessary), this reification of "Nativity" at the expense of multivalent and complex subject positions would only be intensified. Seen in this light, my own interpretation of Native theatre began to show itself to be equally loaded with preexistent notions of Native culture. In many ways, I had made the mistake of viewing Native performance as a window into Native life, and if I had some trouble discerning exactly what was being revealed through this window, it was due to my own ignorance of what I was seeing, rather than due to the idiosyncratic quality of the glass⁴.

⁴ Jarold Ramsey makes a similar point in his discussion of contemporary Native American writers: "it amounts to a choice between perspectives: on the one hand,

I came to believe that it was imperative to explore how Native theatre was being received by audiences, and what was considered to constitute the "Native" in this theatre. I found that this was not an easy task. In my reading of certain texts, I noticed that irony, self-conscious manipulations of form, and investigations of subjecthood played a large part. Because the artists themselves were engaged in a dialogue with Native culture, many of the plays seemed to invite the audience to interrogate its own presuppositions as to what role the concept of "Native" plays in cultural and political discourse. Umberto Eco has argued that texts force the reader not to take them at their face value, but rather to go outside the text and undertake what he calls an "inferential walk":

The reader was encouraged to activate
hypothesis by a lot of already recorded
narrative situations (intertextual frames).

To identify these frames the reader had to

looking at a Klallam or Acoma poet as an expression of the author's grasp of his or her people's traditions, and, in a real sense, as an extension of these traditions; and, on the other hand, looking at the poem as the work of a contemporary American writer, certifiably an Indian, but who probably reads *Newsweek*, Lewis Thomas, and an indifferent newspaper like the rest of us, and must likewise make poems out of the available words and the interplay of imagination and tradition" (181-

"walk," so to speak, outside the text, in order to gather intertextual support (a quest for analogous "topoi," themes, or motives) (32).

In my own "inferential walk" through these plays, I saw that it was of value to understand these plays as contingent constructions, ones which foregrounded their own ontological premises the better to subject them to scrutiny. Like Magritte's painting *Ceci n'est pas un pipe* (1926), Native performance intervenes in representation by reminding us of its formal constraints. In their playful manipulation of form and identity, they seemed to be part of the project called (in pejection or celebration) the "postmodern," where concepts of knowledge are interrogated and reinvented at the expense of monolithic and editorializing master narratives.

The precedence for an examination of Native theatre through a postmodern lens has been set in other work on Native art. In recent years, critics have begun to frame Native visual art in postmodern terms, employing theory generated from other disciplines (notably literary and cultural studies)

to capture the multivalent nature of contemporary Native work (cf. Brownsey (1993), Ryan (1992:1995), and Townsend-Gault (1991:1992)). Images of stereotype are frequently juxtaposed in ironic counterpoint with "traditional" materials in the work of Native visual artists like Carl Beam and Bill Powless, and their work often belies any concise or simplifying statements of identity. Because no effacement of stereotype can ever be complete, there exists within such work -- called by one critic "contingent constructs" (Brownsey, 123) -- an inherent tension between the familiar and the alien. What is created is a palimpsest, each text only partially obscuring and re-writing the other, which forces the observer to reevaluate his or her preconceptions of what "Native art" is able to express. This movement towards postmodern critical paradigms is also increasingly evident in responses to Native theatre. While perhaps reluctant to categorize Native theatre itself as explicitly postmodern, critics have interrogated non-Native audiences' desire to ideologically filter Native performance (Bennett, 1991:1993 and Filewod, 1992:1994), thus opening up the possibility that Native theatre's meaning is contingent and subject to indeterminacy.

Seeing this affinity, I was also conscious of the dismissal of the label by many Native artists and commentators, who saw in postmodernism yet another Western paradigm hungry for authentic raw material to feed its own ideological agenda. An example of this distrust of "isms" in the Native arts community is contained in Loretta Todd's 1992 article "What More Do They Want?":

By reducing our cultural expression to simply the question of modernism or postmodernism we are placed on the edges of the dominant culture, while the dominant culture determines whether we are allowed to enter into its realm of art when we articulate the dichotomy of the traditional versus the contemporary, we are referencing the centre we are caught in the grasp of neocolonialism, in the gaze of the connoisseur or consumer, forever trapped in a process that divides and conquers.

(75)

While this evaluation bears reflection, it also represents an unduly inflexible view of

postmodernism and Native expression, shared by my colleague with whom I sat out the nine-ball tournament. He, as well as Todd and others, base their perception of the relationship between postmodern theory and Native art as being sterile on a relatively static model of the two entities. I would argue that the conjunction of the two permits a mutual transformation of means and ends, where the ideological agendas advanced by Native theatre make use of the tools of deconstruction⁵ to reinvent a "new" conception of Native subjecthood. Similarly, this project calls into question whether the tropes of power implicit in postmodern theory are contingent or necessary.

Because of this mutually informing relationship, I have constructed my discussions of Native theatre to emphasize the ways in which postmodern theory selectively illuminates aspects of Native expression. Chapter 1 outlines the relative strengths and weaknesses of postmodern theory as an affirmative tool for Native explorations of identity. Chapter 2 begins a discussion of the potential ways Native theatre is

⁵ The term "deconstruction" here is meant to denote the critical project as articulated by Derrida: "[deconstruction] is simply a question of (and this is a necessity of criticism in the classical sense of the word) being alert to the implications, to the historical sedimentation of language which we use" (1970: 271).

perceived by an audience, and the tactics employed by Native performers to subvert the process of reification. Chapter 3 focuses upon the body in plays written by Native women, and how its materiality is both constituted (in part) and threatened by dominant discourse. Chapter 4 explores the affinity between postmodern ideas of history and the synchronic formulation of the past in Native performance. Chapter 5 extends the concept of trickster discourse to examine Native plays which interrogate the ideological underpinnings of narrative form. In each of these discussions, I do not seek to minimize the incompatibilities between postmodern theory and Native theatre; the template of theory necessarily is denatured by the exigencies of cultural construction.

Since my focus is upon Native plays which conform, albeit selectively, to postmodern patterns, there are many works which I have chosen not to examine. (A comprehensive annotated history of Native theatre would be an invaluable resource in this regard.) Many of the plays written by Native people are concerned less with formal experimentation and irony than with the presentation of positive images of Native culture,

where the processes of diagnosis and healing on both an individual and cultural level are valorized. Given this vital job, the insights garnered from postmodern theory, however judiciously applied, could only be an unneeded imposition. Similarly, this thesis is not meant to provide a comprehensive catalogue of postmodern theory (an impossible task in itself)⁶. My goal is to provide a synthesized model for approaching a kind of Native performance which in many ways approaches the concept of healing from another angle. This model, I hope, frees this self-reflexive theatre from the debilitating identity of received cultural knowledge, an identity which crushes engagement and robs the Native performer of his or her success as creative experimenter. If all Native theatre is viewed solely as an expression of "traditional" Native culture, a standard of "Nativity" is implied that is problematic and ultimately artificial; if we do not address the special nature of the theatre's content, we risk defining it as the Other which defies interpretation. I feel that the persistent hybridity of Native theatre, its mixture of irony and affirmation, requires a critical strategy which

⁶

For an early but nevertheless useful survey of the

can accommodate and articulate the challenges of such contingent constructs.

many tributaries of postmodern thought, see Bertens.

Chapter 1: Parody and Perruque: Postmodern Tactics and Native Performance

It is [an] illusion to think that we can merely step outside the house of metaphysics and dance freely in the sunlight The only possible strategy is the much more patient and laborious one by which the foundations of the structure may be carefully but decisively deconstructed, displaced, disorganized -- giving rise not to a new space outside the old enclosure, but to new angles, new possibilities within it. The process requires that one use the elements of structure against the structure.

Richard Klein

Given the repeated charges levelled at postmodern theorists (especially during the 1980s) that their work lacked political utility, it is no coincidence that recent postmodern theory has paid particular attention to the ways in which so-called "marginal" groups can or do employ postmodern tactics to articulate their concerns. Postmodernists have often, with some justification, been accused of a kind of philosophical nihilism, where their frequent attacks on both the hierarchical structures of discourse and the privileged master-narratives that anchor such structures often left little space for any conception of dependable meaning as anything but an impossible chimera. In *The Postmodern Condition*,

Francois Lyotard's oft-cited definition of postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv) is resolutely apolitical and would offer small comfort to those who seek to challenge the content of these narratives with their own:

. . . . [the] grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. (37)

Many thinkers pursued this incredulity to its logical extreme, defining all positions of authority -- dominant or subordinate, subject or object -- as "galax[ies] of signifiers" (Barthes, 1974: 16) with no legitimating force. Jean Baudrillard, a particularly radical but influential theorist, advocates a total abolition of the notion of the referent and its metaphysical primacy in signification:

. . . .the crucial thing is to see that the separation of the sign and the world is a fiction This "world" that the sign

Chapter 1

"evokes" (the better to distance itself from it) is nothing but the effect of the sign, the shadow that it carries about. (1988: 84-5)

Because of the predominance of the hall-of-mirrors approach to signification, both proponents and detractors of postmodern theory are often cautious about its compatibility with other counter-hegemonic theories, especially the postcolonial. For example, some postcolonial theorists champion a project which aims to rediscover suppressed precolonial metanarratives, "the way in which another, lost master-narrative recalled through the creative power of *maya*, of illusion, is used to free the colonized" (Mishra and Hodge, 282). Because they often operate according to a centre/periphery model of discourse which stresses "universal" textuality over the local colour of quaintly outmoded master-narratives, postmodern theorists can be accused of replaying the power games of colonization¹. If the postmodern corpus of theory can only base its persuasiveness upon philosophical scepticism and the undermining of truth-claims, it is clear that while perhaps useful

¹ For further discussion of the ways in which the postmodern can mimic colonialism, see Crapanzano (43) and Salter (140).

in levelling the structures of Western Enlightenment thought, it can do little to provide the marginalized with tools to build new structures out of the ruins.

The recent focus upon the marginal comes, in part, out of a desire to realize the largely abstract theoretical paradigms of postmodern thought in practical terms. Postmodern emphasis upon the delegitimization of universal systems of value, as well as the challenging of monolithic conceptions of the self, would seem, at least on one level, to offer those traditionally excluded from the discourses of the mainstream culture an opportunity to challenge and resist their assignments of value. Since the notion of universality and its attendant legitimation of truth-claims is negated by postmodern theory, those wishing to recast knowledge-seeking in politically empowering ways, such as postcolonialists, feminists, Marxists and others, are forced to ground their own brand of postmodern analysis in the local, contingent circumstances that postmodern theory reveals. The battle for legitimacy is crucial here in a double sense. Just as marginalized peoples seek to demonstrate their own legitimacy as speaking subjects using the tactics

of postmodern analysis, their relative success or failure to achieve this legitimacy reflects upon the overall utility of postmodern theory as an empowering tool, its role in the necessary construction of equitable human relations in the world.

In the struggle by First Nations artists and critics to assert a viable subject position, there are at least two kinds of discourse at play: one dominant and the other resistant. The dominant discourse makes use of particular signs of aboriginality to either challenge or support dominant political or ideological projects, such as environmentalism or gender equality. While Native peoples are often vocal participants in this discourse, they have little control over how their material and cultural heritages are employed; the boundaries of this discourse are determined almost entirely by the settlers. Terry Goldie has argued that the signs of the aboriginal appearing in settler literature in Canada, Australia and New Zealand can be organized into distinct "commodities" such as orality, sexuality and so on. His term "commodity" suggests both the artificial origins of the signs and its necessary relation to a marketplace. Against (and alongside) this

dominant discourse exists the resistant discourse animated and policed by Native cultural spokespeople. In this discourse, attempts are made to affirm a distinctly Native world-view which may or may not bear resemblance to the shadow discourse constructed by dominant culture.

While it may be simple enough to distinguish between these two kinds of discourse in theory, it is quite another matter in practice. The co-option of the resistant by the dominant is always immanent due to the former's relative weakness and the capitalist nature of the latter, where all images, resistant or otherwise, can be assimilated as exotic Other or feisty but nevertheless knowable Same. In my thesis, I will argue that in order to subvert the absolute containment of resistant Native discourse by the dominant settler discourse, many Native performance and theatre artists must somehow confront this discourse and evade its totalizing effects. This entails a sophisticated understanding on the part of Native artists of how signs of aboriginality are constructed and manipulated. Some of the most radical Native art to be produced in recent years blurs the distinction between Native and non-Native signs, and this savvy reworking of the traditional and the

contemporary can be seen as part of the overall agenda to undermine stereotype through direct intervention. R. Radhakrishnan points out that meaningful "ethnic" discourse which challenges the dominant must be two-fold in purpose:

The constituency of "the ethnic" occupies quite literally a "pre-post"-erous space where it has to actualize, enfranchise, and empower its own "identity" and coextensively engage in the deconstruction of the very logic of "identity" and its binary and exclusionary politics. Failure to achieve this doubleness can only result in the formation of ethnicity as yet another "identical" and hegemonic structure. (50)

To achieve this simultaneous act of (de/re)construction, Native artists must incorporate signs domesticated by repetition and make them appear strange and even dangerous. One technique frequently employed to achieve this end is parody, defined by Linda Hutcheon as "repetition with critical distance which allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (1985: 26). By mimicking the tropes of

dominant discourse, Native artists hope to denature them and thereby render them visible (and therefore open to interrogation). Artists like Daniel David Moses and Monique Mojica use parody to both involve their audience in the ridicule of obvious stereotype and to alienate them through the parodying of target texts which might appear genuinely noble and authentic to mainstream and marginal audiences alike. When successful, such parodic strategies prevent audiences from viewing Native images in simple or historically sanctioned ways. Frequently, there is an emphasis placed upon the inauthentic as a frustration of settler desire for terror or succour. However, the use of parody by these and other Native artists is not as straightforwardly radical and oppositional as Hutcheon's definition would imply.

Hutcheon makes a vital distinction in her discussion of parody based in part upon the etymology of the Greek term *parodia*. She points out that *parodia* can be translated as both "counter song" and "beside song" (32), the difference between the two derivations reflecting two distinct uses of parody as an ideological tool. Hutcheon argues that traditional parody, tracing its legacy from the Greeks through to the Augustan poets,

mocks a target text in order to champion an aesthetic or moral ideal or advance coherent social criticism, such as in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. In this way, traditional parody is a "counter song". Modern parody, says Hutcheon, lacks this moral agenda, in that one text is not always championed over another. It exists alongside the target text, thereby rejecting any notion of ideological primacy. Parody as beside song reflects the postmodern impulse to challenge the sign as identity, and its doubleness serves to multiply meaning rather than fix it according to prescribed criteria (31).

Parody in Native performance can be seen to be both traditional and modern in its treatment of its target text. Several of the plays in this study, including Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, utilize postmodern parodic techniques while rejecting the ideological and epistemological implications of such techniques. Mojica's play at once posits clearly defined ethical positions, positions which lend her parodic attacks moral force, and frustrates any attempt to differentiate absolutely between purely resistant Native texts and their tainted counterparts. Thus, Native performance is able to shift discursively

between the parodic categories of counter- and beside- and by so doing force the audience to accept the subject position of the Native performer as a necessarily contingent one².

This is not to suggest that the blurring of counter- and beside- in Native performance is entirely due to choice. The persistent denial in postmodern cultural criticism of totalizing narratives with clearcut distinctions between right and wrong leaves little room for those who wish to dismantle stereotype and replace it with "the truth". Hutcheon and others seem resigned to the fact that parody in the traditional mode is virtually impossible to entertain in our present age. Indeed, the whole concept of resistant and dominant discourses battling in distinct skirmishes would seem to imply a yearning for modernist certainty. Because Native performance utilizes postmodern theatrical techniques to assert a distinctively Native subject position, it opens itself up to charges of ideological nostalgia and naivete. However, I believe that it is Native performance's insistence upon articulating difference through postmodern techniques that

² In this sense, all Native artistic expression is a *performance*, where the artist in effect must re-present signs of identity in a self-conscious manner.

challenges in a vital way the gatekeeping function of postmodernist ideas.

While I have suggested that Native performers attack dominant discourse through parody and semiotic "pollution" (by this, I mean the mingling of "pure" and "impure" signs of aboriginality) , I also see them engaging with postmodern concepts in order to reveal their dogmatic underpinnings. In this regard, the work of Michel de Certeau and Nelly Richard proves especially useful, since both theorists describe how systems of control are disrupted by marginal voices not through outright confrontation but instead through selective interpellation.

Michel de Certeau's writings can be understood in one sense to be a challenging response to Foucault, specifically the latter's idea that systems of authoritarian control derive their contemporary power not from site-specific acts of discipline but from a ubiquitous or "panoptic" presence that has infiltrated every instance of human activity. What de Certeau contests in Foucault's analysis of disciplinary administration is the undervaluing of popular response to the encroachment of this administration. For de Certeau, it is important not

to make clear how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of "discipline".

(xiv-xv)

To this end, de Certeau explores the ways in which systems of control are frustrated through everyday acts of resistance by those most subject to their effects, the peasant or worker, those who must escape the dominant discourse without leaving it (xiii).

De Certeau employs the terms "strategy" and "tactic," metaphors of warfare, to differentiate between two kinds of resistance to systems of control. The first implies a large-scale manoeuvre of an organized armed force which can define its goals according to sites either occupied or lost to another's occupation. For de Certeau, strategy is the privilege of the dominant system which can use its resources, economic, social or ideological, to separate itself from its enemy and thereby isolate it as a locus of potential control. In contrast,

the tactic, derived from the concept of guerrilla skirmishing, suggests "a logic of momentary occupation without ownership" (Frow, 55). It "insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance" (de Certeau, xix). Because of his or her disenfranchised position in society, the peasant/worker can only employ tactics to disrupt the hegemony of the dominant system, but for de Certeau, this is a strength rather than a weakness.

According to de Certeau, tactics of evasion are part of every person's experience of daily living. He offers an example of tactical resistance in French factories, where the worker uses the machinery and excess materials of the employer for creative and therefore non-commodified purposes (he calls this poaching of resources at the employer's expense *la perruque* ("the wig")) (25-6). Another of de Certeau's examples of tactical resistance is the syncretic adaptation by the conquered South American Native peoples of the dominant cultural forms of the Spanish conquerors:

[The Native peoples] often made of the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on

them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept. (xiii)

Because marginals can redirect and intentionally misuse the systems imposed upon them, de Certeau argues, popular culture can articulate its own desires through the systems of the powerful and become "the dark rock that resists all assimilation" (18).

Despite the inherent idealism (and selective naivete) of de Certeau's position³, his discussion of tactical resistance offers insight into the selective use of postmodern techniques by Native artists. Although postmodern theorists take great pains to distance themselves from the totalizing projects of the past, their rejection of coherent subject positions and their valorization of indeterminacy do form a persistent matrix of control, especially when viewed from a position of

³ In his critique of de Certeau, George Yúdice points out that "such 'tactics' are wielded not only by workers but by the very same managers (and other elites) who enforce the established order ripping off the 'system' much more profitably than any worker or 'marginal' person" (216).

cultural and economic periphery. Writing from a Latin American perspective, Nelly Richard argues that the theories of the postmodern replicate the processes of colonization, where the periphery is used by the cultural and economic centre to validate its own fears and hopes:

. . . . if indeed the postmodern is a discourse that theorizes the explosions of the center and the heterological emancipation of the peripheries, these peripheries continue -- in most cases -- to be *spoken* (and *made to act*) by the hegemonic discourse of the Euro-North American alliance -- a discourse which speculates on totalities and fragmentation, transforms the periphery into one of those margins resemanticized by the postmodern lexicon of the crisis of centralities, and calls upon it to confirm its theories of decentralization. (457)

If postmodern theory is taken as the dominant discourse in literary and cultural studies in this discussion (many, including postmodernists, might not), it would be useful to investigate whether tactics such as de Certeau has described --

provisional reworkings of persistent systematic structures to unforeseen ends -- can be discerned in the periphery's engagement with postmodernism. Richard suggests that just this sort of *perruque* is central to any understanding of Latin American postmodernism:

Always expert in the transcodification of cultural "bricolage" (the renovation of models with the residuals or wastes of other constructions), the periphery appeals to international postmodernism in order to resignify local and self-directed operations. These operations conquer the metropolitan addressee's attention because they pretend to share his/her same vocabulary (simulation and parody, recycling and appropriation, etc.), only later to invert the terms into a countertermimesis. (457)

What Richard calls a "countertermimesis" is a type of Trojan horse, where discourse produced by the periphery which conforms cosmetically to hegemonic definitions of the postmodern serves to transform the very notions on which postmodernism has been predicated. What may walk and quack like a duck

may in fact be an entirely exotic (and unpredictable) species of beast.

In this light, Native expression has a double engagement: with the dominant discourse as a whole to make it tactically habitable through the challenging of control; and with postmodernism itself to secure the construction of contingent and critical subject positions from which to articulate self and culture. One commodity that serves Native artists very well in both contexts is tradition, or more exactly, the lure of tradition. In an article on the work of African-American writer Ishmael Reed, David Mikics suggests that it is this lure of tradition, rather than any specific reification of it, that enables Reed and other "ethnic" writers to ground their "aesthetic eccentricity" with "an *ad hoc*, self-ironizing center of gravity" that provocatively recasts premodern and therefore primitive culture as "postmodernism from way back" (16). While this move may be the product of atavistic longing⁴, it reflects the ethnic writer's understanding that tradition as a basis for cultural certainty is highly prized (and sought after) by those who hunger for quintessence in a

⁴ I will explore in detail this idea that traditional Native culture was "always-already" postmodern in Chapter 5, specifically the claims made by Gerald Vizenor in this vein.

postmodern age. Rather than presenting traditional culture straight up, and thereby opening the door to co-option by the dominant, many Native artists re-present traditional material in a highly ironic context, forcing the viewer to reevaluate his or her own expectations and desires for the real (or unreal) thing.

Two potent examples of this kind of tactic can be drawn from the work of Rebecca Belmore and Edward Poitras. Belmore's 1991 performance piece *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* involved the construction of a huge megaphone facing Mount Rundle in Banff, Alberta, through which thirteen Native speakers including Stoney Chief John Snow were invited "to address the land and their connection to it" (Youngman, 36). In 1989, Poitras produced an installation piece at the Centre international d'art contemporain de Montréal in which he executed all the parts of a prophetic dream attributed to Black Elk described in Neihardt's famous book *Black Elk Speaks*.

Both pieces are similar in that they address two myths of Native spirituality cherished by both dominant and resistant discourse and interject real bodies and active voices into them. Interpretation of these works is difficult. One critical approach

would be to see the pieces as straightforwardly naive renderings of traditional Native symbols in order to reconstitute them as signs/referents, thereby reasserting their validity. Another would explain them as ironic commentary on Native mythology in discourse, highlighting the gap between symbol and sign/referent in a contemporary context. I would suggest that neither critical approach can adequately explain the pieces and their effects on an audience. Belmore and Poitras could also be revealing the poverty of standard criticism (postmodern or otherwise) to explain Native expression and its complex relation to tradition. I believe these two pieces are perfect examples of Richards' countertermimesis, challenging postmodern definitions of parody and ironic recycling. Because they refuse to contextualize their pieces with ironic or straightforward commentary, they invite the audience to interpret the work as in part a commentary on interpretation (Jimmie Durham has called Poitras' Black Elk piece "an act of intelligent, innocent/cynical bravado" (1993: 209)). What appears clearly earnest or ironic on the surface can evade both categories and their epistemological implications. It is this kind of double-dealing that informs much of the

work discussed in this thesis, a deft mingling of postmodern and traditional tactics that renders simplistic interpretation impossible. Take Durham's discussion of artistic responsibility to his or her materials:

When we [Native artists] do works on paper we cannot forget the paper-making process, the fact of the trees on our land. What symbolic combinations can we make with each work of art? What semiological vocabularies can we expose? Languages speak through objects. A whiskey bottle has as valid an artistic use as any other object. Of course, one listens to the conversations of the bottle when considering aesthetic purposes. It would be something like a sin to trick the bottle into lying: a matter of intercepting the universal dialogue so necessary to our survival. One can use the bottle to *play* tricks, or to tell jokes, or to make any unexpected combinations, but we would not force it into false positions. (110)

Durham's comments can be read as a straightforward pantheistic revision of materialism, or as an

ironic reworking of this idea (signalled perhaps by his oblique reference to alcoholism). His own work often manipulates standard concepts of Indianness in ironic ways, constructing images that are simultaneously ingenuous and savvy. Like Belmore and Poitras, Durham can be read as ironizing the Native sign (a favourite postmodern strategy) and as reasserting Native control of the sign as a challenge to notions of relativity and textuality implicit in postmodern theory.

While this approach is on one hand decidedly unpostmodern in its valorization of uniquely Native points of view, it is also an extension of certain antinomian impulses within postmodern theory. Many thinkers closely associated with postmodern theory, such as Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard, see themselves as diagnosticians of postmodern culture rather than its celebrants. Often their analyses serve to advance social critiques that have more in common with modernist idealism than postmodern *jouissance*. For example, using the metaphor of homoeopathic medicine, Jameson suggests that postmodern aesthetic techniques should be used in order to "undo" postmodernism, "to master these things by choosing them and pushing them to their limits" (Stephanson, 17-18). Jameson's own

rejection of capitalism as rapacious transnational co-option informs his description of postmodern culture. Similarly, Baudrillard, who is often quoted in isolated fragments to support charges of postmodern nihilism, seeks to move the political debate away from what he sees to be the outmoded dichotomy of real/illusion towards an informed understanding of how ideology constructs the reality that is affirmed or denied. Given these inherently moralistic agendas, both theorists have been accused of a kind of ideological nostalgia, where a premodern subject is idealized in opposition to contemporary moral paralysis. While some Native artists could be accused of such retrojected nostalgia, many cannot; their goal is to revitalize the present and explore ways of subverting the totalizing tendencies of dominant discourse. The underlying pessimism that often plagues even the most celebratory discussions of postmodernism is characteristically absent in those Native artists who have adapted postmodern techniques to their own ends. What distinguishes the work of many "marginal" postmodern thinkers, whether artists or critics, is the desire to lay bare the construction of master-narratives and power relations without jettisoning wholesale the

concepts of subjecthood and the referent in signification. Patricia Waugh criticizes what she interprets as the implicit nihilism of numerous postmodern thinkers as a product of the dominant's exclusive nostalgia for the coherent autonomous self:

. . . the decentred and fragmented subject of much postmodernist writing is one whose existence is premised upon the disintegration of a preexisting belief in the possibility of realizing the full autonomous subject of Enlightenment rhetoric, of German idealist philosophy and Kantian aesthetics It is clear from recent feminist scholarship that most women are unlikely to have experienced history in this way. Thus the goals of agency, autonomy and self-determination are not ones which feminists have taken for granted or glibly seen as exhausted. (347)

This intention to understand the mechanics of subjecthood in order to construct a viable and flexible self is demonstrated in the work of

several postmodern theorists, including Judith Butler and Hutcheon. The former stresses that to deconstruct the subject is not to eliminate it, but rather to "call into question and open up a term, like the subject, to a reusage or redeployment that previously had not been authorized" (1992: 15). By constructing subject positions that are both emancipatory and multivalent, that champion specificity in Native discourse and question the ideological bases upon which that specificity is predicated, Native performance adapts postmodernism to serve the needs of an evolving hybrid cultural life.

While the modes of irony and semiotic pollution are employed to great effect by Native artists, these modes are in themselves eminently co-optable. A controversial proof of this fact is the series of stories written by W.P. Kinsella set on a fictional Hobbema reserve. These stories, often constructed around elaborate practical jokes frequently played upon unsuspecting non-Natives, are highly ironic, and do not offer many Native signs untainted with parody. In his analysis of Kinsella's Hobbema fiction, Goldie's reliance upon formal criteria (such as the narrator's degree of introspection and the absence of natural metaphors)

to illustrate Kinsella's non-Native appropriation of Native signs is limited, however, since it suggests a normative model of discourse based upon an impossible presupposition:

The text [of Kinsella's Hobbema fiction] is able to maintain an uneasy balance between a "stage Indian" and what would be considered by many white readers to be "non-Indian" partly because Silas [the narrative "voice" in Kinsella's stories] is almost completely without introspection. The reader is thus not required to judge Silas' absent thoughts as "Indian" or "nonIndian" but is left with *the paradox of an Indian narrator and no Indian consciousness*. (my emphasis) (52)

Thus, Goldie critiques Kinsella in light of an absence which is by implication a formalized presence forever outside the text at hand, one which the reader can affirm only in its absence. How Goldie or any other reader (regardless of ethnicity) might "know" what "Indian consciousness" in fact is in order to point out its absence is precisely the problem. While the quality and ethics of Kinsella's stories can be denigrated, his use of

irony and parody echoes with varying degrees of sophistication the ironic fiction of Vizenor, King and other Native writers. I believe that the important distinction between Kinsella and the aforementioned writers, indeed, between the dominant use of Native signs and their use at the hands of Native spokespeople, lies not in formal differences (implied or explicit) but in the latitude the sign is given as a wandering signifier of Native subjecthood. Goldie begins to suggest this when he points out that the Native character loses Kinsella's interest when it moves outside the semiotic field of "Indian" as defined by the author (52). In the work of many Native artists, it is just at this point, when the Native sign transgresses the tacit boundaries of its own verisimilitude, that the work comes alive. While I would argue that there is no foolproof method by which to differentiate settler irony from its Native counterpart, the latter often permits a flexible conception of Native culture as both earnest and ironic. In this work, there is frequently an emphasis placed upon the process of cultural construction rather than on its specific reified product. As Jean Fisher argues, it is the production of a Native subject position from which

to speak that is the only viable (and useful) product:

. . . .the form of aesthetic utterance these [Native] artists employ is less a statement or a representation in the Western sense than a performative act -- a "speaking" body continually retracing the boundaries of the self in the world. In such an utterance the art *object* is not necessarily privileged over the *gesture* that informs it or the communal space it addresses (49).

In my estimation, it is the efforts of such marginalized voices, to reinvent postmodernist techniques and ideas and make them tactically habitable and politically useful, that will challenge the implicit dogmas of postmodernist thought and teach new ways of understanding Native life and culture as a dynamic "act of intelligent, innocent/cynical bravado".

**Chapter 2: "For Only Through Your Eyes Am I
Remembered": Native Performance and the
Field of Perception**

What is seen by the mainstream is only
the tip of the cultural iceberg, its
totality submerged in a cloak of silence.
The surface reflection is your deception,
and it is we who are watching you.

Edward Poitras

In an article on American performance art in the 1980s, John Brockway Schmor argues that postmodern theatre often problematizes the act of representation by emphasizing "the field of perception" over "the will of creation" (168). It is this "field of perception" that I wish to focus upon in this second chapter, because I believe that any analysis of Native theatre must be prefaced with a discussion of how context necessarily influences the very nature of Native performance. I will argue that the act of watching Native theatre is an intrinsic act of ideological and aesthetic containment, and that many Native performance artists and playwrights manipulate and redirect the audience's gaze (and desires) as part of a strategy of resistance.

Despite the widespread acceptance of the intentional fallacy as a commonplace of criticism, and the popularity of deconstructive techniques which highlight the indeterminacy of meaning within

texts, much of the work done on Native theatre is marked by the uneasy acceptance of it not as art but as received cultural knowledge. The tendency to treat Native drama as documentary occurs frequently in the critical responses to the work of Tomson Highway, perhaps the most popular (and controversial) Native playwright in recent years. Despite Highway's use of self-consciously theatrical devices like gigantic rubberized female body parts in *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, critics often choose to read the work as realism. For example, Roberta Imboden affirms that "what appears as wild exaggeration on the printed page [of *Dry Lips*] is a faithful representation of the tragedy of reservation life" (117). Similarly, Ray Conlogue, in a 1989 review of the premiere performance of *Dry Lips*, claims that Highway's use of the "medicines" (Conlogue's term) of laughter and dreams "are part of Native thought" (A17)¹. While I would not seek to prove that Highway's (or any other Native playwright's) work is somehow un-Native, I would question the process through which fictive constructs are automatically reified as "faithful representations" of Native "life" and

¹ I am indebted to Filewod (1994: 368) for his emphasis on the problematic nature of Conlogue's review.

"thought". I would argue (as have others) that the acceptance by non-Natives of particular visions of Native identity is largely determined by preexisting political and cultural ideologies, ideologies which the Native visions either complement or leave undisturbed. In the case of Highway, the problem does not lie in his plays, which make no pretension to documentary realism. Highway chooses to explore the internal dynamics of Native communities and thereby (to use an overused quote from the playwright about *Rez Sisters*) "make the 'rez' cool and to show what funky folk Canada's Indian people really are" (qtd. in Moses and Goldie, 375). While his plays do explore the hard legacy of imperialism as reflected in Native lives, the playwright refrains from attacking directly the non-Native institutions and attitudes which help foster Native dependency and dysfunction. Thus, there are no non-Native villains depicted in Highway's plays, no enacted embodiments of settler culpability. Because of this absence, non-Native audiences can in effect lose themselves in the skilfully drawn world of Highway's imagining with a minimum of self-consciousness. In the words of Canadian playwright Carol Bolt, watching a performance of Highway's *The Rez Sisters* makes the

audience feel part of "an extraordinary, exuberant, life-affirming family" (26). While such responses are a testament to the playwright's evocative talent, it can be argued that they tend to obscure any real differences between Natives and non-Natives in Canada. Filewod suggests that the "celebratory response" to Highway's play *Dry Lips*

erases the politics of the play and reestablishes the narrative as a generalized statement of anticolonialism, permitting the colonizer to assume the posture of the colonized Consequently, not only do we erase our own culpability in Highway's plays, but we reconstruct [Native] cultural patterns to serve our own cultural project -- a project that has historically erased the native peoples (1992: 21).

The desire for inclusion in the Native "family" is sometimes articulated with proscriptive statements concerning how this family should be depicted on stage. In a review of an Alberta Theatre Projects' 1990 production of *The Rez Sisters*, Martin Morrow sets up an implied and highly political standard of value which is used to judge Highway's play:

With the Mohawks at the barricades and the Peigans at the bulldozers this summer [references to the OKA and Old Man Dam standoffs respectively], Alberta Theatre Projects' production of *The Rez Sisters* couldn't have come at a better time A wry, insightful slice of Native life without any overt messages, this is a story, not about issues, but about human beings. (D1)

In this case, supposedly unreflexive and therefore universal Native narratives are set against those which are seen to communicate "overt messages," messages which frequently remind the audience that Native peoples have unique political and social concerns which need to be addressed².

While such unselfconsciousness is common in the mainstream criticism of Native theatre, there are many non-Natives who are painfully aware of the ideological filters which inform their responses.

"I can't write about native theater," Filewod affirms in his early article on the subject, "all I

² While Morrow's review is obviously involved in the process of political mediation in Alberta and is therefore not a seriously theoretical investigation of the play, it does illustrate in bold terms the tendency to reify Highway that occurs in more thorough-going critical analyses of his work.

can write about is my response to it" (1992: 17). Clearly, Filewod the non-Native critic recognizes that he is not part of the Native "family" that playwrights like Highway construct, and as such, cannot unproblematically participate in its joys and sorrows. Unlike Imboden and Conlogue, Filewod sees Highway creating not verisimilar documents but rather "icons of resistance" (1994: 366), products of the discursive process of cultural recuperation. Filewod's analysis ends here, however, in that he offers no investigation of how these icons of resistance operate in the texts themselves³. By emphasizing his position as outsider (and indeed chastising those who fail to recognize their own outsider status), he is unable to engage with the material for fear of inscribing his non-Native ideological biases upon it. In his book *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, Terry Goldie is also extremely reticent to interpret the content of Native literature. On one hand, he suggests that the methodology he has developed to analyze non-Native constructions of the Native

³ In order to view Highway's plays as theatrical "icons of resistance," one would be required to investigate first how "resistance" is constituted by Highway, and second, how the transformation of the plays into traded commodities (eg. first-year texts and Royal Alex shows) affects their status as icons of resistance .

could be useful in the examination of Native texts.

But he also worries that any attempts by non-Natives to evaluate such texts would necessarily entail judgement of their rightness or wrongness as expressions of culture (217). Like Filewod, Goldie fears a replay of colonization in the critical arena, where critical judgement is predicated upon both a desire for empiricism and an inability to understand Native texts without first denaturing them with non-Native epistemes. By refusing to interpret Native texts, both Goldie and Filewod hope to avoid the ideological violence they see as the inevitable consequence of such interpretation.

This fear of speaking for (and over) the Native artist cannot simply be dismissed as another form of Euroneurosis⁴: it has been consistently reinforced by Native intellectuals and artists in both Canada and the U.S. American Native writer Vine Deloria Jr.'s harsh indictment is an early (1969) but typical example of the hostility of some Natives towards non-Native researchers:

⁴ While this sort of caution indicates healthy respect for and recognition of Native self-expression, Robert Storr sees the "endless second guessing about the latent imperialism of intruding upon other cultures" that often characterizes criticism of non-Eurocentric discourse as resulting in discussions that are "rootless instead of radical" (qtd. in hooks, 513).

Perhaps we should suspect the real motives of the academic community Their concern is not the ultimate policy that will affect the Indian people, but merely the creation of new slogans and doctrines by which they can climb the university totem pole. (94)

In the field of Native Canadian theatre, there is a similar distrust of academic interest. "Not a week goes by, " writes Drew Hayden Taylor, at the time the Artistic Director of Toronto's Native Earth Performing Arts,

that we don't get a call from some university or college student/professor doing research on native theatre in Canada. And each time I put the phone down I struggle to suppress a shudder. (1995: 16)

Given this climate of distrust, it is understandable that non-Native critics would tend to be cautious when dealing with Native art.

At one extreme, then, the Native play is read as a verisimilar document, and in the process, the gaze of the non-Native "outsider" is conflated with the gaze of the Native "insider". This conflation

acts to minimize the political and social distance between the two positions, and obscures the ideological premises which permit the Native construction to be accepted as truth. At the other extreme, the Native play cannot be read -- if reading is defined as a critical and evaluative exercise -- at all. Both extremes of response preempt any thorough-going inquiry into the ways in which Native artists make imaginative and idiosyncratic use of content or form in their work. And both make it difficult to explore one's own response as a non-Native audience member without first seeking some sort of cultural authorization, tacit or otherwise. Susan Bennett provides an absurd example of the tendency to authorize response in a description of an Alberta Theatre Projects (ATP) production of Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* in 1990:

As a white woman in an almost entirely white audience I was particularly unsettled by the performance preface (a convention of ATP productions) which was given to the audience by a white male representing the company. He told us that we should enjoy the play, that it was appropriate to laugh and

that Native audiences had been in to see this particular production and had laughed too. (1991: 19)

Although it is easy enough to critique the elision that results from both the false consciousness of the pretend insider and the hyper-selfconsciousness of the professed outsider, it is far more difficult to suggest any strategies for avoiding such elision. In her illuminating article on N. Scott Momaday, Elaine Jahner argues that it is the very breakdown of understanding between Native North American writers and their non-Native critics that can yield valuable insight into how the act of intercultural communication operates:

The stage has been set so that characters from different traditions can speak to each other, asking questions that made no sense in earlier philosophical settings. The characters may still talk past each other, but such failures to communicate can now become the focus of the exchange as scholars address why the failures occur and what such failures may tell us about how to refine our means of intercultural communication. (167)

I believe (as do Filewod and Goldie) that any study of Native artistic expression must begin at the sites of reception, in this case, with the desires and ideologies that influence how non-Natives perceive Native theatre. By foregrounding these desires, it becomes impossible to reify the constructs of theatre as self-authenticating truth and to immerse oneself uncritically in the enacted worlds. In addition to my consideration of reception and audience desires, I will examine the work of Native artists who play with these desires in an attempt to subvert the essentializing impulse behind them. In this way, I hope to explore the dynamics of these texts and thereby transcend what Bennett calls the "tourist gaze" of the well-meaning but silent observer (1993: 10).

Perhaps the central problem in the analysis of Native theatre is the perceived relationship between the individual playwright and his or her text. As I have argued in the case of Tomson Highway, there exists a tendency in critics to naturalize his plays and thereby obscure the subjective quality of his work. Put another way, Highway becomes personified as the Native "voice" with little attention paid to the personal

consciousness that determines what is spoken by that voice. This obfuscation, it is important to note, serves not only the interests of non-Native spectator-critics, but also those of members of the Native theatre community. When attempts have been made to highlight the mediated nature of Highway's work, the outcry from both within and without the Native theatre community has been substantial. Much attention has been paid to Highway's treatment of gender issues such as sexual victimization, especially in the play *Dry Lips*. This play contains a controversial scene in which a female Trickster figure (taking the form of the character Patsy Pegahmagabow) is graphically raped with a crucifix by another character who suffers from fetal alcohol syndrome (Dickie Bird Halked). This scene and others have prompted women, both non-Native and Native, to condemn *Dry Lips*. Marion Botsford Fraser, a non-Native critic for the *Globe and Mail*, described the play as a "drama studded with misogyny" with little compassion afforded to the women who bear the brunt of the enacted sexism (C1). Métis writer Anita Tuharsky focused upon the negative imagery in the play and suggested that the play's critical success was in part due to its Native pedigree:

If this play had been written by a non-aboriginal person, it would be viewed as stereotypical, sexist and oppressive. However since it is written by a Native playwright, the public is reluctant to look at it objectively. (5)

Marie Annharte Baker, herself a Native playwright, expressed her concern in an article published in *Canadian Theatre Review* that the play reified Native gender stereotypes while appearing to deconstruct them, thereby "silenc[ing]" Native women in the process ("Angry," 88). She describes her own conflicted response to a performance of the play, where she at once applauded the efforts of Native theatre artists while "praying that plays would be written that would help them further their talents but give them a choice as to how they would want to portray their own people" (89). These expressions of displeasure from Native women in turn become used as ammunition by non-Native critics who themselves seek to question the content and reception of Highway's plays.

One such battle ensued between Susan Bennett, a non-Native university professor and critic, and

Jennifer Preston, an active non-Native supporter of Highway and his work. In an article entitled "Weesageechak Begins to Dance: Native Earth Performing Arts Inc.," Preston presented a history of the Toronto theatre organization which lauded the company's many successes and the pivotal role of Highway in those successes. In a published response to this article, Bennett questioned the uncritical historiography of Preston, who, she suggested, presents what is in effect a portrait of Highway as a Native theatrical auteur:

. . . . It doesn't seem overstated to regard the publication of "Weesageechak Begins to Dance" as a kind of checking off of the box marked "Canadian Native Theatre," irrespective that this particular piece takes no account of many and shifting Native identities, of gender, status, or geography. (1993: 12)

Bennett makes use of Baker's abovementioned objections to correct the impression left by Preston that Native support for the playwright was unanimous in its enthusiasm. Bennett also points to the irony of Preston's selective employment of NEPA promotional copy used for a one-woman show

Highway wrote for the actress Makka Kleist, copy which celebrates "the increasingly significant role women have to play in this culture, in this society" (Preston, 1992: 144). "In culture and society, but not in NEPA?" Bennett asks, "I needed to know more about process and selection strategies, about Kleist's involvement (or not) in such decisions" (10).

This letter, in turn, provoked a vociferous counter-response from Preston and two members of the Native Earth organization (actress Doris Linklater and NEPA Board of Directors president Bill Henderson) who dismiss Bennett's objections using largely *ad hominem* arguments without sufficiently addressing the fundamental questions Bennett poses. In her counter-response, Preston writes:

I don't think Bennett's anger is about me, Tomson, NEPA I am not sure what it is about but it is misdirected and her energies are being misused. I sincerely doubt that I can change Susan Bennett's point of view but perhaps I can encourage her to examine her work and her anger and come up with some more positive attitudes. I give the last word to

Ojibway playwright Drew Hayden Taylor, who, when I read [Bennett's] letter over the phone to him, snorted and said "Is this a white liberal who thinks she's defending the oppressed? As a member of the 'oppressed' I don't think I need defending". (1993: 15)

Similarly, Preston rejects the "emotional but poorly chosen" quotation from Baker in Bennett's critique as not reflective of the "volumes of overwhelmingly positive responses" to Highway's work (15).

This controversy uncovers many things, such as the tension between the academy and the Native theatre community, but one aspect which I will emphasize here is the problematic desire for univocality that determines the nature of the debate surrounding the representation of Native peoples in Canada. Filewod (who was himself the co-editor of *Canadian Theatre Review* at the time) tells of how, when Highway learned of Baker's intention to publish her criticisms in *CTR*, the playwright "called me to express his opposition to what he foresaw as a hostile response; he asked me to cancel the article because of the pain it would cause and because it would be divisive" ("Letter,"

37). While these battles can be seen as being the result of a clash of personalities, they also illustrate a clash of ideologies. On one hand, I feel that Bennett's central point in her *melée* with Preston, that every narrative history privileges some facts over others, is a valid one, and has been echoed in other contexts by critics seeking to foster new and challenging ways of reading the facts of theatre history⁵. It is only by investigating the discursive manoeuvres involved in history-making that we can (as Bennett warns) avoid the pitfall of presupposing the homogeneity of other cultures as somehow in opposition to the heterogeneity of our own⁵.

On the other hand, what I see as complicating this call for a self-reflexive historiography of Native theatre are the cultural and political risks that are taken when a marginal group's homogeneous voice is revealed to be composed of heterogeneous voices. This elision of heterogeneity has its counterpart most clearly in the political sphere, where Native activists often feel they must present

⁵ This need for self-reflexivity in Canadian theatre historiography is also emphasized by Barbara Drennan, who sees Foucauldian methodology as enabling the theatre researcher to examine the "sites of discontinuity" within theatre history discourse (48).

the provisional appearance of a unified front to the mainstream public in order to be taken seriously. Jana Sequoya, a Chickasaw-identified writer of mixed descent, articulates the problematic nature of solidarity amongst Native Americans seeking change:

it is one of the paradoxes of democratic government that without the appearance of a homogeneous political identity -- an identity constituted in terms of the dominant system of representation -- the issues crucial to Native American survival as regionally diverse peoples cannot be heard. (455)

In Canada, the political manoeuvring in the aftermath of the Oka Crisis (1990) revealed how the issue of heterogeneity in Native communities could be vital in the struggle to resolve Native issues. Thomas Siddons, then Minister of Indian Affairs, refused to begin land negotiations with the Quebec Mohawks until they "got their act together" and established consensus over grievances and demands (Thompson, A5). Frustrated by the factionalism he found in the Kanasatake Mohawks (factionalism for which he blamed the escalation of the crisis itself

(Fraser, "Native system": A1)), the minister characterized the indigenous political system of the Mohawks as promoting instability in the community. In response, Kanesatake Grand Chief George Martin charged that Siddons and his ministry were engaged in a divide-and-conquer strategy in order to transfer the blame for breakdowns in the talks onto the Mohawks (Kuttenbrouwer, A5). In her questioning of Siddon's handling of the affair, Liberal MP Ethel Blondin underlined the irony of Siddon's depiction of Mohawk government as inherently unstable by pointing out that since 1986 "the turnover of ministers of Indian affairs has been almost as great as that of chiefs in Kanesatake" (Fraser, A4). In her analysis of public policy regarding Native peoples in Canada and Australia, Sally Weaver argues that public policy is shaped by conflicting definitions of ethnicity, what she calls the "private" versus the "public":

Unlike private ethnicity, which is behavioural, situational and heterogenous, public ethnicity is symbolic, global in application (to all or specified members of a minority) and uniform in concept

Public ethnicity is rationalized on the basis of how the nation-state wishes to deal with (or ignore) its aboriginal minorities. Whereas private ethnicity can be seen as emphasizing the "being," or the present condition, of aboriginal groups, public ethnicity stresses the "becoming," the future desired condition of aboriginal minorities which the nation-state has determined, and the processes (e.g., of civilizing, integrating or self-managing) whereby this eventual condition is to be achieved. (185)

Thus, ethnic identity is not produced simply out of conflict between Native and non-Native combatants, but rather emerges when private, heterogeneous conceptions of identity clash with public, homogeneous ones. Weaver stresses that the two kinds of ethnicity are not entirely discrete; private conceptions of ethnic identity are inevitably altered by the ideological pressures of public definitions (184). What often materializes when public and private paradigms of Nativeness collide is a provisional construct which is neither entirely a reflection of Native experiences nor a perfected illustration of non-Native desire.

Alcida Rita Ramos argues that the process of bureaucratization within non-governmental organizations dedicated to the support of aboriginal peoples unwittingly replaces real Native peoples with "ethical holograms" (162), simulations of aboriginal purity which efface "the irrationality of contorted and controversial relationships in the interethnic arena" (160). In this discussion, Ramos draws heavily upon Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal simulacrum to illustrate the danger of ethnic idealism. Baudrillard writes:

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. . . .
(1983: 4)

Social theorists like Weaver and Ramos emphasize the composite quality of Native voice, a quality

produced by the struggle between the forces of containment and transgression.

What has all this to do with Tomson Highway? I believe that it is the tension between the public and private, the normative and the transgressive, which characterizes the critical responses to his work. Highway's position is precarious, in that he is both the perceived explicator of Native experience for non-Natives and the originator of artistic forms which Native people can accept as culturally appropriate. By being implicitly championed by non-Natives like Morrow in opposition to the mobilized activists of Oka and Old Man Dam, Highway becomes a sign of public ethnicity with an attendant teleological slant. His plays, examples of Weaver's "behaviourial, situational, and heterogeneous" ethnic discourse, become transformed into static and reified signs of ethnic identity. The Highway - Native Earth controversy can be seen to demonstrate how public ethnicity, with its drive to homogenize and thereby contain Native self-expression, can affect even those organizations whose professed mandate is to foster such self-expression. Furthermore, this controversy indicates there exists pressure from within the Native theatre community (including from the

playwright himself) to brook little public discussion of the problems in his work, even when these discussions are instigated by Native people. As a Cree artist, Highway is unavoidably subjected to the tacit pressure to "serve his community" and juggle individual and communal agendas. Shelby Steele, in his discussion of African-American artists, discusses the problematic nature of what he calls "racial orthodoxy":

. . . racial orthodoxy is a problem for many black artists working today, since its goal is to make the individual responsible for the collective political vision. This orthodoxy arbitrates the artist's standing within the group: the artist can be as individual as he or she likes as long as the group view of things is upheld The effect of this is to pressure the work of art, no matter what inspired it, into a gesture of identification that reunites the artist and the group. (28)

The problem in Highway's case is: to which group is his gesture of identification directed? By writing a play containing Native female characters, he produces a text which in turn becomes the context

for many non-Native spectators' beliefs about Native life. When his vision of Native community is challenged by members of actual Native communities, their utterances are elided by Highway and NEPA. In this way, Highway's naturalized role as Native popularizer prevents his work from being examined critically by both Native and non-Native spectators.

The irony for many Native performers and playwrights including Highway is that the act of representation, when most successful, becomes a disappearing act. For example, when there was talk in 1970 of adding the name of Chief Dan George to the list of Oscar nominees for his performance in the film *Little Big Man*, the idea was quashed by a Los Angeles movie critic, who, with what must have seemed like breathtaking logic at the time, pointed out that "it would be ridiculous to give an Academy Award to an Indian for playing an Indian" (qtd in Lucas, 75). Non-Native critics frequently frame the discussion of Native artistic endeavour within the Western binarism of individual versus communal consciousness; in many cases, the Native artist is seen to possess one or the other, not both. In his article on trends in postmodern Native visual art circa 1985, Jay Scott characterizes the creation of

pre-contact Native art as profoundly unself-conscious in its expression of communal knowledge: "the concept of self-expression to a thoroughly tribalized mind is meaningless -- there is no self to express" (35). Thus, if a Native artist chooses to represent "tribal" consciousness, he or she risks being defined as an almost thoughtless amanuensis for the tribal whole rather than as a self-aware creator who is both individual and communal in temperament. The double bind that cost Chief Dan George his Oscar nomination -- perform outside the semiotic field of "Indian" and risk the label unrealistic, or lie convincingly inside the field and disappear -- is a common one that plagues many Native artists. If Highway is to be read as a "resistance" writer as Filewod argues, the playwright's oppositional stance is negated by the absorptive and naturalizing tendencies of both non-Native and Native audiences. While he is countering simplistic depictions of Native peoples, and thereby entering onto the battlefield of cultural (de)construction, he also celebrates his own creative commitment to Native experience, offering the audience the illusory and privileged position of voyeur (Wasaychigan, the name of Highway's fictional reserve, means "window" in

Ojibway). Highway's ultimate fate is one of disappearance, where, like the trusty Native interpreter who is chosen to communicate between cultures, his success is measured by how completely he is able to transform himself into a deictic sign-maker.

* * *

. . . . we Indians have been forced by various means to live up to the ideals of what being an Indian means to the general public. In art it meant work that looked "Indian" and that look was controlled by the market, and if the market said that it did not look "Indian" then it did not sell. If it did not sell, then it wasn't "Indian". I think somewhere in this mess many Indian artists forgot who they were, by doing work that did not have anything to do with their tribe, by doing work that did not tell about our existence in this world today, by doing work for others and not for themselves.

James Luna

The problem that presents itself to Native artists is how to construct workable identities without their being rendered into inflexible templates through the act of spectatorship. Many so-called marginal groups (feminist, gay, non-Eurocentric, etc.) have been confronted with this same problem, and one recurrent strategy of oppositional discourse has been to adopt anti-realistic modes of representation. Writing from a

feminist perspective, Elin Diamond underlines realism's role in the entrenchment of ideology:

Realism's fetishistic attachment to the true referent and the spectator's invitation to rapturous identification with a fictional imago serve the ideological function of mystifying the means of material production, thereby concealing historical contradictions, while reaffirming the "truth" of the status quo (61).

However, given the "rapturous identification" many non-Native audiences have experienced with Highway's non-realistic plays, it is clear that the employment of hypertheatrical elements is not enough to counteract the reifying power of the spectator's gaze. In Highway's case, any departures from realistic convention, such as the use of a Nanabush trickster figure which participates in and comments upon the world of Wasaychigan Hill Reserve, are interpreted as tropes of tribalized Native thought. As my examination of selected Native plays and performance pieces will illustrate, many artists attempt to draw the audience's attention to its own role in the

constitution of Native images. This strategy often ironizes the legitimizing power of authenticity and interweaves realistic and anti-illusionistic modes of theatrical representation. Derrida, in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," suggests that at the heart of every structure of discourse, and around which all freeplay and indeterminacy in the structure are organized, lies a false centre which is in fact a product of the desire for certitude, the centre which "cannot hold". Nevertheless, according to Derrida, it is this impossible desire for a fixed point of coherence which animates all forms of human discourse. One primary non-centre in the discourse of Native North American representation is the criterion of authenticity. The desire to evaluate the relative merits of any Native construct according to a proposed standard of authenticity obscures the often chimerical nature of such a standard. No artistic representation of Native peoples exists in a vacuum; it is designed for, and is valorized or condemned by, an audience. The audience's own expectations and desires serve to define the boundaries of what is considered a true Native identity, and perception of the truth of the depiction is frequently related to how

closely the representation meets the criteria of "Indianness" as perceived by the audience. Any construct -- whether historical, ethnographic or artistic -- appears authentic if it causes the beholder to believe it to be a trustworthy representation of reality⁶. The beholder's belief in the construct can be generated by the construct's factual accuracy (historical authenticity), its cultural source (ethnographic authenticity), or, perhaps most important for our concerns, its congruence with previously held ideas that the beholder also believes to be true (artistic authenticity).

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the tautological quality of authenticity is to examine some contexts in which the term has been used. Nowhere has authenticity been marketed with more vigour than in the Canadian film industry. Because authenticity unavoidably involves subjective belief as well as factual accuracy, film companies use the term "authentic" to describe their films which often depict Native characters and storylines in artistically familiar but ahistorical fashions.

⁶ James Clifford stresses that dialogues between cultures are determined by pre-existing patterns of thought that filter out what is unfamiliar: "What one sees in a coherent ethnographic account, the imaged construct of the other, is connected in a continuous double structure with what one understands" (1986: 101).

The 1993 \$32-million Canadian epic *Shadow of the Wolf* was marketed as representing a distinctly Native point of view in opposition to other "unauthentic" films⁷, despite the fact that it is based upon a book (Yves Theriault's *Agaguk*) which has been generally criticized as being both inaccurate and misleading⁸. Similarly, the 1991 film *Black Robe*, a \$14-million Canadian-Australian co-production, was hailed as a critical success while its historicity was hotly debated by Native audiences and Native actors involved with the production. In the end, Native spectators and actors could not agree amongst themselves as to whether the film attempted to debunk romantic myths of Native history, or ironically recreated a seventeenth-century Jesuit's subjective mindset⁹.

The controversy surrounding both films indicates how conclusions about the authenticity of representations are based upon preexistent notions of what constitutes the facts of ethnic identity.

⁷ In an article on the film in *The Globe and Mail*, the caption to the publicity photograph reads in part ". . . its creators were determined to maintain the story's integrity - its Inuit point of view. This is not another *Dances With Wolves*" (Conlogue, "Story," C7).

⁸ See Conlogue, "evolution," C7.

⁹ For an extended discussion of the debate surrounding this film, see Appleford (1995: 102-106).

This desire for an authentic representation of the Native is in part an index of healthy respect for Native culture and a reflection of the growing hunger for reliable information on the subject. However, anthropologists like Ramos suggest that the desire for authenticity in Native discourse frequently masks an ethnographic idealism, where the purity that is impossible in non-Native culture is sought in alterity (167). Many ethnographers have endeavoured to reveal the highly impure, hybrid nature of "pure" Native representations in order to counter this idealism. For example, Rudolph Kaiser researched the origins of the famous nineteenth-century speech attributed to Chief Seattle, often reproduced to illustrate the ecological awareness of traditional Native people, only to find that the tract was in fact largely authored by a non-Native for an American Southern Baptist film project in 1970. In a similar vein, William Powers corrects the partisan portrait of famed Oglala shaman Black Elk drawn by John Neihardt in 1932, in which Black Elk emerges as a wholly tribalized practitioner of Native ways, by introducing biographical details concerning Black Elk's Catholicism and leadership role in the Catholic Church of his day. These investigations

are part of a larger drive in the social sciences to foreground the material means of production in Native discourse and its effects on the content of this discourse. By doing so, the heterogenous and truly multicultural quality of Native expression is reclaimed.

Many Native artists seek to champion the hybridity of Native discourse as a source of discursive power and as a way of eluding the essentializing tendencies of the cultural marketplace. One playwright who challenges the limiting definitions of the authentically Native is Daniel David Moses, a Toronto-based writer of Delaware heritage who grew up on the Six Nations lands near Brantford, Ontario. Concerned with exploring the shifting signifiers of Native identity, he rejects the notion of an authentic core of Native discourse:

The idea of presenting something that someone will decide is authentically "Native" seems absurd to me. I can remember asking an interviewer, because I wanted to try and understand what they meant by authentic and Native, "Does that mean that Margaret Atwood is authentically Caucasian? (Appleford, 1993:

21)

Moses also sees Native identity as existing in a definitional space created by desires both internal and external to Native consciousness. For example, he describes why he feels Native peoples have a heightened ecological awareness:

I think Native people have a sense of larger responsibility to the planet, whether we come at it just from the idea that Native traditions honour the environment as a mother, or whether we come at it from the idea that we are looked at as people who should have those ideas and therefore we're allowed to have them (emphasis added) (Moses and Goldie, xii).

There is a heightened awareness in his recent work of the gaze of the mainstream culture, and how this gaze often desires a "real" Native presence to be (re)presented for its view¹⁰. In his play *Almighty Voice and his Wife*, Moses tells the story of the nineteenth-century Saskatchewan Cree folk hero Almighty Voice whose initial poaching of a settler's cow leads to the killing of a Mountie and

¹⁰ Portions of this section on *Almighty Voice and*

an eventual stand-off involving Almighty Voice, two of his companions, and one hundred officers and civilian volunteers. The first act of the play focuses on the relationship between the Cree man and his young wife White Girl, retelling their courtship on the One Arrow Reserve and their subsequent flight from the law after the killing of the Mountie. It ends with Almighty Voice's grim vision of his wife and his child as he lies dying, cornered in a poplar grove:

The drum heartbeats in the night.

*The moon is low in the sky, pulsing.
Almighty Voice lies by the dead fire,
leg badly wounded. The spectral tipi
appears and the drum goes silent.
Inside the tipi are White Girl and her
baby, mother and child, a destination.
Almighty Voice rises and uses his
Winchester as a crutch to come to the
tipi. White Girl comes out and shows him
the baby and the baby cries. The moon
turns white. Almighty Voice dies. (52)*

Moses has called this first act "a poetic but straightforward narrative" (1998:141) in terms of representation; the audience is able to lose itself in the tragic-romantic narrative with little reminder of its own presence or of the narrative's fictionality. However, the playwright has indicated that the direction of the second act was

His Wife first appeared in Appleford (1993): 21-26.

determined by his need to shift the narrative away from Almighty Voice in order to see "who the people who were pursuing him were" (Appleford, 1993: 24).

The play's second act makes it clear that Almighty Voice is not simply being tracked by angry Mounties and vigilantes: he is also being tracked by the non-Native spectator for very different reasons. The pursuit of Almighty Voice by his audience is the pursuit of the "almighty Native voice," the authentic Native self, and Moses' play emphasizes the destructive nature of such a pursuit.

Moses presents us in the second act with a grotesque mixture of vaudeville and minstrel show, with both White Girl (now the Interlocutor) and Almighty Voice (now Almighty Ghost) wearing whiteface and performing a bizarre mixture of racial slurs, melodramatic clichés, and never-ending puns. The juxtaposition of Almighty Ghost/Voice's confused but earnest description of his own death (enacted in its "pure" form in Act I) with the wisecracking commentary of the Interlocutor/White Girl re-presents the tragic event as black comedy:

Ghost: All I remember --

Interlocutor: Come on Ghost, this won't make

you the toast of the town.

Ghost: My leg was gone.

Interlocutor: Come on, Chief, be a friend.

Ghost: It was! I used a branch from a sapling.

Interlocutor: Be a pal, Chief.

Ghost: No, it was my gun for a crutch.

Interlocutor: This is a bit much for this early in the proceedings.

. . . .

Ghost: My legs were gone.

Interlocutor: Are we talking vacation?

Ghost: Like they were already dead. I must have screamed.

Interlocutor: Maybe we're talking shopping.

Ghost: But my throat was too dry.

Interlocutor: Can I get you something?

Ghost: There was no sound in my mouth.

Interlocutor: Quite the come down for Almighty Vocal Cords.

Ghost: I couldn't sing my song.

Interlocutor: Oh lord, talented, too!

Ghost: My death song. I crawled out of the pit.

Interlocutor: And we're not talking orchestra pits out here in the sticks. (58-60)

As the act unfolds, the two characters incessantly trade one-liners and sing songs dripping with self-conscious parody:

Ghost: (*to the tune of Oh! Susanna*):

I track the winter prairie for the
little squaw I lost.

I'm missing all my kissing I had
afore the frost.

I'm moping, oh I'm hoping oh, to
hold her hand in mine.

My flower of Saskatchewan, oh we were
doing fine.

Ghost and Interlocutor:

In our tipi, oh we were so in love,
One Arrow was too narrow for
my little squaw and me. (64)

The employment of the minstrel/vaudeville show as a device, with its racist agenda and its self-consciousness of playing to an audience, serves to emphasize the means of cultural production of Native images. The savvy Interlocutor lets her rookie "end man" Almighty Ghost know exactly what commodity the marketplace demands:

These fine, kind folks want to know the truth, the amazing details and circumstance behind your savagely beautiful appearance. They also want to be entertained and enlightened and maybe a tiny bit thrilled, just a goose of frightened. They want to laugh and cry. They want to know the facts. And it's up to you and me to try and lie that convincingly. (57)

Moses is highly cognizant that every signifying act the Native actor performs for an audience runs the danger of being perceived as natural rather than acts of theatrical representation. Goldie reminds us of this risk: "if in the theatre, the voice, the human sound actually heard, is from an indigene throat, how much more difficult for the audience to recognize the distance between 'voice' and referent voice" (188). By injecting an historical narrative with self-conscious and anti-illusionistic elements, Moses prevents the audience from fixing its reifying gaze. He is able to create what Terry Eagleton (in his discussion of Barthes) calls a "'healthy' sign,"

one which does not try to palm itself off as

"natural" but which, in the very moment of conveying a meaning, communicates something of its own relative status as well. (135)

Part of Moses' design is to throw the audience off-balance by juxtaposing supposedly pure and authentic Native tropes with clearly parodic inversions of these tropes. In this way, he denies both Native and non-Native spectators the comfort of the real. For example, when Almighty Ghost ironically repeats the phrase most associated with Chief Dan George, "My heart soars! (69), the issue of textual purity becomes truly complex: the audience's perception that Moses is parodying George's authentic poetic mysticism must be tempered with the observation that the phrase "My heart soars like a hawk" (while adopted and developed by George in his writing) was, as Goldie points out, first spoken by the actor in the film *Little Big Man*, whose text and direction were determined almost entirely by white artists (189). Moses lampoons not George's sentiment but the ignorance of the realities of cultural hegemony, a hegemony that helped to produce the text and make it famous.

Along with Moses, other Native playwrights

such as Margo Kane and Monique Mojica have shown great interest in interrogating the tainted images of racial stereotype rather than simply offering new and improved images for consumption. Both Kane's *Moonlodge* and Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* dramatize the search for a usable Native identity.

Moonlodge dramatizes the life story of Agnes, a young Native woman removed at a young age from her family and brought up in a series of white foster homes, who seeks to know her Native heritage. Because of her alienation from her cultural origins, she cannot simply adopt a ready-made authentic ethnicity but must investigate and reject several different mainstream conceptions of Indianness, conceptions that would be seen by the sympathetic spectator as obviously ridiculous. It is as a Brownie that Agnes learns her "first Indian song," E. Pauline Johnson's "Land Of The Silver Birch," which she enacts with great comic effect (1992: 281-282). Agnes' parody of Hollywoodesque clichés is relatively gentle in its satire, in that Kane does not emphasize the implication of the mainstream audience in the process of stereotyping. Agnes' performance of the song "Running Bear" invites the audience to laugh along with her:

Little White Dove was her name
such a lovely sight to see
All the women were either subservient or sexy.
I preferred sexy! *[Is dancing seductively
flaunting and pouting.]* All the women always
followed their men ten paces behind.

But their tribes fought with each other
so their love could never be
Hollywood version. Lots of leg. *[Chorus line
kicks.]*

Running Bear loved Little White Dove
with a love as big as the sky
Fringed mini-skirts. Lots of skin. *[More
chorus line kicks.]* Running Bear loved
Little White Dove

with a love that couldn't die
Savage tragedy! *[Melodramatic pose. Dives
onto floor and does frog stroke.]*

He couldn't swim the raging river
'Cause the river was too wide
[Continues swimming various strokes.] Because
his name was Running Bear and not Swimming
Bear!

He couldn't reach Little White Dove
waiting on the other side

[She shades her eyes.] And Indians always
looked like this because if they looked like
this *[Covers them]* they couldn't see anything.

In the moonlight he could see her
blowing kisses across the waves
her heart was beating faster
waiting there for her brave

[Much shimmy with breasts and shoulders.]
Primitive, primal, savage, supernatural love .
. . (283).

Mojica's play, like Kane's, is at its heart the journey of an individual who desires to explore the many possible constructions of the cultural self. On one hand, she attempts to subvert the eliding legacy of history by setting up a discourse that incorporates the voices of Native women who have been silenced by history, such as Pocahontas/Lady Rebecca/Matoaka and Malinche. On the other, Mojica creates self-deconstructing parodies of Native stereotypes, with names like Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides and Cigar Store Squaw, which are shown to be products of non-Native settler fantasies. In her bid to win the Miss North American Indian Beauty Pageant, Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides proposes the ultimate sacrifice:

For the talent segment. . . . I shall dance for you, in savage splendour, the "Dance of the Sacrificial Corn Maiden," and proceed to hurl myself over the precipice, all for the loss of my one true love, CAPTAIN JOHN WHITEMAN. (*swoons*) (19).

As is the case with Moses and Kane, Mojica exaggerates images to the point of ludicrousness in part to denaturalize them. But perhaps more importantly, all three playwrights present these stereotypes in order to dramatize the process of constructing a workable identity as a Native person. This process involves not only the valorization of Native experience but also a reckoning with the constructs that inhibit the valorization of such experiences. In all three plays, there is a threatened subjectivity that struggles with the empty shadows of non-Native desires. In Moses's drama, the struggle of Almighty Voice's wife White Girl becomes the struggle of the individual to maintain a sense of self in the face of images imposed from outside signifying difference. In order to do this, she must confront these images head on. Although the

figure of the Interlocutor appears to have swallowed White Girl whole, frequent moments occur in the second act in which Almighty Voice/Ghost intuits his wife's presence concealed within the ring-master persona, and he realizes that "this is what they've done to you" (66). The Interlocutor/White Girl flees from this recognition and attempts to put ironic distance between herself and Almighty Voice/Ghost by using the brutal ideology of the minstrel show in an awful frenzy of racial self-hatred:

Interlocutor: . . . Do you know, sir, how many Indians it takes to screw in a lightbulb?

Ghost: What's a lightbulb

Interlocutor: Good one, Mister Ghost, a very good one You, sir, you, I recognize you now. You're that red skin! You're that wagon burner! That feather head, Chief Bullshit. No, Chief Shitting Bull! Oh, no, no! Blood thirsty savage. Yes, you're primitive, uncivilized, a cantankerous cannibal! Unruly redman, you lack human intelligence! Stupidly stoic, sick, demented, foaming at the maws! Weirdly mad and dangerous, alcoholic, diseased, dirty, filthy,

stinking, ill fated degenerate race,
vanishing, dying, lazy, mortifying, fierce,
fierce and crazy, crazy, shit, shit, shit . .

Ghost: What's a light bulb?

Interlocutor: Who are you? Who the hell are
you?

Ghost: I'm a dead Indian. I eat crow instead
of buffalo.

Interlocutor: That's good. That's very good.

(93-95)

In a poignant final scene, Almighty Voice/Ghost wipes the whiteface make-up from the Interlocutor's face and gives her back her name. By the end of the play, we realize that what we have witnessed is not a simple statement of identity but an on-going battle for a soul. In this way, the play conforms to the comic tradition, in that lovers must transcend obstacles put in their path in order to find each other once again.

While the glimpses of a Native subjectivity in *Almighty Voice* are fleeting, in both *Moonlodge* and *Princess Pocahontas* there are attempts made to challenge the unreal with the real. In *Moonlodge*, Agnes is also threatened both physically and

spiritually by the dominant cultural systems, but her ultimate reward is an identity grounded in the concept of Native community. The wise Native elder Millie tells Agnes that "your medicine will come from your own people" (290), a suggestion that while Agnes' personality is composed of many parts, the site of ethnicity becomes not the individual but the Native community and the community of Native women. This provides Agnes with an actual soil in which to grow her own sense of self. While Mojica's work is far more metatheatrical and discursive than Kane's, it too journeys towards an essential Native self. By mixing her portrayal of Pocahontas with parody and self-reflexive techniques, Mojica, like Moses, prevents a straightforwardly tragic reading of Native history. The critical reception of her play reflects the ever-present pressure to satisfy the audience's desire for familiar and therefore authentic narrative form. In his review of Theatre Passe Muraille - Nightwood's 1990 co-production of *Princess Pocahontas*, Robert Crew applauds Mojica's efforts but criticizes her "campy spoof" style as getting in the way of the story of Pocahontas:

. . . underneath, and barely touched upon,

there's a sad story of a young woman whose reward for teaching the settlers to avoid starvation was to die in exile at the age of 22.

Crew's review suggests that he would have liked a story which dramatizes with pathos the historical Pocahontas and her sad fate. The playwright openly acknowledges the audience's unavoidable role in the construction of Native discourse: "So here ends the legend / of the Princess Pocahontas- / / if you want any more, make it up yourself" (31).

But in the end, like Kane, Mojica presents a specific definition of Native identity uncomplicated by critical irony. A contemporary character claims that a blue spot at the base of the spine indicates "Indian blood" (20), thereby naming an ultimately essentialist site of Native subjectivity. What unites all three plays is their evocation of the struggle of the Native subject to excavate the site of ethnicity. What the Native subject must contend with are the persistent signs of the "Indian" which reify themselves at the expense of the bodies which are forced to enact them.

Although Native playwrights invite the

audience to participate in the exorcism of stereotype and cheer on the struggle towards Native selfhood, they also (often simultaneously) demonstrate for the audience that there are Native experiences that cannot be apprehended, that not every story can or should be told. This reminder serves to confront the audience with its own desire for an authenticity sanctioned by the Native subject. When Agnes stumbles upon Native dancers performing traditional dances at a powwow, her representation of the dances is clumsy and ends up "becoming quite comic" (1990: 21). While the audience is included in the process of ridiculing stereotype, it is denied a mimetic enactment of Agnes' engagement with authentic Native culture. Similarly, when Agnes is taken away from her natural parents in the Social Services car at the start of the play, she mimes a silent scream the audience is not permitted to hear (1992: 279). We as audience members are outside observers of the car and her suffering; her pain eludes the scene/seen. In some cases, the conspicuous and therefore frustrating absence of the authentic Native self in Native art is not due to the artist's masterly control. Performance artist Rebecca Belmore's piece *For My Kokum* consists of a

wooden box, wrapped in furs and decorated with floral beadwork, containing a tape machine playing a recording of Belmore's grandmother speaking Ojibwe, a language which the artist at the time of completing the piece was unable to understand (Townsend-Gault, 1991: 67). Belmore's highly personal tribute to her grandmother is also an expression of the artist's feeling of unwitting distance from her own roots. Unable to interpret this sign of difference, she chooses to represent her cultural heritage as both cherished birthright and untranslatable absence.

Such narratives of absence reveal the inherent slipperiness of the Native subject. The interplay between invitation and interdiction, between self and non-self, is vital to the project of cultural rehabilitation. No simple authenticity which can be reconstituted as public, and therefore subject to the dominant's hegemony, is represented unproblematically. Similarly, the Native spectator's desire for authenticity is also frustrated in order to emphasize the process and not the product of cultural rehabilitation. What becomes important is the positionality of the Native subject rather than the cultural elements that the subject chooses to embrace. In the cat-

and-mouse game enacted perpetually between performer and audience, the Native subject invites Diamond's "rapturous identification" while demonstrating the often horrible consequences of such an act. The performer's confrontation with the audience on this score can be quite bitter and unequivocal. In Moses play *Kyotopolis*, the central focus is the search by a non-Native character for a reified Native identity. A character called Ricky Raccoon describes in a taunting monologue directed at the audience this desire for presence using the metaphor of cannibalism:

And you don't want to know how how we feel now, do you? You don't want to know what we think, do you? We aren't Indian enough, are we? Or are we, like, too Indian for you to chew? Are you hungry enough now finally to eat anything? Are you? Are you? (63)

Similarly, the Native American troupe Spiderwoman Theater's 1989 collective work *Winnetou's Snake Oil Show From Wigwam City* attacks the mainstream's voracious hunger for easily digestible Native values and images by using the medicine show form to foreground the commercialism of cultural and

spiritual theft. However, this play also articulates the paradox of Native discourse, where the survival of Native cultural expression is in part predicated upon its suitability for co-option. It is with great irony, anger and frustration that the actress Gloria Miguel turns to the audience and says "for only through your eyes am I remembered" (63). Although the audience's gaze can be reflected back upon itself, it can never be permanently evaded.

Many Native artists make this gaze the focal point of their work, hoping to expose the signifying act by presenting an entirely ironic object for view. In his installation work in the Museum of Man in San Diego entitled *The Artifact Piece*, Native American performance artist James Luna presented himself lying in a display case, complete with mock-explanatory tags (one documenting the injuries received during an episode of "excessive drinking" (Luna, 1987: 41)). The work evoked the totalizing context of positivist anthropology while denying it a compliant subject/object. Similarly, the performance piece by Native Americans Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña called *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit* . . . involved the two presenting themselves as

undiscovered Natives from a fictional island in the Gulf of Mexico. The installation, which toured locations in North America and Europe, consisted of the two Guatinauis (as they called themselves) on exhibit in a cage performing "traditional duties" such as sewing voodoo dolls and working at a laptop computer (Fusco, 145). The piece was designed to place the audience and its reactions at the centre of the performance:

Our project concentrated on the "zero degree" of intercultural relations in an attempt to define a point of origin for the debates that link "discovery" and "Otherness" . . . we intended to create a surprise or "uncanny" encounter, one in which audiences had to undergo their own process of reflection as to what they were seeing. (148)

Jean Fisher argues that this strategy in Native art of foregrounding the audience's gaze and reflecting it back onto itself is more inherently radical than returning the gaze, which she believes simply reaffirms the non-Native audience's dominant status:

If the purpose of the undead Indian of colonialism is to secure the self-identity of the onlooker, the shock of his real presence and the possibility that he may indeed be watching and listening disarms the voyeuristic gaze and denies it its structuring power.

(48-49)

This gaze, and the desire that determines what it apprehends, is far from uniform. There are a myriad ways of constructing any audience's point(s) of view, but I will suggest two that bear on this discussion. In his analysis of the relationship between alien cultures and gaze, Edward Bruner points to the divergent but often synchronic agendas of the tourist and the ethnographer:

Just when ethnographers have given up the quest for the exotic, authentic original -- the source, hordes of tourists are demanding it, and getting it, all over the world as cultural performances are constructed to fill tourist expectations. Ethnographers want thick description; tourists, thin description.

Ethnographers seek a processual historical world; tourists, the timeless, ethnographic

present. Ethnographers demand complexity; tourists, ready accessibility. (1993: 324)

I would argue that the non-Native spectator views Native performance both as an amateur ethnographer and as a professional tourist, at once desiring the essential narratives that explicate culture and the familiar signs that signify unknowable difference.

Both positions, while antithetical, are positions of ideological power, where the spectator can construct his or herself as insider or outsider according to inclination. Because of this slipperiness, some Native artists see the very concept of audience as an inherent impossibility given the oppositional nature of Native discourse.

Native American performance artist Jimmie Durham writes:

. . . . all those [Indian artists] who do remember and see cannot effectively say what they see because there is no podium, and no audience except a designated audience. The motive for the designation is cancellation; designated, the audience becomes passive, a nonaudience. (Durham, in Durham and Fisher, 101-2)

In short, there is no simple position for the Native subject to occupy. The desire on the part of Native playwrights to replace stereotype with more heterogeneous and responsible images is met by the audience's desire, equally ardent, to reify these fresh constructs and thereby rob them of their oppositional power. The Native artists under discussion also reject what has become categorized as the postmodern tactic of narrating the impossibility of a viable transcendent subject position. Playwrights like Moses, Kane and Mojica offer traces of subjectivity without divulging it explicitly on stage, tantalizing the audience with the lure of inside knowledge. With their interrogation of mainstream imagery, they reveal the omnipresent power of the dominant structures of thought to define and proscribe their identities, and dramatize the necessity of running the gantlet of stereotype in order to subvert its reifying power. By suggesting that the construction of cultural identity involves confrontation with the empty shadows of the culturally Other, these performances show ethnicity to be a process of negotiation rather than simple affirmation. There is no stable position in this field of perception,

neither in the audience nor on stage. The Native performer moves discursively between shadow and substance, constantly on the verge of disappearing from view, while the audience shifts from insider to outsider according to the ideological moment. This instability, far from being lamented by the Native self-performer, is used as a source of strength. "For me," writes Spivak, "the question 'who should speak?' is less crucial than 'who will listen?'" ("Questions," 60). By investigating "who will listen," Native artists ensure that their multivalence as speaking subjects is both protected and valued.

**CHAPTER 3: "AN ENCLOSED GARDEN WALLED OFF FROM
ENEMIES": FEMINIST THEORY AND NATIVE
WOMEN'S THEATRE**

The pleasure of these texts is not in the oppression they record, but in their construction of a discourse that can accurately account for it and trace its dynamics -- a discourse that moves in and out of oppressive operations, marking the perspective of the critique and the liberative distance the feminist critic is able to inhabit from collusion with its causes.

Sue-Ellen Case

She wanted to suffer like I had suffered, but how did she know what I'd suffered, or if I'd suffered? Then she'd take it all. When I started to feel sorry for her then I'd see my mother in her, my mother kneeling in front of this statue. A statue with white skin, and black hair, and empty blue eyes, and then she and my mother and the Virgin Mary would merge. I'd want to take her, and hold her, and rock her, and sing songs to her, I wanted to heal her. Everytime I'd feel like that, she'd jump on stage and she'd play it all back, and I'd stand there feeling like she'd stolen my thoughts. She'd just take it all.

Maria Campbell on watching Linda Griffiths during the rehearsal process of Jessica

The relationship between feminist theory and Native women's art, and specifically theatre, can be configured in many ways: uneasy detente, mutual misunderstanding, knife fight. The constant in any construction is the element of tension that exists between academic feminists and Native women artists, often articulated by the latter using the

language of colonialism. Despite the apparent attractiveness of a critical position like the one described by Case, where systems of oppression can be mapped and thereby navigated by the distanced female subject, many Native artists reject the notion that they themselves, as women of colour, can occupy such a position (if indeed, they suggest, anyone can). There are several ways to overcome this impasse. One would be to argue that Native women are somehow wrong in their rejection of feminist theory. This position has its obvious neocolonial overtones, and transforms feminist theory into a monolithic *grand récit* that can only be accepted or rejected, not interrogated. Another approach would entail arguing that Native women's creative expression cannot be illuminated by Western ideas of gender equality or difference. This position caricatures the uniqueness of Native women's art and denies the cross-cultural resonance of many artworks by Native women. I feel that perhaps the most useful position is one which not only creates a relationship but more importantly recognizes the relationship that already exists between feminist theory and Native women's art. For both non-Native feminists and Native female theatre artists, it is the *female body on stage*

that is the point of praxis, where both groups articulate the effects of colonisation and explore the textual nature of female identity. I will argue that while Native women frequently come at the question of female identity from the angle of legal status (specifically the Indian Act and its amendments), they often share with non-Native feminists a desire to deconstruct the coherent, pliable female subject and dramatize the vulnerability of the body without its colonizing text¹. Although I posit this as a common goal, I do not pretend to minimize the friction between the two groups. Like Campbell's constant battle with Griffiths chronicled in *The Book of Jessica*, there is emotional violence done. But I feel that it is this very tension, this lack of consensus, that impels any dialogue forward and forces important

¹ I mean here not to imply a neat (and therefore false) distinction between male and female Native playwriting; the work of many playwrights such as Moses, Highway and Flavel explores the issue of female subjecthood, and can be examined in light of feminist theory just as readily. I have concentrated upon female playwrights in this chapter because the divisions and sympathies between non-Native and Native women are often presented in a deceptively facile manner in critical discourse.

questions on both sides of the debate to be addressed.

When speaking of feminist theory and its influence on women playwrights and performers, it is best to be specific about which theory one is speaking. While there are many schools of feminist thought, and within each there are many internecine struggles, some basic categories can be defined generally in order to understand the feminist underpinnings (and contradictions) of feminist theatre. Bearing in mind that the strategies of feminist theory are often synchronous, there are at least three strains of classic Western feminist critical theory that bear on this discussion: radical, cultural, and material². Radical feminists, as the name "radical" (pertaining to the root) suggests, believe that the root of all systems of oppression, whether economic, ideological or cultural, is female oppression by the agents of patriarchy (Rowland and Klein, 274-75). As radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson argues, the "male/female system [is] the first and most

² This tripartite division of feminist thinking is in many important senses quite dated, superceded by multivalent feminist approaches that allow for multiple perspectives. However, for the purposes of this chapter, where I wish to illustrate how specific artistic choices made by Native playwrights can be seen to support equally specific ideological premises, I feel it necessary to spell out these premises in (admittedly) outdated and consciously simplified

fundamental instance of human oppression
[and] all other class systems are built on top of
it" (qtd. in Rowland and Klein, 275). Because
female oppression is seen as both fundamental and
universal, many radical feminists strive to
convince women of all races and classes that they
are united as an oppressed class with a common
enemy. Some, like Vanaja Dhruvarijan in her
article "The Multiple Oppression of Women of
Colour" and Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology*, go so far as
to suggest that women who identify more with their
particular ethnic group than with other foreign
women greatly aid those in their own cultures who
wield power through patriarchal control, thereby
dividing and conquering (Dhruvarijan, 19: Daly,
365). In addition to affirming a gender-based
solidarity across cultural and economic lines,
radical feminist theory also advocates a
transcendent definition of woman with inherently
spiritual or metaphysical dimensions. As Daly
(whose work is central to both radical and cultural
feminism) writes,

Radical Feminism is not reconciliation with
the father. Rather it is affirming our

terms.

original birth, our original source, movement, surge of living. This finding of our original integrity is re-membering our Selves. (39)

In this way radical feminist thought tends toward transcendence and universalism.

While radical feminists seek to understand the root of male/female oppression and advocate universal female solidarity, cultural feminists can be seen to develop radical feminism's transcendent idealism as a critique of gender inequalities. For cultural feminists, according to Linda Alcoff,

feminist theory, the explanation of sexism, and the justification of feminist demands can all be grounded securely and unambiguously on the concept of the essential female. (408)

Adrienne Rich reflects the essentialist and metaphysical tendency of cultural feminism in her explanation of misogyny:

The ancient, continuing envy, awe and dread of the male for the female capacity to create life has repeatedly taken the form of hatred

for every other form of female creativity.
(21)

In its championing of the feminine principle and its celebration of "the female body and its spiritual and political meanings" (Rich, 290), cultural feminism does not challenge the validity of defining "woman" as "nurturing," "creative," etc.; it merely challenges the negative connotations the patriarchy has attached to these definitions (Alcoff, 407).

In contrast to radical and cultural feminists, materialist feminists engage in analysis which highlights the non-essential and historically contingent nature of female oppression and identity. While cultural feminists like Rich affirm that "the repossession by women of our bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers" (292), materialist feminists argue that female oppression (and liberation) must be understood not in essential or transcendent terms but within the context of economic forces which are seen to determine how gender is constructed in any given period of history. Often drawing heavily upon Marx, Engels and other socialist theorists,

materialist feminists view women in relation to their culturally assigned market value as commodities or as producers of labour within a fundamentally oppressive economic system:

. . . . the roots of the secondary status of women are in fact economic women as a group do indeed have a definite relation to the means of production and this is different than that of men If this special relation of women to production is accepted, the analysis of [their] situation fits naturally into a class analysis of society. (Benston, 199)

In contrast to a metaphysical, biological or essentialist definition of woman explored by both radical and cultural feminists, materialist feminists such as Mia Campioni and Elizabeth Gross urge a multifaceted conception of female identity which takes into account variable cultural and economic forces:

. . . . there cannot be one or even two kinds of subject, but many different kinds, bounded

not simply by the biological body but by its necessary social and individual signification. The body is not simply the "seat" of subjectivity: it is also the target of technologies of power and forms of social control in all cultures. (qtd. in Johnson, 322-3).

What unites all three types of feminist inquiry is the focus on the relationship between the female subject and the external forces which either engender it or prevent it from discovering its own essential "subject-hood".

The effect of postmodern theory on these classic modes of feminist analysis has been both far-reaching and highly contentious. Many postmodern and poststructural thinkers, in their rejection of the notion of the coherent, autonomous subject, have seen the definitional category of woman as the ultimate postmodern non-subject. Alice Jardine sees the questioning of Western *grands récits* by such thinkers as Lacan and Derrida as necessarily destroying any conception of the feminine as natural or intrinsic:

In France, such rethinking has involved, above

all, a reincorporation and reconceptualization of that which has been the master narrative's own "non-knowledge," what has eluded them, what has engulfed them. This other-than-themselves is almost always a "space" of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as feminine, as woman. (25)

For Derrida, the feminine is a powerful force of resistance and disruption of the *grands récits*, but at a cost; "she" must remain undefined, avoiding any attempt to define "herself" using the logocentric and essentializing tools of "her" oppressors:

Out of the depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity, of property. And the philosophical discourse, blinded, founders on these shoals and is hurled down these depths to its ruin. (1978: 51)

Some feminists like Julia Kristeva (1980) use this kind of anti-essentialist thinking to produce what has become known as "negative feminism" (Alcoff,

418) which deconstructs female identity without constructing an identity to take its place. For Kristeva, woman becomes an elusive otherness and a gap in discourse that can never be defined:

A woman cannot be; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being. It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say "that's not it" and "that's still not it". (137)

Thus, any exploration of female subjectivity must have, as its goal, the representation of absence.

It is this sort of analysis of the female subject by feminist theorists, of the classic or postmodern variety, that has animated many female theatre practitioners. Many use the stage as a testing ground for models of female presence and absence. In her article "Feminist Theory and the Problem of Performance," Janelle Reinelt argues that feminist experiments with theatrical form have gone through three distinct historical phases: mimetic, deconstructive, and resistant. The first, mimetic, utilizes the conventions of realism to "tell the woman's story" without problematizing

these forms. Reinelt suggests that the influence of materialist feminism, with its focus on the means of cultural and economic production, and of French poststructuralist ideas of the feminine non-self, led to a new phase of experimentation which challenged the notion of mimesis itself. This second deconstructive approach foregrounds the artificial and mediated nature of mimetic representation, often dramatizing through staged absence the hegemony of the male gaze. In this way, feminist theatre dramatizes De Beauvoir's famous statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (38). Like the negative feminism of which it is an expression, this kind of theatre becomes criticized by feminists, according to Reinelt, for its rejection of any notion of female subjectivity.

This in turn leads to an approach that seeks to couple material and postmodern feminisms' critique of engendering and signifying systems with the radical/cultural feminist championing of the female subject as an active agent. This resistant mode involves an exploration of the "excess" of gender signification, where "that energy of resistance, that quality of intentionality which belongs to the subject by way of its agency as

producer of meanings, constitutive as well as constituted" is celebrated (Reinelt, 48-53). It is the critical point at which body confronts text that feminist theory and postmodern theatre intersect. Daniel Mesguich articulates the postmodern recognition of this critical collision:

When the actor of a text enters the scene, we have the monstrous division of a text by a body as well as that of a body by a text. This division doesn't quite fit. There is a remainder, infinite, in movement. (113)

The stage becomes the place where the living female body can confront the lifeless texts that she is forced to speak and reveal, through Reinelt's "excess" of signification, the gaps where agency can exist.

That the exploration on stage of female subjectivity or its impossibility is not necessarily cross-culturally liberative can easily be demonstrated by an examination of non-Native women playwrights who use Native characters in their works. It is clear that when the Native appears in plays which attempt to dramatize the ideological oppression of the female subject,

little is done to challenge the dominant use of the Native as seamless and faceless Other. In plays of the deconstructive mode, where attention is paid to how the female subject is defined and controlled by external forces, the Native female acts as almost a force of nature, the shoal which Derrida hopes will send philosophical discourse down to its ruin. A clear example of this occurs in *The Occupation of Heather Rose* by Wendy Lill, first performed at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre in 1988. It is a monologue telling the story of a white nurse, Heather Rose, whose isolation in a remote northern Native community precipitates her mental and emotional breakdown. As the character narrates the story alone in her nursing station, we hear the intermittent chanting of an unseen elderly Native woman who is staging a sit-in demonstration in the station to protest the delay in obtaining a prosthetic leg. Lill constructs the play as an indictment of political and bureaucratic systems, where the non-Native female social worker becomes a middle-man enforcing rules she has no say in formulating. In a drunken rage, Heather articulates her frustration with her place in the system by focusing on a Ministry of Health official and his occasional visits:

What did he know about these people? About the spirits on Snake Lake, about visions, and animals running around inside your head and long nights and dark days and crying jags and ravens that laugh at you and freeze-up and no mail what the hell did he know? flying in and out, in and out, in and out consulting on this, consulting on that, flashing their million dollar smiles, talking about the reserve from plane to community hall to band office to plane with their Indian friends, being helpful and advisory then back into the air. Once a month old Blue Eyes came and went, his tan always the same. Perfect. Probably uses a sunlamp. Hope he gets skin cancer. Probably plays squash tells women with cute little satin asses about his latest junket to desolate Indian reserves ... about what losers we all are ... (1988: 32).

The speech grounds Heather's frustration in a desire for the power of "Old Blue Eyes," a power which sexually attracts her to him earlier in the play. Thus, Lill ties sexual and political power together in a critique of Heather's enforced

position as sexual/bureaucratic subaltern.

The only point in the play where Heather Rose does not differentiate between herself and the Natives she reluctantly services is at the end of this speech, where she uses the pronoun "we" to describe herself and the Natives as "losers". While Lill recognizes the common position of subaltern that Heather and the Natives inhabit, the play's driving emotional momentum is Heather's insecurity in the face of an unknowable and undifferentiated Native Other:

You know what really bothers me about you people? You expect me to stich you up, give you pills, send you out to the hospital, wipe your bloody noses . . . and I have never once heard anyone say what you're supposed to say when someone does something NICE for you.

What do you say? You say "Thank you."

To just once hear "Thank you Miss Rose" would be music to my ears!

But instead I get silence. Dark eyes.

Secrets. Why is that? I never know what you're thinking. Never know what you really want from me. Should I stand on my hands, tell jokes, disappear? Are you glad, sad, mad

when you see me. Do you like me hate me, pity me, laugh at me, blame me? Answer me! (34)

The play is not intended as an exploration of the gender solidarity across cultural lines that radical/cultural feminists seek; it is more an attempt to recast the classic heart-of-darkness narrative in material/cultural feminist terms. In fact, Lill employs a quotation from Conrad's modernist classic *Heart of Darkness* as an epigraph to the play (2), thereby situating it in a specific tradition of Self/Other literature. Lill's play is both selectively material and radical in its feminist message. The former is clear in her critique of Heather's economic role, and the latter emerges at the end of the play where Heather's gendered sexuality is shown to be the cause of her internalized Self/Other dichotomy. In her final madness, Heather links her feeling of being an outsider in the Native community to her early traumatic memory of beginning her period:

I remember the feeling of warm blood flowing onto my white cotton underpants beneath my gypsy rose skirt. . . . The street is tinted

with car chrome flexing with heat. The strength of it sickens me. And I know that the street is a Danger full of odd leeches and worms under stones. And I can't cross the street. And I know that the men who are leaning against cars are talking about SEX and not mowing their lawns. And that the cars that are speeding off from curbs are going to do away with unwanted kittens and grandmothers and malformed baby sisters and bottle after bottle of liquor in cool fringed bars where women work licking the sweat from under their noses.

And I know I can't cross the street and that you and mother are dead. And that it is all moving too quickly now, folding in on me, breaking off miles and miles away, leaving me battered and lost on a lake under sheets of ragged ice. (43)

Thus the forces which "occupy" Heather are a composite of Native hostility (the chanting unseen protestor), subaltern frustration, and an originative fear of sexuality and its engendered consequences. As radical feminists like Atkinson would argue, the genesis of Heather's oppression is

her entry into the dangerous arena of male-dominated sexuality. Lill explores how these material/cultural forces act upon the isolated female subject in a similar fashion in her play *Sisters*, where a group of nuns running a Native mission school are racked by both doubt about their role as Church minions and about their repressed sexuality. Significantly, in both of Lill's plays, the Native people are never seen, only signified through sound (the chanting in *Heather Rose*) or brief silhouette (the shadow of a nun beating a Native girl in *Sisters*). Lill's female subject is totally isolated, suspended between the anonymous patriarchal powers-that-be and the equally faceless Native Other. The critique of signifying systems and their ability to rob the female subject of agency that Lill presents is never applied to the Native characters; instead they merely form a backdrop to the struggle of the non-Native female subject in search of this agency. In *Sisters*, the protagonist Sister Mary takes a cue from her earlier memory of a Native student's attempt at arson and burns down the empty and abandoned building years later in an act of belated agency. In a later revision of the scene for a performance at the University of Guelph, Lill rewrites an

explanatory speech for Mary. In the revised speech, Sister Mary says that she immolates the school not for the memory of the abused Native children (her reason in the original text) but for the memory of a fellow sister who harboured repressed lesbian feeling for her. Again, the rage is personalized and tied to sexual and subaltern oppression rather than to issues involving Native agency. Lill's radical feminism is selective in that no common bond between "sisters under the skin" is ever suggested or even intimated. The Native remains, intentionally, outside the field of feminist interrogation.

* * *

Other thorny issues arise when female subjectivity is "shared" by non-Native and Native female playwrights. Perhaps the most contentious instance of this is the play *Jessica: A Transformation*, co-written by Linda Griffiths and Métis writer/activist Maria Campbell. This work has become a site of contention amongst critics, many of whom view it in terms of its political ramifications. The attacks frequently centre on the first section of the published text, which is a

history (narrated and edited by Griffiths) of the play's creation and of the struggle, both creative and personal, between its two collaborators. Helen Hoy, for example, views this prefatory section of *Jessica* largely in terms of its postcolonial significance, seeing it "rehearse systematically the sites and tropes of Euro-American/Native contestation: land, treaties, ownership, concepts of time, religion, cultural copyright" (29). Even when the project is viewed in light of feminist theory, as in Jennifer Andrews' 1996 article, the preface is read as an equally clear record of female oppression: "the preface [to *Jessica*] specifically examines the issues of race and sex using a 'critical feminist' context, as Campbell challenges the oppressive discourse of white women, including Griffiths, who maintain patriarchal structures of power" (300). Although these interpretations do encourage resistant and often clear-eyed reading of the *Jessica* project, I feel that they at the same time obscure the indeterminate and postmodern feminist nature of the preface³. It is both the revealing interrogation of

³ While Hoy suggests in her article that "an entire poststructuralist/feminist/psychoanalytic paper on split and shared and overlapping selves, fluid and transgressed ego boundaries, and transposed subject positions, incidentally, is

feminist assumptions and the articulated mutual relationship of use and risk existing between Griffiths and Campbell that marks the preface as a document of postmodern feminism, anti-essential and contingently constructed.

Several critics have (quite rightly) pointed out the faux transparency of the recorded exchange between Griffiths and Campbell, where Griffiths' "let's talk" candour masks an editorial control that silences as much as it voices (Hoy, 26). Another troubling aspect of the preface is the mysterious non-presence of Paul Thompson, the vital shaping force of the project who is rarely foregrounded. His role as a submerged patriarchal presence so discomfits Griffiths that she, at one point, feminizes him as if to include him in the "female perspective" the preface is meant to evoke:

Here he was, strung between the egos of two emotional and demanding women, each one holding a different key to the play we were trying to make. He'd run one way, then the next, explaining me to Maria, and Maria to me.

begging to be written on *The Book of Jessica*" (32), the premise of mutuality and cross-cultural risk that might inform such a paper would appear to be incompatible with her own postcolonial reading.

Later he said it was his turn to become a woman (51).

With these examples of ideological interest in mind, one can examine the exchange cautiously for the relationship that it narrates, albeit selectively. Griffiths' narration of events is interspersed with transcribed tape-recorded conversations between the two women. It is in these excerpts that the motivations of Campbell and Griffiths emerge and are subjected to rigorous mutual scrutiny. For Campbell, a Métis woman engaged in helping her community in her capacity as both activist and artist, Western-style theatre seemed to offer itself as a potent medium which could represent and energize Métis experience:

I didn't know much about theatre, but I was doing community work when I saw [Clarke Roger's 1974 production of] *Almighty Voice*. I went to the play because the Native community was in an uproar. It was a play about Native people done by whites; it also delved into a spiritual world that we felt should be interpreted by Natives themselves. I went to denounce it, and ended up defending it. In

that production of *Almighty Voice* I saw something really powerful happen, something that educated, that healed, that empowered people; it was fun and it was magical. (16)

In comparison, Griffiths' initial attraction to the *Jessica* project was more self-interested and amoral in nature. She expresses her desire for the project using metaphors which accentuate this desire rather than conceal it under the rubric of cross-cultural philanthropy:

I liked to climb inside other people's psyches and kind of ... sibyl them. I was taught that you could open yourself up to anything, anyone, let the energy pour through you, and something would happen. I was ravenous for these moments. (14)

If there was earth, air, fire and water, only one of these forces really made sense to me. I'd always felt as if I was ninety-five percent air. Sometimes hot air. One of the many things that made me hungry for this project was that I knew it would have everything to do with the earth. (18)

It is this aspect of the project that lends special credence to its being seen as cultural predation. However, while both the play and its prefatory history can be seen as examples of cultural appropriation and elision, they can also be seen as examples of what Stephen Muecke, informed by his reading of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, calls "mutual becoming":

Deleuze and Guattari seem to be saying it's OK to study the "Eskimos" if you are Eskimo-becoming and they, the Eskimos, are European-becoming, but both in a process of becoming-minor (327)⁴.

As I have indicated, Griffiths and Campbell both have agendas which are mutually pursued through the

⁴ I have employed Muecke's pithy reading of Deleuze and Guattari due to the latter's own rather oblique definition of "becoming":

There is no subject of the becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority; there is no medium of becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of a minority. . . . A line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle. . . . A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between. . . . it constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man's land, a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of

use of theatre. The published history of the play relates the often painful process of becoming-minor for both women, each trading roles of teacher and student throughout the creative process. What is significant about this becoming-minor from a feminist perspective is the genderized language and concepts both women use to articulate the process.

The shifting roles of teacher and student are sexed by Campbell as "mother" and "daughter" : "Sometimes, I feel really bizarre, weird, you know, like I'm your mother. Other times, I feel like you're my mother and I'm the kid" (77). Griffiths' unstable identity as mother/daughter in the relationship is in one sense a reflection of her dual role as visible interpreter of Campbell's experience in theatrical terms and as "ravenous" female interlocutor hungry for the life-knowledge of the older, more experienced Métis woman. To illuminate the dynamics of this duality, I will turn to an example from the discourse of postmodern or "critical" anthropology⁵.

In his analysis of Majorie Shostak's landmark

the other. . . . (292-293)

⁵ The term "critical" as used here has been adopted by anthropologists to describe particular anthropological discourse which subjects the premises of the discipline to scrutiny.

study of the !Kung people, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*, James Clifford sees the relationship between Shostak, the anthropologist, and her !Kung informant Nisa as an "explicit feminist allegory" (1986: 107) dramatising the open-ended nature of feminist anthropological enquiry⁶. Clifford takes his cue from Shostak's statement to her informants that "I wanted to learn what it meant to be a woman in their culture so I could better understand what it meant in my own" (Shostak, 349). Clifford sees Shostak's desire for self-knowledge as, on one hand, lending specificity to the utterances of her informants, and, on the other, destabilizing the binary power relationship of anthropologist/informant:

Nisa [Shostak's informant] speaks, throughout, not as a neutral witness but as a person giving specific kinds of advice to someone of a particular age with manifest questions and desires. She is not an "informant" speaking cultural truths, as if to everyone and no one, providing information rather than

⁶George Marcus and Michael Fischer, two prominent critical anthropologists, echo Clifford's reading of *Nisa* as an example of self-reflexive feminist ethnography (57-59).

circumstantial responses Without drawing explicit lessons from Nisa's experience, [Shostak] dramatizes through her own quest the way a narrated life makes sense, allegorically, *for another*. . . . The writer, and her readers, can be both young (learning) and old (knowing). They can simultaneously listen, and "give voice to," the other. (107-108)

Like Shostak, Griffiths too begins with the search for the female "angle" as a general principle of knowledge-seeking. In a 1983 interview, she notes that

It was in the collective that I got encouragement to go for the female perspective. That was part of the populist ethos of collective theatre, which aimed at capturing the perspectives that the mainstream culture was likely to ignore. (Klein, 7)

In plays such as *Maggie and Pierre*, she gives voice to both a real female (Margaret Trudeau) and to an immanent "female perspective," in this case, female frustration with social roles and with impassive

patriarchal love objects. In *Jessica*, Griffiths attempts the same sort of feminist/anthropological/theatrical "sibyling," but is impelled by her subject to examine her right to occupy any of these seats of power. And like Shostak, Griffiths' actual experience with the Other Woman makes the fixing of the objective feminist position from which to study the Other Woman impossible. This lack of an objective ideological position poses a risk for both sibyl and sibylled. The risk this openly unstable relationship poses for the Native subject, in both feminist ethnography and feminist theatre, replaces the risk that the unself-reflexive discourse of knowing once posed, as Judith Stacey suggests:

. . . the irony I now perceive is that [feminist] ethnographic method exposes subjects to far greater danger and exploitation than do most positivist, abstract, and "masculinist" research methods. The greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater the danger (24).

As the epigraph to this chapter illustrates, it is

this danger that underpins much of the hostility Campbell feels towards Griffiths, the feeling that Griffiths the theatrical ethnographer has somehow "stolen her thoughts".

When analyzing the preface as a postcolonial text, the mistake is often made of constructing Campbell as a stolid and earthy postcolonial heroine, and her narrative as displaying, in Hoy's words, "anti-colonial resilience" in the face of Griffiths' "liberal self-scrutiny" (30). For Hoy, Campbell's fundamental struggle is with "her cultural ethic of generosity, of letting go and giving away" (31). This binary construction does two things: first, it perpetuates the idea (begun by Griffiths) that Campbell is the unproblematically real, the authentic, which the unreal and inauthentic sibyl Griffiths must signify; second, it minimizes the confusion and indeterminacy of Campbell's own subject position. I suggested earlier in the chapter that the relationship between the two women could be seen as one of mutual becoming, where Campbell wanted knowledge of Western theatre and Griffiths wanted something to make a proper theatrical meal of. This model of mutual becoming also describes an internalized struggle often analyzed by feminist

theorists: the struggle of the female subject to confront her own Other. Far from defining herself solely in culturally resistant terms, Campbell expresses a painfully personal agenda that complicates her reactions to the play itself. For her, it is the acceptance of her bracketed and forgotten younger self, the hooker and junkie, the young Maria that Griffiths mercilessly replays for Campbell during the rehearsal process (32). To do this, Campbell must use Griffiths to become whole, as Griffiths recognizes: "You hated having to use me to get it out . . . you couldn't do what I could do" (71). Similarly, the sibyl's need for a subject has a personal dimension. Griffiths, who, as a privileged middle-class child, saw herself denied the right to experience the emotional pain she felt, recognized in Campbell the opportunity to feel that pain as Campbell:

When I started to ... act you ... write you
... whatever it was I did ... I could act the
way I felt, as if somewhere I had been beaten,
raped, oppressed. I could act from the part
of me that wasn't a nice clean girl . . .
. (75-76)

Both women enter into a relationship of becoming-minor, what is repeatedly called a "treaty" (82), where each must acknowledge (but certainly not tame) the foreigner within and without'. In her article on ethnicity and Canadian writing, Smaro Kamourelis sees this concept of self-exile as the foundation of writing, a concept which she articulates with the metaphor of the "black angel":

This foreigner is a black angel: black because the message she delivers is a cipher, a message veiled by layers and layers of deferred meaning. . . . We would be content if that otherness inside us were to remain silenced, forever furled up neatly. For when this angel surfaces, she bears, more often than not, unsettling news The black angel takes the shape of exiled speech It is the stifling of the other's voice inside us, this negation of our condition as foreigners, that initiates the frenzy with which we set out towards language.

(143-4)

⁷ Kristeva writes: "[we] recognize that one becomes a foreigner in another country because one is already a foreigner from within" (1993: 14).

I would argue that it is this exploration of the interpenetrating female Other in the preface to the play that distinguishes the project as an example of postmodern feminism. Postmodern in its fluidity of roles, its agonism, and the becoming-minor that occurs when cultures (and genders) mutually appropriate.

Like its preface, the actual play of *Jessica* is marked by inherent contradictions. As Andrews indicates, the play attempts to weave a number of feminist approaches, including cultural and material, to dramatize the transformation of its Métis main character Jessica into a powerful and integrated female subject (299-300). In an earlier interview discussing the play, Griffiths describes the inherent tension of the piece as being between "the politics of feminism" on one hand and "feminine mysticism" on the other (qtd. in Corbeil, E7). The latter theme emerges in Jessica's search for female transcendent power that is open to all women. When she and her white prostitute friend Liz pray to "the round-bellied goddess," they feel a kinship that helps them experience this mystical female energy (*Jessica*, 135). In an echo of Rich's cultural feminist explanation of misogyny, Jessica

emphasizes the imperiled nature of this essence: "there's a place I've got inside that men always seem to want" (159). This valorization of universal female essence across cultural lines is part of a cultural feminist approach, but it also reflects the collaborators' search for a spiritual common ground between their Native and non-Native cultures. While she seems to waver on this point throughout the preface, Campbell does affirm the necessity of discovering this transcendental essence when she asserts that "the circle of grandmothers [has] no colour" (17).

Material feminism, with its positing of economic forces as the foundation of sexism, has frequently been used as a strategy to understand post-contact Native gender relations. As its thesis indicates, Nancy Bonvillain's "Gender Relations in Native North America" is informed by materialist feminist practice: "We will see the extent to which ecological and social conditions have moulded gender roles in Amerindian cultures and the extent to which they have been reshaped by post-colonial historical forces" (1-2). In a similar fashion, *Jessica* presents the Native female subject in specific historical and economic conditions that precipitate her oppression. After

Jessica's lover Sam beats her, he explains his behaviour in the context of Native male disenfranchisement: "I want to beat you because I can't beat them, you're just one step down from me, that's all you've got your mysteries, all I've got is that sometime I was a warrior" (161). The play attempts to combine these two types of feminist thinking, one essentialist and the other contingent, to articulate both the power and fragility of the Native subject.

One aspect of the play which seems to exemplify the unresolved tension between feminist form and Native content is its reworking of traditional Native material. In a particularly effective instance, the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman is transformed into a parable of female power and its terrible and far-reaching responsibility. A common origin story that appears in many Native cultures across North America, this myth relates how the teachings of the Creator came to be passed down to the First Nations' peoples. In a version related by the Lakota-Sioux elder Lame Dear, two hunters follow a vision of a strange white buffalo calf on the plains. The calf transforms itself into a beautiful woman, and the first hunter, seized with desire, attempts to rape her. He is

struck dead instantly for his crime, and the second hunter, humbled and afraid, leads her to his camp.

She gives the people the sacred pipe, teaches them prayers and songs, and then leaves, transforming back into the buffalo calf, and then into stone (Erdoes, 251-5). In Lane Deer's version, the story is told from the viewpoint of the Sioux, and the desire of the first hunter is seen as sexual but also as a symbol of all greed (255). Griffiths takes this origin story and uses it as a metaphor for Jessica's struggle against fear of herself and of men, but also of her power to teach and heal.

In a moment of despair during her stay in an asylum, Jessica narrates the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman:

All she knew is that she was walking. She was tired and she was walking across the empty plains She walked because she had to tell them something, she had to remind them. She didn't want to be the one that had to come, she had begged to stay, but now she was trapped in a human body Finally, when she could hardly stand, she saw two hunters coming towards her Then the hunters saw she was wearing the head of a white

buffalo calf. As they came near, she knew one of them wanted to rape her, and the other recognized her. She let one come very close, willing him to stop. He reached out to grab her, she looked into eyes that had never been taught, then a cloud rose up, and he became dust She told the other hunter to go ahead and prepare the camp. As she watched him go, she knew she was on the brink of what all the suffering had been for, and for the first time, she was afraid. She asked them why, when she was so close, should she shake with fear? (142-143)

White Buffalo Calf Woman becomes a multilayered symbol which juxtaposes the transcendent power of the female to destroy (the hunter's death) and to enlighten (the gift of teachings) with the very personal fear of harnessing and understanding this double-edged power (her doubt before entering the camp). In the preface, Campbell complains that Native and Métis men want to revitalize the traditional teachings without acknowledging and incorporating the female source of these teachings (59). This scene reinscribes the feminine at the centre of cultural rebirth without erasing the

human frailty and responsibility that necessarily accompany such a move. By having the extremely vulnerable female subject (Jessica narrates this story in a straight-jacket), whose enacted story contains scenes of both rape and numinous connection to the spirits, speak this story of cultural rebirth, Griffiths dramatizes with great success the metaphor central to mainstream feminism: the personal is political.

It is compelling instances like this, where female agency is self-created, seemingly universal, and affective, that prompt critics like Amanda Hale to assert that "it is essential to recognize and name this as a feminist piece of theatre" (11). It is tempting to "name" this play feminist, especially given the recombinative energy of the abovementioned scene. However, like the preface itself, the play is fundamentally about a desire to unify Native and non-Native feminist modes of knowing. At the end of the play, all the spirits - - Wolverine, Coyote, Bear, Crow, and Unicorn -- fuse into Jessica in a vision of *unitas* (174-175).

This desire to combine Native and European symbols obscures the different problems each set of symbols poses. In order to use the Native spirit figures in a secular theatrical context, Griffiths had to

first convince the reluctant Campbell that such a use would not caricature or sully their spiritual power (37). In comparison, the audience had to be convinced that the Unicorn was a vital symbol of exiled Celtic spiritual power and not a kitschified product more at home in "the knickknack corner of Woolworth's" (60). Both processes involve the continuum of the secular and the spiritual, but each attempts to move in opposite directions.

Thus, the issues of cultural appropriation and control which are rehearsed in the preface are not transcended in the play with any degree of satisfaction. The line separating feminist knower and Native known is blurred but cannot be effaced.

Both women undergo a shared process of becoming-minor, becoming-Other, but ultimately the play's cross-cultural nature fixes its vision of female agency within a contestatory field.

Monique Mojica's 1991 play *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, like *Jessica*, is also driven by an irreducible paradox. It is, in various degrees, both feminist and postmodern. Its feminist critique provides both analysis of female Native oppression and images of renewal, while its postmodern self-reflexive theatricality deconstructs the settler discourse and its

stereotypical signifiers. It is the tension between these two critical discourses -- feminist and postmodern -- that perfectly illustrates both the value of postmodern feminist theatre and the inherent problems that arise when it is used to dramatize the Native female subject.

Mojica's task in *Princess Pocahontas* can be demonstrated by examining how it has been read by both theatrical and academic critics. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Robert Crew, in his review of Theatre Passe Muraille-Nightwood's 1990 production of *Princess Pocahontas*, applauds Mojica's efforts but criticizes her "campy spoof" style as getting in the way of the "real" story of Pocahontas. Crew presupposes a distinction between the play's campy style and the true story that lies "underneath" the play's narrative. It is this desire to separate content from form that Mojica will argue helps silence Native female voice, and it is a desire she seeks to subvert. She does this through the use of parody and other overtly theatrical devices. In an article entitled "Dialogic Monologue: A Dialogue," Jennifer Harvie and Ric Knowles cogently suggest that the play is "counter- rather than anti-hegemonic" in nature (153). By this, they mean that it is meant to replace the settler narrative

with a transcendent and resistant counter-narrative rather than demonstrate that such a narrative cannot exist. Indeed, the play attempts to both deconstruct and reconstruct Native female identity, to refigure the tragic narrative that Pocahontas exemplifies into a self-reflexive comic turn. And it is at this liminal point, when female agency is represented alongside deconstructive parody, that the irreducible paradox of the play asserts itself.

One tool which Mojica uses to decentre the narrative is parody. The play opens with a broad parody of a beauty pageant, complete with sound effects drawn from such diverse elements of mainstream culture as "Hollywood tom-toms, the 'Indian Love Call', 'The Good, The Bad and The Ugly', and the 'Mazola' commercial" (18). The exaggerated images serve to deconstruct the traditional narrative of the Indian Princess with its quiet beauty and self-denying sacrifice. While it pokes fun at negative stereotypes of Native peoples, it also ridicules the signifiers which are supposedly complimentary. For example, Princess Buttered-On-Both-Sides parodies the spiritual language of Native stereotypes when she says "you have made my heart soar like a rabbit" (26). Through the alienating techniques of breaking the

fourth wall and mixing the tragic with the comic, Mojica seeks to explode stereotypes from the inside and keep the audience off-balance. It is through the presentation of coterminous but conflicting images, the excess of signification in Reinelt's terms, that Mojica hopes to assert the possibility of self-conscious Native female subjectivity.

By mixing her portrayal of Pocahontas with parody and self-reflexive techniques, Mojica, like other Native playwrights, prevents a straightforwardly tragic reading of Native history.

When the Sacrificial Virgin balks at diving into the volcano and says "Have you got the wrong virgin!" (25), the familiar tragic closure of sacrificial martyrdom is subverted. In his review Crew also criticizes Mojica for being both "superfluous" and "bathetic" when she calls the historical "turning off" of Native women "an essential fiber in the fabric of our contemporary lives" (Mojica, 47). For Mojica, the linking of past and present crimes against Native women is not "superfluous" but is instead a central point of the play. By subverting the audience's desire for tragic, mimetic or historical closure, *Princess Pocahontas* attempts to reconfigure how Native experience is understood.

Like *Jessica*, Mojica's play combines material and cultural feminist approaches to explore how female Native agency can be achieved. On one hand, the play offers a materialist feminist analysis of how Native women are objectified. The playwright often recasts gender relations in terms of commercial exchange, and emphasizes the Native woman's unwitting role as commodity. In this vein, Lady Rebecca/Pocahontas accuses her father of valuing her less "than old swords, guns or axes" (31). Perhaps the most thoroughgoing example of Mojica's materialist feminist approach is the character of Margaret, who defines herself almost entirely according to her usefulness in a cross-cultural patriarchal labour market:

When there is no more to trade, our men trade us.

Fathers, uncles, brothers, husbands trade us for knives, axes, muskets liquor.

My husband didn't have a good hunt this season. (46)

While Mojica ties in Native women's oppression to dehumanizing economic and social forces, she does not reject the essentialist and transcendent

idealism which materialist feminism seeks to dismantle. In this, she has more in common with radical and cultural feminists than with material feminists.

Much of Mojica's rich and multilayered imagery both defines and glorifies the essential Native female principle. Cultural feminism's fusion of biological and spiritual essence becomes culturally specific in the playwright's hands but its emphasis upon transcendent value is upheld throughout the play. The character of Ceremony, representing among other things the puberty ritual and the instructions of the grandmothers, is personified as a female figure (15-16), thereby linking the female body with social and gender identity. Mojica contrasts the barren Virgin figure -- a product of patriarchal Christianity -- with the seething female power encased within its sterile form:

Let me tell you then, how I became a virgin.
Separated from myself my balance destroyed,
scrubbed clean
made lighter, non threatening
chaste barren
. . . .
Encased in plaster

painted white.
But oh, if there is one child
who sees my nostrils flare
my eyes spark and
recognizes my heartbeat (37)

By describing a true female presence dominated by a false one (shaped by fearful patriarchy), Mojica provides a cultural feminist counter-definition of womanhood rather than denying that one can be found. While Mojica can be seen to fit within the ideological categories of both materialist and cultural feminism, her emphasis on a specifically Native female community places her in opposition to radical/cultural feminists who seek to unify all women as one class. Where the play *Jessica* favours a recombinant cultural approach, Mojica is quite explicit in her rejection of the cross-cultural feminist label:

It's International Women's Day -
No, I didn't go to the march
So many years of trying to fit into feminist
shoes.
O.K., I'm trying on the shoes; but they're not
the same as the shoes in the display case. The

shoes I'm trying on must be crafted to fit these wide, square, brown feet (58)

Despite the fact that Mojica herself is biologically both Jewish and Native (a "mixed-blood Jewish-Indian actress-cum-playwright" as the *Canadian Jewish News* defines her), her vision of female identity is predominantly shaped by her Native heritage. Mojica's elision of internal difference, of the foreigner within as an imbricated part of self-expression, marks her use of feminist paradigms as distinctly un-postmodern.

Princess Pocahontas is paradoxical in that it both foregrounds the constructed nature of historical narratives ("So here ends the legend/of the Princess Pocahontas-/ /if you want any more, make it up yourself" (31)), and the limits of transcendent knowledge ("And I do not represent all Native women. I am one" (59)) while constructing an historical narrative with essentialist/transcendent content. On one hand, she does not claim to speak for all Native women, but she does see them as the "centre of the hoop of the nation" (39) on the other. Both the term "centre" and "nation" imply a relatively stable relationship between the nature of Native women and their place in Native

societies. Because of their central position, women are also shown to have a defined role in the revitalization of the Native culture:

He said, "It's time for the women to pick up their medicine in order for the people to continue."

She asked him, "What is the women's medicine?" The only answer he found was, "The women are the medicine, so we must heal the women." (20)

Mojica sees Native women as "build[ing] alliances with our bodies/ loyalties through our blood" (43), indicating a solidarity amongst Native women by virtue of shared struggle, heritage, and gender.

This vision of solidarity and transcendence exists in uneasy counterpoint to the self-consciousness of the play. For instance, the character "Storybook Pocahontas" co-exists in a subordinate position to "Pocahontas" yet each is clearly a fictionalized construction. In the end, the playwright relies on biological essentialism in the form of the "blue spot" to signify nationhood:

When my child was born I turned it

over to check for the blue spot at the base of the spine. Even among the half-breeds, it's one of the last things to go. (20)

While postmodern feminist theatrical techniques provide many strategies for the dismantling of master narratives, its deconstructive and critical edge can be seen to cut both ways when Native artists attempt to assert their own historical and subject positions. The postmodern impulse to expose the constructed nature of reality extends to the organizing principle of history. In the words of Linda Hutcheon (1988):

History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought - as a human construct. And in arguing that *history* does not exist except as text, it does not stupidly and "gleefully" deny that the *past* existed, but only that its accessibility to us is now entirely conditioned by textuality. (16)

By viewing history as a socially constructed text rather than an absolute or transcendent foundation for knowledge, postmodernism calls into question any narrative which depends upon history for its

validity. Any discussion of transcendent meaning in history is seen by Hutcheon and other postmodernists as the product of "nostalgia" (89) which must be avoided. Crapanzano suggests that what separates postcolonialism from postmodernism is its legacy of real oppression and struggle: "The past of post-colonialism . . . cannot be overcome. It cannot be controlled by citation. It cannot yet be reduced to trash, the trace, the pseudo-trace. It is too painful" (434). For Mojica, it is the pain of having no clear legacy or history:

No map, no trail, no footprint, no way home
only darkness, a cold wind whistling by my
ears.

The only light comes from the stars.

Nowhere to set my feet.

no place to stand. (19)

Alongside carnivalesque inversions and subversions *Princess Pocahontas* juxtaposes bitter vignettes of suffering, as when ridiculous images of Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides and Cigar Store Squaw are followed by a scene in which women discuss the torture and oppression of actual contemporary

Native women (49-52). This juxtaposition, Mojica seems to stress, does not serve to confuse the real with the parodic and thereby place each on an equal footing. Instead it demonstrates how histories of oppression are made up of impersonal stereotypes and personal violence, each of which must be examined and resisted. The transcendent truth that Mojica pursues in the play becomes "the weight of the history on our backs, the tiredness of the struggle we shared" (53). And it is this transcendent truth which appears so fragile in the midst of parody and deconstructive techniques.

The search for an essential and transcendent foundation for female agency appears in contradiction to the style of feminist postmodern performance generally characterized by Jill Dolan as "break[ing] with realist narrative strategies, herald[ing] the death of unified characters, decenter[ing] the subject, and foreground[ing] conventions of perception" (60). However, Patricia Waugh notes that feminist art often does utilize the aesthetic forms of postmodernism while rejecting its negative ideological premises (352). She argues that postmodernism's denial and deconstruction of history and subjectivity are based upon the rejection of both an "ideal [male]

autonomous self" and a view of history as a totalizing system. Waugh suggests that

those who have been excluded from the constitution of that so-called "universal subject" are unlikely either to long nostalgically for what they have never experienced or possessed or to revel in the "jouissance" of its disintegration. (347)

Perhaps Mojica's method can best be illustrated by two separate moments in the play. The first involves Contemporary Woman #1 being led through a rite-of-passage ceremony by Spirit-Sister in Transformation 12 (54-58). Contemporary Woman pours a bucket of sand centre-stage and makes footprints with it (57). This moment represents Mojica's difficult task in that the footprints which will lead her to her identity, her way home, must be self-consciously constructed by the artist out of extremely impermanent materials. However, she is guided in this act of fragile self-creation by the Spirit-Sister, a transcendent image of female Native power. Thus Mojica's act of creation is at once artificial and essential. Similarly Mojica's invocation of her "word warriors" in

Transformation 13 joins together the concepts of text and power, once again indicating how the recognition of textuality does not necessarily lead to powerlessness or nihilism. By walking this very thin line between postmodern parody and ethnic/gender affirmation, Mojica attempts to create a workable identity which is both celebratory and multivalent.

* * *

Thus far, my analysis of Native women's theatre has proceeded from a kind of normative feminist perspective, pointing out elements of mainstream feminist thought that exist within the works while ignoring the particular cultural/historical contexts that inform and shape them. At the start of the chapter, I suggested that Native women's theatre is in part a response to issues of legal status, and that theatre by both mainstream feminists and Native women focus upon the female body on stage. It is to this body on stage, moreover a body under threat, that I will now turn. Any materialist analysis of women's oppression engages in the foregrounding of specific historical and economic forces that shape female

experience. For Native women, one enormous influence on how their lives have been perceived until very recently is the Indian Act (1876, 1951) and the boundaries of status that it proscribes for women. I will argue that this legal document's effect upon Native self-expression has been profound, and contextualizes the "postmodern" strategies of female Native subject constructions on stage.

The Indian Act's determination of Native identity is both complex and far-reaching, and some discussion of its various ramifications for women is required. The central issue that has historically occupied Native women regarding the Indian Act is that of membership. The first appearance of provisions that determined who was and wasn't "Indian" was in the 1869 British North American Act, Section 6, which stated that a Native woman who married a non-Native man lost both her status (which afforded specific rights) and her privileges as a Native person as set out in the Act. The regulations pertaining to Natives in the 1869 B.N.A. Act eventually evolved into the 1951 Indian Act, and with this evolution came even more restrictions for Native women. Section 6 became Section 12.1.b of the 1951 Indian Act, and another

section of the new Act stated that a Native woman who married a Native man from another band was transferred to her husband's band regardless of her wishes (Jamieson, 11). The regulations controlling Native women's behaviour were often formulated so as to afford officials great latitude in their moral judgements. For example, Section 72 of the 1876 Act gave the Superintendent-General power "to stop the payment of the annuity and interest money of any woman having no children who deserts her husband and lives immorally with another man" (qtd. in Jamieson, 119). The provisions regarding interracial marriage, as statistics bear out, were not legalistic paper tigers that little affected Native people's lives. By 1970, over half of all Native marriages were to non-Natives. However, as Jamieson points out, the number of Native men who "married out" roughly equalled that of Native women (125). Instead of being penalized for their mixed marriages, Native men were in effect rewarded, in that Section 12.1.b of the 1951 Act awards Native status to non-Native women who marry Native men. Predictably, this unfair treatment under the Act was challenged in court by Native women who had lost their status because of its provisions.

The Bedard-Lavell case (1970) involved two

Native women, Yvonne Bedard and Jeanette Lavell, who were denied their status rights because of Section 12.1.b, and who argued that the section constituted a violation of the Canadian Bill of Rights. Their cause was opposed by the National Indian Brotherhood at the time, and the case lost at the Supreme Court level with no possibility of appeal. While the explanation for the Brotherhood's hostility is complex, one undeniable element in their opposition was the feeling that Native women who married out were in some sense betraying the community. Though professedly based on economic conservatism, the fact that the recognition of non-Native female spouses as status was just as much a drain on the financial resources of the community indicated their decision was influenced by ideological concerns. The Two-Axe Early case followed in 1975, where Mary Two-Axe Early, officially non-Status under Section 12.1.b, sought to be allowed to be buried on reserve land. As in the Bedard-Lavell case, she faced hostility from her band government, and her case too was defeated. It was only through constant pressure from Native women's rights organizations and from other feminist women's groups like the Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the National

Action Committee that the Federal government took the first steps towards removing the sexist provisions of the Act. In 1980, the Minister of Indian Affairs instituted a moratorium where individual bands could apply for a ministerial dispensation of Sections 12.1.b and 12.1.a.iv. (another proscriptive section). Unfortunately, very few bands applied for the dispensation (129).

Eventually, due to such factors as censure from the United Nations Human Rights Committee (1981) and the prohibition of gender as grounds for discrimination in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1983), the Federal government finally ratified a bill known as Bill C-31 (1985) which amended the sex discrimination of the Indian Act⁸.

While this struggle revealed many things, not the least of which being the political and social schisms within Native communities, it demonstrated in unequivocal terms *the textuality of Native female identity*. While all Native people are defined by the legal delimitations of the Indian Act, the debate over membership painfully

⁸ Despite the implementation of Bill C-31, many problems still exist with inequitable treatment of the genders under the Act, such as the issues surrounding the transmission of status to children. For a discussion of the further areas of controversy, see Jamieson, 129-134.

demonstrated how Native women's legal identity was entirely contingent, dependent upon the agendas of both Native and non-Native men. Just as female Native status could be erased by the stroke of a pen, this status could be easily transferred to non-Native women who "married in". The removal of status, while fundamentally economic in effect, also controlled Native women's access to their communities and the cultural support these communities offered. The category "Native woman" was shown to be a wandering signifier in the truest sense, subject to the hegemony of mutually reinforcing patriarchal systems on and off the reserve. Section 12.1.b authorizes the construction of Native women as arbitrary signs ultimately subject to the external marketplace, in essence bought and sold as commodities/signs with no attention paid to the referential consequences. In this way, the threat posed to Native female identity was at once material and ontological. Because of this enforced textuality, many of the depictions of Native female identity by Native artists necessarily involved the exploration of textuality (and the issues revolving around authorship of this textuality) in both a political and ontological context.

One consequence of the membership battle was, predictably, the sense felt by Native women of betrayal by their own communities, especially by Native men. The anger generated in this conflict was directed at Native men, but also with great vehemence at non-Native women who were perceived to be replacing Native women on the reserves. This anger extended to what was construed as the feminist agenda of infiltrating Native traditional life. During the on-going legal struggles, Native combatants on both sides of the debate voiced hostility towards non-Native feminists for meddling in Native internal affairs. For example, on the eve of the tabling of Bill C-31 in 1985, Frank Tajotekane Horn, a Mohawk man, wrote in an angry letter printed in the *Globe and Mail* that the proposed amendment was part of a plot devised by "bitter masses of unhappy middle-class women" and feminists to allow non-Native husbands of Native women to take over the reserves (1). In a similar fashion, Theresa Nahanee ten years earlier wrote an article entitled "Feminists vs Indian Women" which championed the struggle of Native women like Bedard, Lavell and Two-Axe Early while at the same time reviling non-Native feminists for attempting to turn Native women against Native men and destroy

traditional Native ways of life.

The effect of this hostility towards both non-Native women and their colonizing ideologies on Native women's playwriting is often unambiguous. Nahanee, the author of "Feminists vs Native Women," wrote in 1989 a play entitled *Three Indian Women*, performed by Toronto's Native Earth Performing Arts. Despite the fact that Bill C-31 was successfully passed four years before, and the fact that non-Native women's groups like the N.A.C. and A.C.S.W. actively participated in the fight to secure Native women's rights in the Act, Nahanee's play constructs the only non-Native female character as a self-seeking usurper of Native female status. The play relates the struggles of two Native women to secure their legal status on the reserve in the 1970s. The non-Native invader, known only as "The Chief's Wife," delivers a monologue voicing her predatory smugness:

I am an Indian. I married an Indian and OUR children are Indian. My husband, the Chief, says it's always been like this and always will be. At first, when I heard those women demanding their rights and found them supported by other women, I felt guilty. But

my husband assured me I am entitled to be an Indian. These women, though, claim they're still Indian even though they married OUT. But they don't fool US. (1989: 40)

The play does little to ironize or complicate this portrait of non-Native female greed. As the third "Native woman" to which the title of the play refers, The Chief's Wife, described in the first scene as "white-skinned, blond, blue-eyed" (1), is the monstrous embodiment of the Native male's misplaced desire. She knowingly possesses that which the two real Native women lack -- status -- and the hatred which the playwright Nahanee feels for such accomplices is palpable⁹.

Given the textuality of Native female identity and the sense of imminent invasion from outside that such a contingency permits, it becomes clear how vital a role the female Native body plays in the securing of Native nationhood. A Cheyenne saying is used by Mojica to conclude *Princess Pocahontas*, a play very much informed by the debate over status: "A nation is not conquered until the

⁹This focus upon the non-Native female as a threat to Native cultural survival is detailed, in relation to recent visual art by Native female artists, by Ryan (1995: Chapter 2).

hearts of its women are on the ground". In the face of textuality, where signification is controlled from outside the self, the Native female body comes to represent metonymically the Native nation. In this way, the Native woman becomes fixed as the guardian/gateway to Native land and culture. Mojica's focus on the Native woman as the point of entry for outsiders into Native territory is in part a response to charges from Native men like Horn that Native women are the willing weak link that permits the destruction of Native sovereignty. The words of Cortez's Malinche in her play are meant to refer as much to Canada in 1984-5 as they do to South America in 1519:

What is that they say about me?
That I opened my legs to the whole
conquering Spanish army? They were
already here. I was a gift. Passed
on. Handed on. Like so many pounds
of gold bullion (24)

Mojica emphasizes the necessity of reaffirming the Native woman's body as a material and cultural locus. In a scene dramatising the rebuilding of the Native nation, Mojica places two female actors

on stage, with one playing a Native man and the other a Native woman. The male character is weak both physically and morally, demonstrated by his repeated falling to the floor and his lusting after white women (40-41). The scene is comic, but at its conclusion, the male character leaves the female character alone on stage, an isolated embodiment of imperilled Native resistance. Wole Soyinka neatly articulates how such images of the isolated stage body can be read on both a metonymic and literal level:

The spectacle of a lone human figure under a spotlight on a darkened stage is, unlike a painting, a breathing, living, pulsating, threateningly fragile example of this paradigm [of the cosmic human condition]. It is threatening because, unlike a similar parable on canvas, its fragility is experienced both at the level of its symbolism and in terms of sympathetic concern for the well-being of that immediate human medium (41).

The discursive move towards metonymic construction of the Native female body clearly is designed to imbue this body with symbolic heft and

importance. However, it must be remembered that this move is nothing new. In the many North American plays written about Native peoples in the nineteenth century, at a time when settler anxiety concerning Native people was at its height, the construction of the Native female as metonymic gateway to Native land was a common rhetorical strategy. Eugene Jones lists the numerous plays of colonial America in which Pocahontas or a generic facsimile falls in love with the white hero and enacts the willing submission of the Native nation to settler control (41-62). A more recent example of such metonymy is George Ryga's character of Rita Joe, standing isolate and vulnerable, awaiting the terrible ecstasy that is both her and her doomed people's destruction. In her book *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas writes:

The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious (115).

The female body as social body has been a constant trope in Western theatre. One need only consider the plays of the Jacobean era, where anxiety over

political and social upheaval is rehearsed in violence enacted towards noble female characters. The qualities of femaleness most prized in Renaissance society -- chastity, internal strength, purity -- caused women to be seen metonymically as nations or states whose purity and security were open to attack from outside forces. Peter Stallybrass suggests that the image of the chaste noblewoman in the Jacobean theatre became "a map of the integrity of the state. The state, like a virgin, was a *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden walled off from enemies" (qtd. in Malcolmson, 331).

In a similar fashion, contemporary Native writers frequently conflate issues of sexual and cultural breach when reconstructing historical figures like Pocahontas. However, their aims in doing so often reflect divergent agendas. Unlike Mojica, whose handling of Pocahontas reflects a resistant denial of her culpability in settler narratives, writers like Beth Brant and Richard Rodriguez celebrate the sexual/cultural breach that Pocahontas represents. For Brant, a Canadian Mohawk-identified mixed blood writer, Pocahontas' entry into the non-Native world was both premeditated and prescient, inaugurating a hybridity of race and cultural knowledges:

I feel in my heart that Pocahontas was guided by a divine power. Not a god in christian terms, but a communion with Creator. . . . I propose that Pocahontas had her own destiny to fulfil -- that of keeping her people alive. . . . Did Pocahontas envision Nations of New [mixed-blood] Peoples? A world where people would say, "I am a human being of many races and Nations." Is this the real destiny? (88-89)

Just as Brant reconstitutes Pocahontas as her spiritual grandmother by virtue of her power and foresight, Rodriguez, an American mixed blood writer, uses Pocahontas as a symbol of becoming-other in a postmodern acquisitive and erotic sense:

My rewriting of the Indian adventure [into a story in which the conquistadors' culture was in effect conquered, absorbed, and transformed by Indians through conversion and miscegenation] was not only to move the Indian away from the role of victim but to see myself in relationship to Pocahontas, to see myself as interested in the blond on his horse coming

over the horizon. It occurred to me there was something aggressive about the Indian interest in the Other, and that you were at risk in the fact that I was watching you, that I wanted you, that I was interested in your religion, that I was prepared to swallow it and to swallow you in the process. (79)

It is significant that all three writers (Mojica, Brant and Rodriguez) are of mixed-blood heritage. Yet while Brant and Rodriguez celebrate Pocahontas' fall "into the breach," and thereby reaffirm their own subject positions as cross-cultural and polyvalent hybrids, Mojica presents her as a pawn of patriarchal systems and effectively effaces her own mixed-blood history.

Mojica's strategy has much in common with other historical reconstructions of the Pocahontas story by Native people. For example, the Pamunkey people of Virginia (the tribe from which the historical Pocahontas came) annually produced a version of the story that was regularly performed between 1881 and 1915 for descendants of the Virginian colonists. Significantly, the play was meant to counteract the prevailing cultural prejudices among Virginians who constructed the

Pamunkey as racial hybrids of white, Native and African-American and thereby undeserving of legal status rights. Thus, the Pamunkey play championed the racial purity of Pocahontas and virtually eliminated John Rolfe's role (her white husband), thereby denying the interracial marriages and the blurring of ethnic boundaries such marriages precipitated (Feest, 59).

Of course, each strategy is a selective elision, either of historical/material forces on one hand or of self-agency on the other. Whether the female Native is reconstructed as a metonym of the Native nation's rebirth or of the nation's resistance to breach, the problem remains of how this metonymic function affects female agency as a speaking subject. If the Native female body is constructed as a "map of the integrity of the state," and moreover, this construction is implemented by both the defenders and the invaders of this state, the Native woman is defined once again as a contingent sign. If viewed in light of the dominant culture's use of the body/culture metonym as it enacts tropes of settler power and desire, the counter-resistant metonym of Mojica (to return to the basic argument of Harvie and Knowles) does little to problematize the construction of

such a metonym. In essence, Mojica valorizes the body/culture conflation as the hope for Native cultural and spiritual rebirth. Given the enforced textuality of Native female identity in the Indian Act and the struggles to elude this textuality, Mojica attempts to fix identity by reasserting the body at the centre of Native culture.

* * *

Wendy: There was this joke going around at the cop shop: how do you wink at an Indian?

Eileen: How?

Wendy makes like she's shooting a gun.

Night of the Trickster

I have argued that one strategy employed by Native female playwrights in the face of textuality is to construct a metonymic body that is transcendent in response to the female Native body's vulnerability. Another strategy, which I see as more explicitly postmodern, seems to explore this vulnerability by staging the "monstrous division" of the Native female body by colonizing texts. While many plays by Native women do not directly seem to address the issues of membership

and culpability as raised by the Indian Act, they do display an awareness of Native identity as a contingent construct¹⁰. In these plays, there is little appeal to a transcendent point of identity where subjectivity can anchor itself. Instead, the spectacle of the body's division and determination by text serves to emphasize both the inescapability of contingent subjecthood and the necessity of narrating oneself in order to participate in (but not control) the writing of the female self.

The narrativity of the female subject has been a frequent focus of feminist discourse. Many feminist theorists make a distinction between the biological category of woman and the ontological attributes that each culture assigns to this biological category. Judith Butler argues that the construction of cultural codes which determine the boundaries of gender makes the enactment of gender in everyday life an essentially theatrical enterprise:

The body is not a self-identical or merely
factic materiality; it is a materiality that

¹⁰ Gerald McMaster suggests that it is the resistance to the "coded power" of the state that energizes much of the recent work of both male and female Native artists (76).

bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities. (1989: 272)

The recognition of gender constitution as inherently theatrical enables performers to denaturalize the cultural texts and thereby foreground for an audience the process of signification. One way of doing this is exemplified by Mojica, in her parodic exaggeration of historical stereotypes of the Native female. Another is to explore the relationship between body and text, specifically their indeterminate coherence as disparate entities.

An example of this occurs in a performance piece by Rachel Rosenthal entitled *Rachel's Brain*, where the performer, costumed in a mocking parody of a salon aristocratic woman complete with period wig and corset, delivers a monologue detailing what Elin Diamond describes as "the Cartesian *cognito* against the Truth of which all matter is measured" (67). As the monologue proceeds, the performer's body rebels against the physical and ideological constraints in which it is presented and begins to

twitch and gasp, until the monologue degenerates into incoherent grunts and stifled cries (Diamond, 67). This performance can be read as demonstrating the affective materiality of the gender code, the text as body that forcibly occupies the female body conterminously. In this way, the valorization of the body as a material entity that need only reject the ephemeral texts of culture is challenged and complicated. One corollary of this idea is that if the identity of the body is neither transcendent nor self-apparent, the self must narrate oneself into being and displace the colonizing texts that seek entry and reification. Many feminist theorists use the term "positionality" to articulate this need to self-narrate. Alcoff writes:

the concept of positionality includes two points: first . . . that the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable within a (constantly moving) context; but, second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the

place where a meaning can be *discovered* (the meaning of femaleness). (434)

It is this emphasis on narrativity and subject-as-process that marks many contemporary feminist theatrical experiments, as Reinelt argues (52). In the hands of Native women, the representation of the Native female body under threat from colonizing bodies of text is at times hopeful and at other times marked by frustration and despair.

There are many instances in Native women's theatre of the violence of text as it encodes the body. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the play *Moonlodge* by Margo Kane dramatises the journey of a Native woman towards a transcendent Native community. However, before she reaches this goal, she is very much a body at risk, searching for a cultural script that will provide her with identity and direction. One traumatic scene in the play involves Agnes' rape by a biker who picks her up as a hitchhiker. Out of naiveté, she has projected her Marlon Brando fantasies onto him, fantasies of which she is quickly disabused. In performance, Kane's body enacts the signs of being raped by the unseen biker while she sings the song from *My Fair Lady* entitled "On The Street Where You Live" (286-

7). In its original context, the song is sung by a worshipful Freddie to the window of Eliza.

Its placement in the rape scene can be read in a number of ways. In one sense, Agnes needs to separate herself from her violated body (her struggles to free herself prove unsuccessful), and the song with all its escapist sentimentality allows her to escape, if only temporarily, from her situation. In another sense, the song can be seen as part of a patriarchal system of gender signification, where romantic wish-fulfilment for women, the desire to be raised from rags to riches and to be worshipped in a non-threatening manner, is promoted in order to mask the culturally and materially subaltern position of women. Throughout the play, Agnes is shown to be the victim of media-generated illusions, and she constantly projects her stock of images onto the world she discovers. Because of the manner in which the rape is staged (the absent rapist), and the nature of the song's text, the song can be seen to, if not facilitate, at least abet the rape of Agnes. She is, most directly, raped by a man, but the cultural texts that disguise the vulnerability of the female body also help to make her an easy target. The extreme contrast of the song and the rape is at first

comic, but as the scene progresses, the horror of the act and its ironic libretto indicate graphically the violence against the female body that patriarchal texts enable.

A work which presents a number of texts which simultaneously compete to define the female Native subject is the fascinating play *Night of the Trickster* by Métis writer Beatrice Monsionier. In this complex work, the stories of four Native women's rapes are interwoven with legal transcriptions of the *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba* and with the political context of the Meech Lake Accord. The play focuses on the story of Rachel, who is having difficulty recovering from a recent rape. Her partner Sam is busy presenting arguments for the Meech Lake hearings. For Sam, the Meech Lake Accord represents the political rape of First Nations peoples, the denial of their legitimacy as founding nations within the narrow French-English paradigm of the Accord. Against this backdrop of political violation the play explores the victimization of Native women. Rachel's job is to transcribe tapes from Aboriginal Justice Inquiry hearings involving interviews with convicted Native women. Each woman attempts to explain her situation and the socio-

economic factors that influenced her to commit crime. Throughout the play, excerpts are played from these hearings, and they set up a thematic counterpoint to the expressed feelings of fear and powerlessness of the characters. Each character seeks legitimacy: political in Sam's case, and personal in the cases of the interviewees and the female characters.

One scene in particular dramatizes the power of texts to define the Native female subject. In it, four of the characters, Rachel, Wendy, Roz and Eileen, are on stage. Rachel is engaged with her transcription of the tapes, which are heard throughout the scene, while Roz is busy reading aloud excerpts from an actual essay written by Emma Laroque about Native female empowerment. Wendy is the unwitting guinea pig for Roz, who has just completed a beautician's course and is anxious to try her make-up application techniques on Wendy. Roz's impetus to read the essay came from her being called a "squaw" on her way to work that day. The texts here are numerous. Roz questions why she has been assigned the designation "squaw" and seeks a more self-empowering narrative in the text of the essay. Her discovery of a new text for herself will not cause the squaw text to disappear, but

will only preempt it with an empowering one. Make-up in this scene is clearly shown as a text, one which inscribes the female body with signs signifying either chastity or whoredom. Eileen the beautician suggests that make-up can be used to make a Native women appear more white or like an Indian slut (24). The transcribed tape that plays through this scene is marked by the frustration of the Native women who feel trapped by the legal system and are often unable to articulate their needs within this system. All of these texts unfold simultaneously:

Commissioner

We talked about the children.
You all have children?

Eileen

Trying to figure
out your eyebrows

Patty

My kids are in care, in
Children's Aid right now and
that's because I, well, okay
Since I've been here, I've
signed V.P. papers. They're
voluntary placement papers
because you know in a way
that you have to instead of

Wendy

What's to figure?

Eileen

They're on wrong.
I have to fix them
up.

them apprehending your kids. Like you have to go along with whatever your worker says because when you are inside here, you really haven't got any say, like, you have to agree with what they say, otherwise they'll say, like, how do you say that, like fighting against them, like ...

Commissioner

Not cooperating?

Patty

Yes. You're not cooperating and when you go to court, they bring that up and they say you are uncooperative plus you are an unfit mother.

Roz

... beast of burden. Ah, here we are. The portrayal of squaw is one of the most degraded, most despised and most dehumanized anywhere in the world. She has no human face; she is lustful, immoral, unfeeling and dirty
... .

Eileen

(looking up) That's terrible! Okay down, straight forward. Good.

Roz

... a view rendering all Native women and girls vulnerable to

gross physical,
psychological and
sexual violence.

This Emma Laroque
really hits it right
on, eh?

Wendy nods from her
desk. (17)

The Native female body is beset on all sides, by institutional systems whose language is a mystery, and by the social signification of appearance, whether artificial or natural. The police joke heard by Wendy, "How do you wink at an Indian?," and its punchline, the miming of a shooting gun (24), neatly expresses Monsionier's argument that texts and their affective meanings pose real dangers to the safety of Native people.

Monsionier's representation of the female enscripted body has much in common with the work of other Native artists. Jimmie Durham's 1986 *Self-Portrait* consists of a life-size cut-out (painted red, of course!) inscribed with texts and other signs of ethnographic classification. In her commentary on the piece, Fisher (1989) describes it

as a body "emptied of real substance, no more than the sum of vacuous inscriptions written by a language incapable of translating concepts alien to it" (12). Monsionier takes the idea of coded bodies and applies it to specific issues of gender, especially rape. When one of the women is raped, the police advise her to refrain from bathing so that proper blood and semen samples can be taken (44). The woman's body is shown to be an object of inscription; the rapist writes on it with his semen and the police require her to preserve this "text". This play is, in the end, hopeful, in that the women embark on a plan to castrate rapists that goes comically wrong, but in the process they rebuild self-esteem and learn the importance of fighting to write one's own script. What distinguishes this play as postmodern is its complex interweaving of apparently discrete texts to reveal their underlying similarity, and its feminist inquiry explores the threatened female body and the difficult task of navigating the many colonizing texts that seek to inscribe it.

The work of another Métis playwright, Yvette Nolan, also explores the process through which the body is subject to the hegemony of text. Like Moses, Nolan utilizes the conventions of the ghost

story to dramatize the body's shift from absence to presence and the ambiguity such shifts signify for an audience. In the one-act play *Blade*, Angela, the white main character of the play, tells the audience of the rash of prostitute killings in Winnipeg. One of the victims was a woman in one of Angela's university classes, a Native girl named Cindy Bear, "you know, like Yogi Bear's girlfriend" (1992: 1). Angela relates how after Cindy Bear's death, the media assumed that the dead girl was a prostitute who hooked in order to go to school, but Angela knew that the girl was attending university through a special program and discounted the media's assumption. The play questions the power of the media image to determine truth, and also questions if such distortions can be overcome. Angela's reaction to a newspaper photo of the murdered woman's body neatly articulates the movement from a reception of image/textuality towards a recognition of a real and shared materiality:

The body was all covered up and everything, but still it was really disturbing. Beside the covered up body were these dots, that looked like someone had spilled a box of

smarties around Cindy Bear, except bigger, you know, like Loonies. Those dots really bothered me, you know, and I looked at them and looked at them until finally I realized that they weren't dots, they were drops, drops of blood. Cindy Bear's blood. And at one corner of the blanket, if you looked really, really hard, you could see a piece of body poking out ... at least I think it was a finger. And I looked so hard at that finger that I could imagine her hand under there all curled up (1).

What at first appears mere image, a series of dots, is gradually linked to an actual body and its manner of death, and Angela can then imagine the body that is concealed from view.

As the play unfolds, the audience learns that Angela herself is the next victim of the prostitute-killer, and that it is her ghost which is now narrating her story. She too becomes constructed by the media as a prostitute, and she comments upon the selective image the media has generated of her:

Angela: (*reading a paper*) Oo yeah, "An autopsy

discovered traces of semen, indicating that she had engaged in intercourse in the three or four hours preceding her death." That was pretty damning, alright. No mention of poor Kyle [her boyfriend] until days later ... hmm, no mention of a lot of things ... "traces of semen" ... no mention of a vagina, or any sort of repository for these traces ... (3).

Significantly, Angela makes no attempt to categorically deny or admit to being a prostitute, and the speeches delivered by her family and friends ostensibly to clear her name leave more room for ambiguous interpretation. Gradually, Angela removes her university clothes and reveals a "hooker dress" complete with gartered stockings and high heels (5). As the play ends, she gets into a car driven by the ghost of her killer who has committed suicide after being turned in to the police by his wife.

If read in relation to the problematic of body/text, *Blade* is a drama of effacement. Both Cindy Bear and Angela are overwritten with the sign of whore. The non-corporeality of Angela is the result of her death, but since the play is about signification, it can also be read as symbolizing

the self without a locus from which to speak. Angela's ghost is not bent upon clearing Angela's name; it is instead narrating itself in order to grasp at the only presence open to it, through speech. As a ghost/victim, she can only be an absence. In the end, the ghost reveals its contingent nature as it is transformed into the prostitute both the media and certain of her friends and family have suggested she was. Her initial intuitive recognition that the Native Other Cindy Bear and herself are materially linked is replaced with the awful understanding that both she and Cindy Bear are ghosts, equally victim to the reifying power of patriarchal texts.

Nolan's focus upon narrativity, with its double-edged irony, also involves the presentation of narration as a tool to heal. In her short piece *Child*, two women, Monique (white) and Monica (Native) tell the story of Monica's childhood. There is a struggle between the women to reconstruct Monica's life, in part indicated by the obvious differences in language:

Monica: When I was very young, just a toddler, my family broke up. There were all kinds of problems within the family, there was

alcohol abuse, and other substance abuse, and oh all kinds of abuse. So my family broke up.

My mother stayed on the rez with my other siblings, but I was very young and my grandparents took me to live with them in the city.

Monique: But the grandparents of this little girl were very aware of the effects of disassociation, of disenfranchisement of their people and they didn't want to propagate this in any way, so they were careful to develop the bond between the little girl and her family on the reserve. And so they prepared the little girl -- Monica her name was, like my name, Monique, but different -- to go back to the reserve and visit with her family.

(1996: 81)

The audience learns that during an early visit to the reserve, the four year old Monica was raped by one of her brothers. Monique, who had never met Monica and who does not see her on stage, hears of this story from a co-worker and is devastated by it. She decides one night to "send herself out" to the little girl through intense concentration and

offer some consolation to her. Monica, in turn, relates her experience of one night after the rape feeling "this warmth this heat pouring into me and it was light in my all and suddenly I felt that I was loved and I was wanted and that this terrible hurt couldn't be taken away but it didn't have to take up all of inside me" (84). During Monica's narration of this event, Monique is almost able to see her beside her on stage. It is this idea of cross-cultural empathy, and that the narration of this bond can help breach the gap between women, that seems to offer a model, however tenuous, of cultural transcendence.

As I have tried to indicate, the responses by Native women playwrights to textuality are various in approach and emphasis. The problem of Native identity being defined by external signs is one which confronts both men and women, and the explorations of Native woman playwrights to this problem yield theatre that is both universal and particular. Whether a counter-resistant call to arms or an investigation of the ontological category of Native woman, these plays denature the signs that fix female identity and dramatize the hazards incurred by the female body in the face of colonizing codes. At the risk of eliding the

differences between mainstream feminism and Native expression, it can be said that it is here, the excavation of the site of woman, that feminist theory and Native theatrical praxis find their "same but different" object.

**CHAPTER 4: HISTORY, USABLE PASTS AND THE NATIVE
SUBJECT IN CANADIAN THEATRE**

Each generation may rewrite history, but it does so under conditions where it receives as its historical endowment previous generations' constructions of the past. For the marginalized and oppressed in particular, whose histories have been erased by power, it becomes all the more important to recapture or remake the past in their efforts to render themselves visible historically, as the very struggle to become visible presupposes a historical identity But it is also the case that those who are engaged in a struggle for identity can least afford to dehistoricize or reify the past, for the struggle is always the struggle for the present and must address not just the legacy of the past but also problems of the present.

Arif Dirlik

If we cannot have a future without a past, how are we to integrate that past into our future? The answer is: by giving both of them the time of the present.

Carlos Fuentes

When considering the apparent lack of interest on the part of Native writers in challenging the historical narratives favoured by the mainstream culture, Thomas King suggests that the historical past presents for most Native writers both a creative and ideological dead end:

Rather than try to unravel the complex relationship between the nineteenth-century Indian and the white mind, most of us

[Native writers] have consciously set our literature in the present, a period that is reasonably free of literary monoliths and which allows for greater latitude in the creation of characters and situations, and, more important allows us the opportunity to create for ourselves and our respective cultures both a present and a future. (1990: xii)

King's observation would seem to be borne out in relation to plays by Native playwrights in one respect. While there are hundreds of non-Native plays which attempt (with varying degrees of sensitivity) to explore the world of the nineteenth-century Native, very few works by Native artists could be termed "history" plays in the generic sense. This being said, I would disagree with King's categorical elimination of the past as a fruitful subject for Native writers¹. Instead, I would argue that most Native plays are informed by a sophisticated understanding of how the past operates within cultures. As I have tried to demonstrate in my earlier discussions of Moses and

¹ I will discuss King's own complex reworking of the past in his fiction as a useful conclusion to this chapter.

Mojica, historical material is most often used for reasons that have little to do with the aims of traditional historical investigation, such as the understanding of the past as a discrete period or making the past "live" in an uncomplicated fashion for a contemporary generation. For many Native playwrights, the past is powerful not only as a resource of cultural information but as a potent catalyst for change. Often what is sought is a reordering of the present, what Spivak calls "not only the retrieval of the colonial history of the past but the putting together of a history of the present" (1991: 139). The past may deftly elude those who seek it, as in Moses' *Kyotopolis*, or exist synchronically with the present and future, as in Drew Taylor's *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* and Ben Cardinal's *Generic Warrior and No-Name Indians*, but it is in all three plays ever-"present" and transformational. I will argue that history in these plays is operating, as Michael Foster and Scott Pratt have argued in their investigation of indigenous philosophical traditions, prospectively rather than retrospectively. And the tension between the past as discrete entity and the past as ideological avatar, far from being resolved or

ignored, is represented as both inescapable in and necessary for the articulation of a Native subject position. In the first section of this chapter, I will examine the change that has occurred in the handling of the historical Native subject by non-Native playwrights. I do this because I see the Native performative use of historical material not as oppositional to non-Native approaches, but instead sharing with many non-Native playwrights a desire to reorder the present by examining how we look at the past.

Before examining how history has been used by playwrights in Canada, it is important to preface the discussion with a brief look at how the notion of history itself has been rethought by contemporary historians. One of the main epistemological debates concerning history is its relation to notions of truth and relativity. While this debate is centuries-old², it is informed in a contemporary context by ideas originating in other disciplines, especially philosophy and literary studies. In the face of consistent challenges to

² Many historians and cultural critics, in their mapping of this debate over history's ontological status, point to thinkers like Montaigne, with his Sceptical position that all knowledge is sensually obtained and therefore denatured, Nietzsche's call for an artistic historical sensibility, and Hegel's famous discussion of the "death of History". See White (1973) and Foucault for discussions of the debate's

these disciplines as empirical store-houses for "truth," historians, such as G.R. Elton, advocate a back-to-basics approach to historical research, an approach which does little to problematize its own epistemic limitations:

Historical method is no more than a recognized and tested way of extracting from what the past has left the true facts and events of that past, and so far as possible their true meaning and interrelation, the whole governed by the first principle of historical understanding, namely that the past must be studied in its own right, for its own sake.

(qtd. in LaCapra, 135)

It is just this sort of ideological positioning, with its positivist faith in "true facts" of the past that lie waiting to be excavated by the disinterested and empirically secure methodology of the historian, that historiographers such as Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra seek to challenge. White's work, beginning with his provocative *Metahistory* in 1973, examines what he terms the "figurative tropes" of history-telling, the

historical pedigree.

rhetorical aspect of constructing historical narratives:

A rhetorical analysis of historical discourse would recognize that every history worthy of the name contains not only a certain amount of information and an explanation (or interpretation) of what this information "means," but also a more or less overt message about the attitude the reader should assume before *both* the data reported *and* their formal interpretation. (1975:53)

For White, the contingent and highly subjective nature of historical discourse does not herald its demise, but rather reaffirms its importance as a radically imaginative mode of knowing. He valorizes what he calls the "metalogical turn" in discourse, which is "a 'turn' against logic itself in the interest of resituating consciousness with respect to its environment, of redefining the distinction between self and environment or of reconceptualizing the relation between self and other in specifically nonlogical, more neatly

imaginative ways" (1978: 10)³.

In his work, LaCapra advocates the use of approaches most readily identified with literary criticism, especially deconstruction, to reveal the contestatory meanings within historical texts:

The multiple roles of tropes, irony, parody, and other "rhetorical" devices of composition and arrangement generate resistances to the construal of [historical] texts in terms of their "representational" or narrowly documentary functions, and they disclose how texts may have critical or even potentially transformative relations to phenomena "represented" in them. In more subtle fashion, they also point to internal contestations or ways texts differ from themselves in their functioning and interaction with contexts, for texts in variable ways may combine symptomatic, critical, and more "undecidable" relations to given signifying practices and sociocultural processes. (38)

³ The "metalogical turn" that White describes is, of course, often easier to imagine than to achieve. White's own work in this regard, especially his earlier writings, has been criticized as replacing the unselfconsciously naturalized tropes of history-writing with equally normative and structural tropes such as irony, epic, tragedy and so on. For a critique of White's figurative approach to history, see De

Despite the general call, as represented by historians like White and LaCapra, for a more self-conscious (and self-consciously creative) historiography, there remains the inherent ontological tension between viewing the past as an empirical reality and emphasizing and championing the subjective methods through which it is transformed into historical accounts⁴. There would seem to be no tenable middle ground between history-as-fact and history-as-fiction, between "self-effacing objectivity and subjective bias" (LaCapra, 26). But like many debates precipitated by the epistemic challenges to "truth," what can emerge is at least a questioning of how empirical reality is constructed, and a better understanding of the potential risks of adhering strictly to either absolute pole.

In Canadian theatre since its inception, this tension so hotly contested by historians, between the past and its meaningful reconstruction into history, has been enacted. Because of the medium's power to embody mythic and historical narratives

Bolla and LaCapra.

⁴ Historian Peter Gay elegantly sums up the empiricist position: "The tree in the woods of the past fell in only one way, no matter how fragmentary or contradictory the reports of its fall, no matter whether there are no historians, one historian, or several contentious historians in its future to

simultaneously, Canadian theatre has played a powerful role in the articulation and problematizing of the past. Like LaCapra and White's examination of historical narratives, theatre scholars have shown interest in understanding the subjective formation of national histories and their relation to empirical data, and the transformational effects of historical drama on their audiences.

One genre of Canadian theatre that has been subjected to such critical scrutiny is what is commonly termed the "documentary theatre movement". In his book *Collective Encounters* (1987), Filewod undertakes to both construct a history of the documentary theatre movement in English Canada and reveal the discursive elisions that obscure the relationship between fact and fiction in some of the works themselves. The term "documentary" itself is misleading when used to describe many of the plays Filewod documents. In its strictest sense, "documentary," as LaCapra indicates, involves the discovery and presentation of new "facts" rather than the reinterpretation of these facts:

record and debate it" (210).

In a documentary model, the basis of research is "hard" fact derived from the critical sifting of sources, and the purpose of historiography is either to furnish narrative accounts and "thick descriptions" of documented facts or to submit the historical record to analytical procedures of hypothesis-formation, testing, and explanation. The historical imagination is limited to plausibly filling in gaps in the record, and "throwing new light" on a phenomenon requires the discovery of hitherto unknown information. It does not mean seeing the phenomenon differently or transforming our understanding of it through reinterpretation. (18)

Documentary theatre rarely confines itself to "thick description" or to simply "discovering" new facts; ideology and the nature of the medium frequently intervene and reconstruct documentary raw material within an interpretative frame⁵.

⁵ The impossibility of re-presenting documentary material on stage, however faithfully, without transforming it is well illustrated by an anecdote related by the journalist and critic Karl Kraus. In 1916, a group of soldiers on leave after surviving the battle of Usziczko were prevailed upon to recreate the battle on the stage of a Viennese theatre. Kraus, a vehement opponent of the war, saw the performance as an obscene conflation of art and reality, where "bombing was a music-hall song" (71).

Theatrical representation is importantly in this context re-presentation, not simply the historical thing itself but something that inevitably signals to an audience how it should receive historical information. While it might seem unfair to evaluate theatrical re-presentation against the criteria of historical research, some Canadian playwrights openly conflate the two in an effort to legitimate the historicity of their projects.

An early example of this conflation occurs in John Coulter's play *The Trial of Louis Riel* (1967). Basing his play on court transcripts, the playwright describes it as "a factual documentary in which I omitted any imaginative interpretation and crammed what has transpired in four or five days into two or three hours" (qtd. in Filewod, 9).

Filewod, in his analysis of Coulter's work, puts the playwright's claim to the test, and through a comparison of Coulter's version of Riel's trial with documentary evidence, concludes that "[Coulter's] Riel is a more obvious militant, less discursive, and arguably less intelligent man than the records reveal" (1987: 12). He suggests that the play's form and the absence of self-reflexive or historical context disguises its creative

reading of the facts of Riel's trial: "although they [the actors in Coulter's play] give the appearance of historical authenticity, they are no more or less 'true' than any actor in any costume drama The documentary tribunal play is in that sense a genre of historical drama which argues its case by means of the aesthetic illusion of reality" (13). As I have already argued, the desire of audiences to reify theatrical narratives as authentic depictions of truth (whether historical or contemporary) can be seen to spring at least in part from ideological agendas which in turn are supported by selective narrative constructions of experience. Filewod suggests that the discrepancy between facticity and dramatic effect in the play has political implications that extend beyond the play itself, since *The Trial of Louis Riel* was annually produced by the Regina Chamber of Commerce as both a tourist attraction and as an essentially authentic historical re-creation(12).

While Coulter appeals to documentary accuracy to legitimate his play's depiction of history, his other versions of the Riel story, *Riel* (1950) and *The Crime of Louis Riel* (1966), while exhibiting

even more poetic licence with historical material, have just as readily been accepted as factual by critics and audiences alike. After watching the premiere of *Riel* (1950), Vincent Tovell upbraided the playwright for presenting the main character in too "documentary" a fashion:

In the end Mr. Coulter leaves us with the questions that stimulated him, the puzzle of Riel's personality and the problem of placing and evaluating him in history, but without the author's own opinions. Had he been willing to adopt a point of view and set out the story from that perspective, its significance, and the drama inherent in it, might have perhaps been fixed more vividly in our minds. (272)

Another equally telling (and baldly ironic) response to *Riel* which emphasizes its documentary effect is related (with unalloyed pride, it would seem) by Coulter himself:

Part of the audience who were not in the least horrified by the appearance of hangman and scaffold [at the end of the play], but on the

contrary thought it the best thing in the play, was the little company of bemedaled veterans of the Second Riel rebellion One of them said to me afterwards, "Gosh, sir, I was all through that bloody rebellion; but tonight's the first time I ever knew a goddam thing about that bastard!" (1980: 264)

Filewod suggests that all documentary theatre is self-authenticating, in that the play's "actuality is authenticated by the internal conventions of the performance" (16). In the case of Coulter, the conventions of courtroom drama and "objective" historical narrative are re-presented (and valorized) as signs of immanent truth arising out of the facts of the past. What is downplayed is the artificial nature of these conventions. White (1978) sees this strategy in historical writing of subordinating artifice as an inevitable consequence of all historical narratives which seek to emplot and thereby contain experience:

Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have a plot all along, they give

to reality the odour of the *ideal*. This is why the plot of a historical narrative is always an embarrassment, and has to be presented as "found" in the events rather than put there by narrative techniques. (24)

Filewod goes on to argue that subsequent documentary theatre experiments in the 1960s and 70s renounce the claim to objective truth-telling in favour of a more openly editorial theatrical approach, as exemplified by the more broadly propagandistic European models developed by Piscator, Littlewood and Cheeseman (16-18).

Rather than submerging the subjective nature of historical narrative, theatre companies like Toronto Workshop Productions and Theatre Passe Muraille (henceforth referenced as TWP and TPM respectively) chose to incorporate the process of fact-finding and research into the text and the performance of the text. In this way, the performances of historical narratives are shown to be both re-presentations of history and evaluations of the information as it is being presented (Filewod, 17). The actor in this approach is at once an iconic and deictic sign. In plays such as

TPM's *The Farm Show*, a work that documents the experiences of a farming community in Clinton, Ontario, the actors provide a meta-commentary on documented experience. While *The Farm Show* is not, strictly speaking, a historical documentary in the way Coulter's *Riel* is, it formulates a relationship between an actor and his or her source material (often far removed from the actor's personal knowledge/experience) that radically departs from the model of verisimilar representation that, up until that period, informed the Canadian history play. The most famous example of the play's method is the hay-baling scene in Act I, where the "actor" Miles describes in comical detail his experience helping Mervyn Lobb, a farmer whom Miles is meant to study for the construction of the play, with the gruelling chore of baling hay. Here the audience is presented with a scene that is self-reflexive in two senses: it shows an actor discussing the process of research and demonstrates the subjective nature of documenting another's experience. The play is about Clinton, but it is also about the actors' relationship to their documentary subjects.

It is these two narratives, each grounded in the actor's relation to his or her material, that

prompt Filewod to describe the play as "a community looking at a community" (36)⁶.

Clearly, the idea of what constitutes a "documentary" play in Canada has little in common with the historian LeCapra's definition of documentary as the straightforward discovery of "new" facts. What becomes important in the representation of documentary material is the actor's presence as discoverer and translator of experience; the subjective nature of fact-telling that is repressed in illusionistic docu-drama is foregrounded and indeed integral to the play's effect on its audience. Jameson, whose rallying cry in the first line of *The Political Unconscious* is "Always historicize!" (1981: 9), sees the goal of historical awareness to be the radical reordering of a contemporary consciousness that has forgotten how to think in a truly historical fashion:

Historicity is neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the future . . .
. it can first and foremost be defined as a

⁶ In a similar vein, Robert Nunn sees the enacted relationship between actor and subject in the play as one of "communitas," "in which diverse groups whose social roles normally keep them separate experience a unity transcending social roles in a special moment on the boundaries of normal

perception of the present as history; that is as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as historical perspective.

(1984: 284)

Filewod suggests that many documentary plays seek to reorder the present by either implicitly or explicitly linking the events of the past to the contemporary context of the audience. In this way, documentary theatre, by making conceptual links between the past and present and thereby constructing affinity, denatures the present as a discrete entity. Filewod offers in this regard the example of TWP's greatest success, *Ten Lost Years*, based on the book of collected Depression anecdotes by Barry Broadfoot and adapted by Jack Winter for TWP. Like *Riel*, the play does not attempt to authenticate its material by making reference to outside authority, but rather relies upon its own self-validating mode of re-presentation. Unlike Coulter's work, however, the transcendent ideal that "authenticates" the narrative is not factual truth or authorial objectivity but a socialist

social life" (46).

vision of communal expression, what Filewod terms "the vox populi" (63). By emphasizing the relationship between contemporary economic prosperity and the hardship of the Depression, and the role of grass-roots political empowerment in the forging of a collective consciousness, the play encourages the audience to reevaluate both past and present in terms of political cause and effect (Filewod, 75).

In a similar fashion, TPM and Rick Salutin's 1974 production of *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* is an explicit attempt to use historical material to counterpoint contemporary political issues. Salutin, through his retelling of the MacKenzie Rebellion, sought to address what he saw to be the pernicious colonial attitude inherent in Canadian society since its inception by dramatizing "the one time we had a movement for independence" (Wallace and Zimmerman, 25). By presenting the historical events as a nascent independence movement, the playwright hoped the audience would draw parallels between the political oppression of 1837 and the contemporary domination of Canada by the U.S. (26).

Another motive for the dramatizing of Canadian history often disclosed by Salutin and other

dramatists is the desire to remind the audience that it in fact *has* a history, that Canada as a nation can and must view its history as an informing resource for solidarity and identity. In the words of Salutin,

. . . . other countries may have to relive or reinterpret their past, but they know they have a past. . . . English Canadians must be convinced there *is* a past that is their own. (qtd. in Wood, 111)

In her commentary on the play, Susan Wood sees as the play's revisionist success its rediscovery of the existence of Canadian history rather than the rediscovery of specifically "new" facts: "1837's real revisionist view of Canadian history is not political but emotional: a new view of history as *ours*, vital to our lives today" (111).

While both *Ten Lost Years* and *1837* do not seek to hide their "emotional" revisionism behind the rubric of strict documentary inquiry, as I have tried to indicate, their strategies are inescapably dependent upon the self-authenticating nature of

history-telling. Both plays employ theatrical techniques, such as metaphorical tableaux and direct audience address, which are anti-illusionistic, but these techniques do little to challenge their overall revisionist messages. White's emphasis upon the form of historical narratives as determining historical content suggests that no history, however self-revealing, can ever relinquish its own claim to presenting a more accurate reading of historical material. In relation to Salutin's play, historian William Westfall, while recognizing the playwright's desire for a liberative "new past" and the self-consciousness of the play's techniques, questions whether such a new past can be reconstructed given the inherently conservative (Westfall says specifically "Victorian") heroic mode Salutin utilizes:

In order to use history to create a new past and break clear from a stagnant present, it is not enough to reinterpret past events. It is also necessary to attack the form of the story in which these events have been told and the social attitudes that are implicit in these

forms [The form of 1837] is the same story that brought us the struggle for responsible government and made the railroad builders into our national saints One must have serious doubts about the ability of a reworked form of Victorian hero-worship to sustain a change to radical consciousness.

(75)

Increasingly, Canadian playwrights who deal with historical subjects focus their attention on this tension between form and content.

Perhaps the most successful theatrical exploration of Canadian history from this perspective is the work of Michael Hollingsworth, whose ongoing *History of the Village of Small Huts* project (begun in 1985) with VideoCarbaret explores the ironic possibilities of foregrounding the various figurative modes of historical narration. In this play cycle, each historical epoch is evoked through the parodic exaggeration of appropriate aesthetic modes -- mystery play in *New France*, comedy of manners in *The British* -- in order to highlight how each aesthetic informs the narrative construction of the historical "story". In one

sense, Hollingsworth's strategy has much in common with that of Salutin, as Michele White suggests in her examination of the cycle:

the self-consciously contrived theatricality . . . creates associations with historical entertainments devised to communicate basic notions of good and evil to an illiterate audience. It thereby alludes to a contemporary widespread and prevalent ignorance of Canadian history, which the cycle is designed, in part, to address. (52)

However, given the playwright's parodic approach, I would question Michele White's assertion that the play cycle in truth can alleviate an audience's historical ignorance. Like Salutin, Hollingsworth seeks to educate his audience, but his subject is less the content of history than its narrative form. The desire that White attributes to the playwright to foster an historical consciousness in the audience can only be a consciousness of figurative construction, since every historical image on stage is, in Hollingsworth's hands, a premeditatively opaque sign.

In sum, I would argue that in the representation of history in recent Canadian theatre, there are at least three distinct approaches. The first, exemplified by Coulter, involves the adoption of a deceptively straightforward narrative form which does not call attention to itself in any concerted way. This non-reflexive approach also does little to explore the essential disjunction between the past and how it is later reconstructed into history. The second, used by TWP and Salutin/TPM, incorporates some element of metatheatre into its performance in order to challenge the separation of past and present. However, this approach often shares with the first a tendency to self-authenticate both experience and historical interpretation of this experience. The third, pursued by Hollingsworth, ironizes the representation of the past through the parodying of figurative narratives through which history is told. The risk here is the elision of any profound retrieval of historical knowledge beyond a self-referential parodic gesture. As in the positivist/subjectivist debate amongst historians, the past as a discrete entity does not change in each approach; what changes is the manner in which

it is permitted to be ordered and apprehended.

What links both playwrights and historians in this context is the paradoxical approach taken towards the differentiation between fact and interpretation in narratives both dramatic and historical. On one hand, recent shifts in historical and cultural criticism have encouraged both groups (engaged in the construction of historical narratives) to emphasize the inability of the narrator to interpret the past in any infallible manner. At the same time, however, this admission of epistemological uncertainty is frequently cosmetic, often followed by an historical narrative that does in fact offer a reading of the past that is virtually untainted by the deep scepticism such a rejection of truth-claims would necessitate⁷. For example, the purpose that has been divined to be behind Hollingsworth's history plays, with all their employment of opaque signs, according to White, is to confront Canadians with their own historical ignorance, and by implication, to encourage them to seek out and

⁷ Smoekawa and Smith, in their critique of historians' responses to self-reflexive historiography, affirm that "to restrict these concerns [political and personal bias] to the acknowledgements or the prefaces of our books seems wholly inadequate to the task of challenging history's claims to the truth. Our fundamental questioning of the discipline would seem to require that we fundamentally alter all of our

demand this buried past. How this discovery is to be achieved, or even if it can be achieved, is left undisclosed.

* * *

The land! Don't you feel it? Doesn't it make you want to go out and lift dead Indians tenderly from their graves, to steal from them -- as if it must be clinging even to their corpses -- some authenticity.

William Carlos Williams

This desire to both point to the inaccessible past and reconstruct it is especially pronounced in the plays about Natives written by non-Natives. A particularly clear expression of this paradox occurs in Michael Cook's *On the Rim of the Curve*, a play about the genocide of the Beothuk. The play opens with a character called "Author" who articulates the frustration of attempting to reconstruct a history from very slim material evidence:

[H]ow'd you write of a vanished people? Out of a bone? A book? A lock of hair? A litany of lies? Or simply honest confusion.
(10)⁸

writing" (158).

⁸ A similar strategy is used by Rudy Wiebe in his prose

Later in the scene, the Ringmaster calls for "a word from our sponsor ... the Beothuk Indians," after which follows thirty seconds of silence (11).

This silence, while reflecting the absence of the Native voice in history, does not last long, in that Cook's agenda is not simply to expose the inaccessibility of the Beothuk's "story". Rather, it is to elicit the audience's help to "help me piece the skeleton together, match bone to bone, let the dark flesh it out" (10). The gap in historical narrative that the Beothuk represent appears to invite the imaginative reconstruction that the dramatist can provide. Thus the play contains poetic speeches delivered by Beothuk characters which elegize their own extinction:

Nonasabasut:

Do not keep us alive

in the minds of men,

or let their dreams

arrest our journey.

It was a good destiny

piece on Almighty Voice entitled "Where Is This Voice Coming From?" The narrative begins with a meditation on the fragmentary material evidence of Almighty Voice's existence and ends with an imaginative narrative describing his unearthly death song.

I have learned,
we walking in sleep
not to wake in the New World,
and those grim men,
grey arrows sped on your breath
became our saviours
and the inheritors of our suffering.
For we were what we were
and nothing changed us
from our coming to our going. (17)

In this way, Cook acknowledges the absence of the Beothuk while reconstructing them to serve his own ideological project. This project emerges throughout the play as an elegy not only for the Beothuk but for the settler peoples whose fate is neatly conflated with that of the extinct Natives:

The fish gone. The stages abandoned. The shores rotting back into the ground, alder and raspberry filling the graveyards. Nothing left then ... only the woods and the water, as it has always been ... and us and the Beothuks on equal terms after all. (42)

While this conflation may serve to elicit a sympathetic response from a settler audience, it also problematically permits (as Filewod points out in relation to Highway's work) "the colonizer to assume the posture of the colonized". The play becomes less about the exploration of history's limits in relation to the Native subject than the expiation of settler culpability.

In this way, Cook's play can also be viewed as part of an ideological tradition in Canadian theatre which has sought to reconstitute the Native subject as an emblem of settler guilt but also of settler emotional and political rights, both apology and *apologia*. This tradition can be traced back to one of the very first theatrical event performed in North America, *The Theatre of Neptune in New France* (1606) written by Marc Lescarbot. It was performed on the shores of Port Royal (present-day Annapolis Royal) to celebrate the return of Champlain and Sieur de Poutrincourt from an exploratory voyage along the coasts of Maine and Massachusetts, the country of the Armouchinquois. The speeches (written in the heightened rhetorical style of the period) delivered by the "Indians" (French settlers in

Native costume) were designed to welcome the civilizing influence the settlers thought themselves to embody. Similarly, Charles Mair's *Tecumseh* (1886), while celebrating the heroism of its subject in the context of the War of 1812, also advanced the popular idea that the inherent nobility which distinguished the aboriginal allies was destined, through the benevolent workings of historical progress, to be passed on to the settlers as the inheritors of the "new" land. While the heavy-handed ethnocentrism of such plays is in large part ameliorated in the more recent depictions of Native peoples, it can be argued that plays such as *On the Rim of the Curve* perpetuate the construction of the Native subject to serve settler ideological needs.

Terry Goldie suggests that there is a persistent desire on the part of settler writers to "go Indian," to feel at home in the environment of a previous and persistent occupant. He sees the settler interest in Native experience as reflecting this desire to erase both historical and ideological distance from the land felt by the settler culture. The paradox of Canadian identity is presented by Goldie thus:

The white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?

(12)

In order to combat this internalized feeling of alienation from one's own country, artists in Canada, according to Goldie, can either reject the Natives' prior claims on the land or somehow reconstruct their own identity as indigenous. Often, Native culture is refigured as an historical legacy whose value lies in its suitability for co-option into a common history in which non-Natives can vicariously share. Emily Carr, in her own commentary on her paintings of Northwest Native villages and totem poles, adopts this latter strategy:

I glory in our wonderful west and hope to leave behind me some of the relics of its primitive greatness. These things should be to us Canadians what the ancient Briton's

relics are to the English. (qtd in Crosby, 268)

This autochthonous desire can be seen to be the defining impulse behind many of the historical narratives constructed in plays about Natives. While Cook's play pursues this idea as negative legacy -- we are alien just as the Beothuk were and are alien -- other playwrights "go Indian" in order to reaffirm a closer connection between settler identity and the land which has consistently resisted such a connection. This drive is well-articulated in Len Peterson's *Almighty Voice*. In his introduction to the published version of the play, Peterson writes,

Most history, of course, rests like crystals in the matrix of geography. I guess this is part of our horror. The jewels of our history are spattered everywhere but in the geography where we live. So our geography lacks spirit, our history lacks base. Indeed. As long as we are merely Whiteskins. But if we admit to our native heritage and ancestry as well, our history and geography may come together, and we may, within ourselves, begin

to find shape, substance and worth. . . . [The Indian's] history is our history. His wisdom is our wisdom. We begin there. At one with our Indian past. (xiv)

With the internalization of the Native subject within the settler consciousness, a shared history of colonial contact with its intersecting but disparate consequences for colonizer and colonized becomes the immanent struggle of the former to find roots. The important distinction between the two is subsumed, as the settler can imaginatively assume both roles as he or she sees fit. The consequences of this discursive manoeuvre were disturbingly evident in a touring production of Peterson's play staged for grade schools. In this production, the children watching the performance were recruited to participate in the final battle which cost Almighty Voice his life. The children were divided into Mounties and Indians according to individual inclination, and the former "team" engaged itself in the extermination of the latter with youthful gusto. Northrop Frye's totalizing conception of myth comes to mind in this context:

The world of mythical imagery is a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside an infinite body.
(136)

In significant ways, the discursive strategies of Cook and Peterson are the opposite of Hollingsworth, in that the latter confronts the audience with the opacity of its own narrative constructions, while the former invites the audience to imaginatively reconstruct the alien Other in a deceptively facile manner. If one posits as a goal the respectful yet penetrating examination of the past, in this case the Native past from a non-Native perspective, both approaches seem either mired in self-reflexivity or verging on colonial solipsism. What confronts the non-Native playwright dramatizing the Native subject, indeed what confronts any attempt to dramatize the past as subject, is the persistent tension between fact and interpretation. In many cases, the desire to compensate for a lack of facts through avowedly imaginative fabulation masks the everpresent desire for the fable to be read as fact.

One playwright who attempts to offer a solution to this historiographic dilemma is Rex Deverell in his play *Beyond Batoche*. Deverell's work frequently takes as its subject matter both the plight of disenfranchised people (eg. *Black Powder: Estevan 1931*, plays about repression of union men) and the nature of theatre as a self-reflexive medium (eg. *Quartet for Three Actors*, a Pirandelloesque play about acting and identity). In *Batoche*, Deverell weds these two interests in order to explore how the identity of the Métis people was and is determined by cultural colonialism. The play tells the story of a film treatment of Louis Riel's life. Central to the play is the issue of historiography and how interpretation determines how historical narratives are constructed. Matt, the screenwriter for the project, sees Riel as a tortured religious visionary, while Shane, the actor set to play Riel, wants to portray him as a proto-socialist revolutionary. Burns, the producer, wants a product which will not offend his investors. Much of the tension involves the squabbling between the three, and what emerges is an enactment of how the means of cultural production bears upon history-

telling. Often Deverell interweaves the performance of Riel's life with the story of the screenwriter's struggle to capture the "essential" Riel, thereby throwing light upon the latter's motivations and bias:

Matt:

How do I picture you, Louis? I want you to be a prophet for me ... but you're not speaking to me. You're not leading me, Louis, and I have so much invested in you. . . . Maybe Shane's right ... you were a revolutionary. But I can't believe that. You wanted to put pressure on the government ... fair enough. Fair enough. But why did you want blood, Louis? Did the Lord command you to lead his people down into the valley of the shadow of death?

Shane as Riel: *Moving into the light as Riel.*

We were a council. I did nothing on my own. We did it together...

Matt:

But the eyewitnesses ... they say you flew

into rages. You were going to put your cousin to death because he was backing down ... You saw traitors behind every tree ...

Shane as Riel:

Do they say that?

Matt:

They give the impression.

Shane: *Breaking with the character.*

You want to make him over in your own image?

Matt:

No. We think alike. That's why I admire him.

(93-4)

What distinguishes this work from other self-reflexive history plays is Deverell's desire to invest his examination of the past with a politically responsible and forward-looking mandate. Into the context of an exploration of contestatory motives for reconstructing history is introduced the story of Yvonne, a Métis schoolteacher who is recruited by the

screenwriter's wife to provide the Métis "perspective" for the film project. Yvonne is shown to be a metonym for Métis persistence both culturally and politically, and she becomes the vehicle through which the playwright critiques the self-interest of non-Native historical narratives; she is the Native fact in the midst of mere interpretation. This factic authority is shown quite forcefully in the scene where Yvonne is introduced to the audience on a guided tour of the historic site of Batoche where Riel and his followers were routed. She finds a glass shard on the site, and is accosted by the tour guide who demands that she hand it over. In response to the guide's officious assertion that "that is not just a piece of broken glass. It is a piece of history," Yvonne replies, "Yeah, mine" (86). Similarly, Yvonne counters the statement made by Kelly, the screenwriter's wife, that the defeat at Batoche spelled the end of Métis resistance by squeezing Kelly's hand in an uncomfortably strong grip (91). In an important sense, Yvonne, like the broken shard, is presented as the material presence of the past that historical interpretation seeks to interpret and thereby contain. As the Métis

consultant, she forces the project team (against their wishes) to incorporate scenes of present-day Métis struggle and hardship in its film. She also causes the screenwriter Matt to scrutinize his own motives for reconstituting Riel as an apolitical mystic. In the end, Matt realizes that his refusal to brook conflicting historical readings of Riel has more in common with John A. MacDonald's empire-building impulse than with Riel's struggle for self-determination.

Of course, Deverell's strategy here is discursive in two important senses. Yvonne, the "voice" of the Métis people, is not the fact subsumed in interpretation; she is the persona of Deverell, the apologetically non-Métis playwright, and is thus subject of and to the ideological hegemony of the settler. Although Matt agrees to leave the project, he is shown at the end of the play "writing" *Beyond Batoche*. The relinquishment of the settler right to narrate Métis history that Deverell enacts is in the end significantly abrogated.

* * *

My motive for prefacing my discussion of Native constructions of the past with an extended

look at non-Native history plays is not one of abrogation, where the former is seen as a diverting but minor sidebar to the former. Rather, I believe that in a vital sense, Native playwrights grapple with many of the same epistemological issues, most directly, the problematic of history-telling. I will argue that while many Native playwrights adopt similar discursive strategies used by their non-Native counterparts, there is an increased awareness of both the effect of power relations on the articulation of a useable past and the political ramifications of situating the Native subject in relation to this past.

What I mean by power relations in this context is the effect of positing a relationship between the past and an emergent present-day Native identity that can either be co-opted into or rejected as untenable by dominant settler discourse. Because the contemporary notion of history (as reflected by White, DeCapra and others) emphasizes the inaccessibility of the past due to the unavoidably transformative processes of retrieval and transmission, those groups who seek an historical pedigree for their ongoing struggle for power and recognition are often criticized for

their lack of ontological savvy. In a challenging article entitled "The Past as Legacy and Project: Postcolonial Criticism in the Perspective of Indigenous Historicism," Arif Dirlik argues that the current championing of concepts such as "imagined communities" and "inbetween" cultural spaces by postcolonial/postmodern critics denies the Native subject the ability to articulate an identity grounded in any kind of transcendent historical context:

Where the postmodern/postcolonial intellectuals themselves are concerned, the repudiation of essentialized identities and authentic pasts seems to culminate in a libertarianism that asserts the possibility of constructing identities and histories almost at will in those "in-between" spaces that are immune to the burden of the past what seems to be new about the current historical situation is the erasure in the name of difference of differences among such groups [who seek to invoke the past in the assertion of cultural identities] in their efforts to cope with the "sentence of history,"

especially those efforts that contradict the new ideology of postmodernism/postcolonialism. "In-betweenness," universalized as a human condition and extended over the past, is thus naturalized in the process and becomes a new kind of determinism from which there is no escape. At the same time, the label of *essentialism*, extended across the board without regard to its sources and goals, obviates the need to distinguish different modes of cultural identity formation that is subversive not only of critical but also of any meaningful political judgement. (3)

Dirlik underlines the political danger of adhering to the dichotomy of hybridity versus essentialism by supplying a quotation from postcolonial critic Diana Brydon illustrating his concerns, a quotation which deserves to be reproduced at length:

While post-colonial theorists embrace hybridity and heterogeneity as the characteristic post-colonial mode, some native writers in Canada resist what they see as a

violating appropriation to insist on their ownership of their stories and their exclusive claim to an authenticity that should not be vetriloquized or parodied. When directed against the Western canon, post-modernist techniques of intertextuality, parody, and literary borrowing may appear radical and even potentially revolutionary. When directed against native myths and stories, these same techniques would seem to repeat the imperialist history of plunder and theft Although I can sympathize with such arguments as tactical strategies in insisting on self-definition and resisting appropriation, even tactically they prove self-defeating because they depend on a view of cultural authenticity that condemns them to a continued marginality and an eventual death Ironically, such tactics encourage native peoples to isolate themselves from contemporary life and full citizenship. (140-141)

By refusing to acknowledge the varying political contexts of Native culturalism, such a position,

Dirlik stresses, leads the postcolonial critic to adopt a "join up or shut up attitude" towards Native advocates (11). In addition, he discusses how the questioning of Native identity constructions can provide the State with intellectual justification for clear acts of appropriation, citing the case involving the Hawai'ian island of Kahoolawe in 1983 (8). This island was being used by the U.S. Navy for bombing practices against the wishes of indigenous Hawai'ians who claimed the site as sacred. The anthropologist Joyce Linnekin challenged the claim of traditional sanctity for Kahoolawe in an article that was later used by the Navy to justify their continued use of the island as a testing ground⁹. Dirlik suggests that a re-examination of essentialism as a contingent category, and by extension, the ways in which historicity can be responsibly adopted by Native peoples is needed. The complexity of this issue is reflected in Native theatrical representations of history. Often, no simple historical fact is presented; fact is always provisional, and, more importantly, contextualized in relation to its instrumentality as a

⁹ For a further discussion of the controversy over Hawai'ian constructions of identity, see Linnekin and Tobin.

transformative tool. To borrow Dirlik's phrase, the past is part legacy, part project.

The grounding of the past in the context of the present is a persistent theme in Native playwriting, and a good example of this strategy can be seen in the deceptively simple one-act play *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock*, written by Drew Hayden Taylor. Intended for young audiences, the play exemplifies the transformative power of the past. In the play, Rusty, a contemporary sixteen-year old Odawa, comes to Dreamer's Rock, a place used traditionally by the Odawa people as a site for dream-quests, to get drunk. He is interrupted in this pursuit by the sudden arrival of Keesic, an Odawa youth from the 1600s and Michael, an Odawa from the year 2095. The two time-travellers converge in Rusty's time because of the inherent power of the site, Dreamer's Rock, and because they have a message for the self-destructive Rusty. In essence, the play is about cultural survival and the best ways to achieve it. Both the past and the future are shown to have specific problems as well as successes. As indicated by Keesic the precontact Odawa, the traditional Odawa way of life is shown to have involved great hardship, an

inability to conceive of partnerships between Native nations, and an inflexible adherence to traditional taboos at the expense of individual freedom (for example, Keesic is attracted to a girl only distantly related to him within his own clan, but is forbidden to marry her because of her clan affiliation). The precontact Odawa, in addition to being portrayed as proud and resourceful, are shown to lack significant adaptive strategies in the face of impending cultural change. Similarly, the future of the Odawa is problematized through Michael. Michael is hampered by his lack of traditional knowledge, knowledge which has been lost through assimilation and disuse; he represents the consequences of successful adaptive strategies which sacrifice cultural continuity. The visitors seek to show Rusty how to unite the strengths of both the past and the future in the present, thereby preventing the loss of traditional knowledge and the inflexible reification of this knowledge. This synthesis of past and future is symbolized by the braiding of sweetgrass by Keesic. Michael shows Keesic his cache of sweetgrass, complaining that "it always ends up the same, falling apart into a mess" (1990: 55). Because he

has lost the traditional knowledge of how to braid the sweetgrass, Michael is unable to preserve it, indicating Taylor's view that material culture, rather than simply conserved, must be shaped and controlled to withstand change. Keesic's braiding of the sweetgrass comes to represent the possibility of cultural tradition as both a conservative and empowering tool. Thus, the past is not simply lionized as an irretrievable legacy but rather put forward as an adaptive (and adaptable) resource for Odawa advancement and survival.

What informs Taylor's work is the rejection of a linear conception of Native history, where the past bears only a superficial relation to the present as a discrete temporal precursor that can only be accessed through the distancing mode of nostalgia. Both the past and the future are shown to be open-ended, and therefore subject to change.

What anchors this open-ended conception is not the valorization of figurative history-telling as an inescapable hall of mirrors, but instead of how the present necessarily completes in a political sense any understanding of the past and future.

This idea that the past must be understood as

an open-ended resource for change was also the underlying message of a play with similar sensibilities, the 1993 piece *Out of the Silence*, a coproduction mounted by Headlines Theatre in conjunction with the Urban Representative Body of Aboriginal Nations in Vancouver. This work, cross-cultural in nature, attempted to involve the audience (primarily Native) in the refiguring of a theatrical narrative of Native child abuse. Utilizing the "Joker" technique first developed by Augusto Boal in his Theatre of the Oppressed project, the production presents a short play relating the story of Kelly, a young Native girl who is sexually abused by her father. In traditional Aristotelian theatre, the audience would be presented with an enclosed narrative to which it would act as sympathetic but powerless voyeur. In this production, the play is presented twice, once as closed, the second as a narrative which the audience was encouraged to halt, and thereby intervene in the action. When the play was stopped by an audience member, he or she assumed the persona of one of the characters on stage in an attempt to alter the outcome of the narrative. In an important sense, this breaking of the fourth

wall was more than an attempt to obscure the distinctions between art and life. It underlines the need for Native peoples in the present to view discrete narratives about their lives and cultures (whether fictionalized or historical) as narratives vitally open to reconfiguration.

It is here that I feel Native history plays differ often fundamentally from non-Native ones. There frequently is an emphasis in the latter on the pain of the colonial past without a concomitant exploration of redress or healing. The aforementioned plays by Cook and Peterson -- Henry Beissel's *Under Coyote's Eye*, relating the death of the last "Stone Age Indian" in 1911 could be included in this category -- can be seen to be part of the on-going project first implemented by the sciences of archaeology and anthropology in their study of Native peoples in the nineteenth century. This project, commonly described by twentieth century critics as being informed by the so-called "salvage paradigm," justified its recording of Native culture by affirming that Native lifeways were on the brink of disappearing through extermination and assimilation. That this belief was a trifle premature is clearly indicated by the

scores of Native activists currently demanding the return of ancestral remains and artifacts from the self-appointed custodians of "dying" Native cultures. By focusing upon the final dying moment, whether literally or figuratively, of the Native subject, the elegiac mode of representation reaffirms the permanent elision of the Native subject beyond poetic death rattles. "History is what hurts," Jameson has written, but more importantly from a Native perspective, history is what demands a response from the present.

While some care should be exercised when citing Native cultural precedent as an operative justification (especially in a chapter exploring the indeterminacy of history-telling), I feel it important to point out that the concept of the past as active interlocutor in Native thinking is not a contemporary invention. The recent re-exploration by anthropologists of the use and function of wampum belts in Iroquois culture furnishes a useful example in this regard. Previously seen in terms of its mnemonic function, the wampum belt has also been recently understood as necessitating a prospective relationship between sender and receiver. When sent as a message to a distant

party, the belt not only contained information but also required the receiver to "answer" the belt either in person or through an intermediary. Similarly, when a Native descendant reads the belt of his or her ancestors, the reader is bound to both interpret the past events signified in the belt and recast the events in light of his or her present situation. Thus, a belt containing past information also contains a demand for response from the reader, whether Native or non-Native, in a contemporary context¹⁰. In a similar fashion, Native plays rarely represent the past as discrete or passive. In Taylor's work, *Keesic*, the precontact Odawa, needles Rusty with difficult questions concerning Odawa culture, and *Out of the Silence* requires the audience to engage with its narrative and devise ways to alter its unfolding.

A science fiction opus set in "a variety of intersections in the global village, that almost present dream of tomorrow" (12), Moses' play *Kyotopolis* explores in an original fashion the ways in which the past is pursued and the redemption made possible by a proper relationship with it.

¹⁰ In relation to East-coast Wabanaki confederacy belts, Willard Walker writes that the loose ends of the warp strings were left untied, symbolizing "emanating words" (109). For a detailed discussion of Iroquois wampum as proscriptive tools, see Foster and Pratt.

One of the play's main themes is the desire on the part of Natives and non-Natives to reconstruct the past to fulfil very personal objectives. At the centre of the play is the elusive figure of Babe Fisher, "shamaness extraordinaire," a Native child-star turned New Age guru who becomes the first Native on a space shuttle mission. Under mysterious circumstances, the shuttle, christened "Crazy Horse," is crippled in orbit and all contact with its crew is lost. Babe's story is zealously pursued by Mary Oh, the rogue reporter and host of a virtual reality music program. In the tradition of science fiction, *Kyotopolis* presents a critique of technology in contemporary society, with virtual reality powwows and artificial intelligence videophone answering programs portraying a world devoted to what Baudrillard has called the simulacrum, the co-option of the real by its sign. The reporter Oh claims that she has met the ill-fated Babe Fisher, but it is only the repeated viewing of her virtual image from the children's program "Tommy Hawk and the Little People" that causes Oh to affect a personal connection with the mega-star. Oh's quest to discover the "real" Babe Fisher is shown to be impossible in a context where

reality has no bearing upon the manufacture and marketing of virtual signs. The play unfolds in the narrative pattern typified by Welles' *Citizen Kane* with Oh interviewing important Native people in Babe's life, each with a highly subjective and often mutually exclusive history of the central figure. What these histories have in common is the persistent need to cast Babe as a redemptive agent. Great-Uncle Jack, a slimy Svengali huckster who acted as his grandniece's manager, attempts to reconcile his own ruthless use of Babe for financial gain with his early memories of her as a sweet-natured child. (His own narrative of Babe's past is further complicated by the stage convention Moses adopts, where the reporter Mary Oh, with whom Jack has a sexual relationship, plays the part of Babe in her family's reminiscences, thereby introducing a subtext of incest into Jack's relationship with Babe.) In terms of public identity, Jack has created Babe Fisher, teaching her camera-ready poses that look "especially Indian" (26), yet he also cannot relinquish his own personal conviction that Babe has a spiritual power beyond market-driven artifice. Similarly, Babe's Grandmother Martha, a born-again Christian,

believes Babe to be the second incarnation of Christ, "The Babe," who will redeem the fallen world through her sacrificial death. For her, her granddaughter represents the link between pagan Native spirituality and Western Christianity, a virtual Redeemer in a postmodern age.

Interwoven throughout these competing histories is the mythic narrative of Babe's rescue by Raccoon from her late mother's house and his delivery of the child to the protection of Bear and the Little People, a Native version of fairies. This story is transformed into a street narrative by Ricky Raccoon, a trickster-clown-children's show host, where Babe's magical protectors become hookers and queers, "Darling, Dear, Bitch and Mary, fairy godmothers all" (83). Babe's past is the site of contestatory desires and fictions, and this, in itself, lends *Kyotopolis* to be read as a postmodern anti-history play which, like Hollingsworth's *Village of the Small Huts* cycle, dramatizes the inaccessibility of the past to present reconstruction.

However, Moses does not simply reaffirm the opaque nature of the historical sign. The necessary path to a redemption of the present, for

the playwright, is twofold, involving an imaginative engagement with both the past and the future. While indeterminate and subject to desire, the past in *Kyotopolis* is experienced by the characters through often painful personal visions.

Jack describes a trip to Europe he and his shaman business partner Curly Bear once took to celebrate their creation of Big Buck Enterprises, the parent company soon to orchestrate the meteoric career of Babe Fisher. On the Belgian-German border, they drunkenly explore a castle after visiting hours. Separated from Curly Bear, Jack searches for him:

I mean it was a long way, more than a couple of stories down, once I found them stairs, feeling along the stone walls. And shit, going across that yard, I kept tripping over stuff in the grass. I could hear them laughing in whatever language it was through that window. That's where Curly had gone to.

I looked in and there he was. Tied to a fucking chair. With this circle of guys in white coats around him, poking him, pinching his skin, looking at his teeth and just laughing away. And he was laughing along

with them. Till one of them started slipping this blade round the edge of his hair. Taking his scalp. Shit he mewled like a cat under a boot. And I just knew his hair would go on display there. And mine too if I let them know for sure where I was from. I wanted out. But I fell. My hand got a hold of something slimy I lifted up into the light from the window. A bone. A human fucking bone from this part of an arm! That fucking yard was full of them. Bones, and teeth and hair. And there I was, me and that bugger Curly Bear, looking up at them laughing, looking up out of a glass display case. (32-33)

This episode is a nightmarish corollary to the political struggle of aboriginal peoples worldwide to reclaim their ancestral remains from institutions. Rather than reflecting upon the pilfered bones from the pasts of both North America and Europe (earlier, Jack relates how the witnessing of a displayed skeleton of an ancient priest in a church prompted Curly Bear to remark, "How would you like it if somebody pulled your covers off? How they supposed to rest in peace?")

(31)), Moses forces the audience to feel the desecration through Jack's imaginative empathy. In this way, the past is not mourned from a comfortable contemporary position, nor contextualized within the ordering trope of history, but is performed viscerally in the present.

This process in a vital way reinscribes the trope of history-telling with a mythic sensibility. Andrew Wiget, in his study of traditional Native American narratives, distinguishes between two types of temporal awareness understood by tribal peoples, the historical and the mythic. The former encompasses the present and the recent past, involving "known personages in identifiable settings," while in the latter "legendary personages engage in fantastic actions against an ethnologically familiar background" (85). What bears on the discussion at hand is the nature of the past the mythic narrative constructs. Wiget further delineates the mythic category as containing origin myths and transformation myths, the first relating the creation of the world and the second the alteration of this nascent world resulting in its present social and physical

organization. In *Kyotopolis*, Moses has refigured what begins as a purely historical search for origins as a mythic narrative of transformation. Despite her shadowy beginnings, Babe comes to represent (as both Jack and Martha intuit) the potential for rebirth and a renewal of the relationship between humanity and the cosmos. The play is framed at its beginning and end by a visual and aural montage which affirms the synchronic character of Babe's life-journey:

Darkness.

Then a drum begins an extremely slow double-beat, like a heart from far off in a dream. And with each heart beat there's a pulse of light projecting from a place. First it's a cracked rock face covered with petroglyphs -- highly abstracted images of men, women, boats, bears, turtles, Nanabush. Then it's a city seen at night from the air with a freeway a glowing blur. Then it's the Milky Way -- and the nearby constellations are very clear. And then it's a path through a clearing. And then the cycle of these four places begins again. And it becomes clear that the crack in

the rock, the freeway and the Milky Way are all somehow the path through the clearing, because along it, along them, comes BABE, a little Indian girl, dawdling in the pulsing lights, trailing a red balloon on a string, paying attention to Nanabush, or stars, or cars, or yellow butterflies. (3)

Her journey along "the path through the clearing" unites four sites of signification: the petroglyphs, emblematic of a distant past only dimly understood, the city, filled with ever-present simulacra and desire for the real, the Milky Way, the outward-directed quest for knowledge in futurity, and the "pulse of light projecting from a place," the quintessential metaphysical illumination that underlies all three. These sites are shown to be contiguous rather than discrete, part of a cosmological whole. This cognitive and mythic confluence of time and space is in an important sense in keeping with the traditional ritual performances of many tribal peoples. M. Jane Young describes a Zuni clown performance which took place at the time of the first U.S. moon landings which enacts a similar cosmological

principle:

. . . . the clowns in the plaza gave a good rendition of the particular walk that the astronauts in their cumbersome space suits exhibited. Then the clowns climbed to the rooftops and walked on top of one of the sacred kivas. The purpose of these actions, my Zuni consultant said, was to object to the behavior of the astronauts who heedlessly walked on the body of the Moon Mother and pierced her with metal instruments in order to bring back samples for study. This performance was not only a critique of the moon shots, however, but an enactment of Zuni cosmological principles -- that the clowns equated the moon with sacred space in this instance was not arbitrary. This coupling suggests a merging of space and time in a ritual context such that the kiva, a ceremonial chamber, sometimes located underground and symbolically associated with the emergence from the underworld, becomes equivalent to the moon, one of the Zuni deities who travels across the sky. Outer and

inner space thus occupy the same place at the same time. (275)

Like the Zuni clown ritual, *Kyotopolis* suggests that the mythic conflation of inner and outer space, past present and future, promotes a respectful orientation of the self in the cosmos through imaginative engagement.

This synchronic view of history is also symbolized by the Bear figure in the play. He appears in the traditional role of spirit-guide to Babe, and in a syncretic Christian context in the belief system of Martha, who asks her granddaughter "does the Bear sleep in Heaven?" (52). Boo, Babe's aunt, relates a story told to her by her niece where she was visited by a u.f.o. in the woods:

And I saw there was this bear there, Auntie.
Ya, a bear at the controls! . . . Well,
Auntie, I heard that bear laugh! And the next
thing I know we was rising up, and flying over
the village, and then up through the clouds
and, Auntie, we got almost to the moon afore
we turned around and started heading back.
And do you know how far that is? You look

back here at a round blue ball and it's the earth and -- you don't know how much it looks like home. That's where it comes from, Auntie, that's where all this comes from. That's where I got my song. That's why I'm going to go there again someday, Auntie. Hey that's what this is all for. (67)

Moses' clever conflation of the tribal myth of origin/ transformation with the narratives of Christian millennialism and extraterrestrial contact, both retold feverishly in contemporary popular culture, highlights the similarity between them. The alien contact story, like the prophetic story of Christ's second coming, is a narrative whose attraction lies in its promise of a revolutionary alteration in how we perceive our place in the universe. The bear carved in petroglyph, sleeping in Heaven, and piloting an alien spacecraft is a figure representing a deep-seated desire for human redemption. Rather than simply lamenting the virtual technological world and the needs it leaves unfulfilled in opposition to traditional tribal values, Moses attempts to show the mythic resonance between them.

As is typical with Moses' work, this narrative of mythic redemption is not unleavened with irony. However, as is also typical, this "ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity" that Hutcheon argues defines the postmodern serves to reaffirm the multivocal nature of "historical" discourse. Moses' choice of the name Crazy Horse for the space shuttle is apt. The story of the Oglala-Brulé tribal leader (1842-77) - the heroic warrior who routed Custer, galvanized his people and was murdered at the hands of his enemies -- is one of unification, tactical prowess (he is famous for his decoy and feinting attacks) and ultimate martyrdom. Like Crazy Horse, *Kyotopolis* utilizes misdirection in the service of a unifying vision. Part of Babe's official mission on board the shuttle is to use her shamanic powers to gain insight into the problem of making an uninhabitable space station livable. The erratically spinning orbit of the damaged shuttle begins to alter the gravitational field of the station. In the final scene of the play, the space station is transformed into "a spectacle of rings and squares, spheres and cubes -- a gigantic high technology astrolabe, a turning tesseract, a future

spirit catcher" (91). In a last confluence of past and future, Ricky Raccoon notes that the revitalized space station resembles "that toy the fairy godmothers hung up on the Babe's cradleboard" (90). Just as the ancient tribal myths of origin and transformation teach the proper manner of living in the present, the play advocates a reexamination of the relationship between temporal and ontological categories to guide humanity as it moves into the future.

There is, perhaps, no better demonstration of the inherent difficulty of re-presenting Native Canadian history than the series of events known collectively as the Oka Crisis of 1990. This conflict, whose lasting legacy was a renewed political will and solidarity amongst diverse Native peoples across Canada, has given rise to many often mutually exclusive accounts of its origins, unfolding, and eventual significance¹¹. In an important sense, the Mohawk people were engaged in two simultaneous campaigns during the stand-offs

¹¹ Attempts to reconstruct the events of the Oka Crisis into historical narrative have been plagued by legal and ideological conflict. Hornung's *One People Under the Gun* prompted an injunction from a Quebec court based on objections from Ellen Gabriel and Denise Tolley, two Mohawk women prominent in the stand-off. They claimed that in his book, Hornung attributed remarks to them which were "lies and fabrications," remarks which made reference to divisions within the Mohawk community. (Bergman)

at Kanasetake and Kahnawake, one against the military might of the Quebec police force and the Canadian army, the other in the realm of public relations against the Canadian government. This latter conflict can be understood as the strategic deployment of the rhetoric of both expansion and contraction. The government's approach to the struggle (reflective of its role in dominant discourse) was two-pronged in this regard. Both the government and the army wished their press releases to represent the Warrior Society (the military factions of Kanasetake and Kahnawake) as a tightly organized and heavily armed threat. This expansion of the Warriors' image helped foster a popular perception of them as a homogeneous threat to national security that justified *a priori* any action taken against them by the military. In contrast to this expanded view, government negotiators, in their closed-door meetings with the Warriors' representatives, treated them not as a homogeneous force mounting a serious attack upon Canadian sovereignty, but as a heterogeneous and loosely affiliated group of individuals engaged in a localized protest over localized concerns (rights to land in the township of Oka). This contractive

strategy helped to divide the representatives and avoid an escalation of the magnitude of issues put forward to be discussed. The Warriors, on the other hand, wanted to be seen as both a homogeneous threat in order to scare both the army and the government, and as heterogeneous individuals, "just folks," defending their ancestral land to garner public support. They also sought through their representatives to expand the number of issues on the table for discussion (such as pan-Native sovereignty and self-government). Each side had as its mandate the maximization of its own influence and the minimization of its opponent's ability to curtail this influence¹².

Because this conflict was being recorded by various news media agencies, both the army/government and the Warriors understood how the manipulation of images could help or hurt their respective causes. While not to denigrate the magnitude of the conflict, the war between the Mohawks and the government forces was a war of signification as well as of political resistance. As Michael Morris points out in his analysis of the

¹² While I have constructed this expansion/contraction model through my reading of various commentaries on the stand-off, a useful discussion of the crisis as an enactment of the discursive power strategies that legitimate political authority is contained in Morris.

"media war" label pejoratively attached to the crisis, "the battle for territory was no less 'true' for having been fought with words or images -- to resort to violence would have been simply an extension of the power communications already engaged" (83). Both sides could watch how the stand-off "read" for the camera on a nightly basis, and plan their actions for the following day in part based upon the effect previous tactics had had on public opinion. Given this situation, there was a constant shadow war between the combatants, where signs were employed to either expand or contract the semiotic field in which the stand-off was contained. For example, the Department of Defense released a high-production video to the media which emphasized the military cohesion and might of the Warriors at Kanasetake, with an officer displaying an array of military hardware -- such as automatic and semi-automatic weapons, anti-tank weapons and rocket-launchers -- which the army alleged the Warriors possessed. In response to this expansive move, the Warriors built wooden mock-ups of these weapons to intimidate the army and to mock its media campaign (York and Pindera, 240-245)¹³.

¹³ The issue as to whether the Warriors actually possessed

Similarly, the Warriors themselves sought to expand the ideological significance of their struggle by utilizing signs that made reference to other liberation movements. The use of facial coverings by the front-line Warriors was not primarily to hide identity (the military's intelligence unit had compiled lengthy files on nearly all the Warriors and their families, and the Warriors often removed the coverings in front of the army), but rather to reference the Palestinian *Intifada* movement that had received favourable media attention earlier that year (Morris, 84). By adopting signs already identified with a freedom-fighter group engaged in a struggle for national liberation, the Warriors hoped to lend credence to their claim that theirs was a struggle against political injustice rather than an illegal act of civil disobedience.

While this struggle involved the Warriors defending their right to self-determination contra the dominant political system, there was an equally vital struggle within both Kanasetake and Kahnawake to present a unified front to both the media and

this weaponry is still in question: on one hand, York and Pindera contend that the Warriors had very few of these weapons shown in the video (245), while the almost complete absence of weapons recovered after the end of the crisis suggests that the Warriors did have some time to destroy or

the government. The Warrior Society itself was highly controversial in its particular formulation of Mohawk identity and resistance, and each community contained both vehement detractors and supporters of their methods¹⁴. Thus, the Warriors had in effect two fronts to defend, one without, involving the government/army forces, and one within, involving political disagreements over the right to represent the Mohawk people. While the overall legacy of Oka was widespread crystallization of Native political will, there was also, in its aftermath, the inevitable polarization and fragmentation in the affected communities to be redressed.

Part of the history-telling process for Native peoples in relation to Oka is the task of narrating a history which both empowers and heals. One instance of this recuperative narration occurs in a powwow celebration held in Kahnawake one year after the stand-off. In an article entitled "'Echoes of a Proud Nation': Reading Kahnawake's Powwow as a Post-Oka Text," Valda Blundell argues that this powwow attempted through semiotic means to valorize both the Warriors' struggle for political autonomy

hide any weapons before being apprehended.

¹⁴ For an equally controversial picture of the internal

and the sacrifices of those opposed to such a struggle. It is traditional at the start of a powwow to stage a Grand Entry during which a Canadian flag is presented with a Flag Song accompaniment to honour Native veterans who served in the First and Second World Wars. In this case, no flag was present, but a Flag Song was sung and a Flag Bearer named. Blundell attempts to decode this subtle semiotic move:

One way of addressing this semiotic issue was to cleverly juxtapose visual and aural signs.

Thus, although neither the American nor the Canadian national flags were paraded in Kahnawake's Grand Entry, a flag song was sung and a flag bearer was named by the emcee as performers entered the dancing grounds during Grand Entry. Through these combined signs, Mohawk sovereignty was (visually) signified by absenting the Canadian flag (a symbol of the dominant federal state) while presenting (making present) both local and national Native political leaders. But lest the absence of flags be read as a repudiation of the actions of (past) Native "warriors," a

divisions within Kanasetake and Kahnawake, see Hornung.

flag -- albeit an indeterminate one -- was nonetheless aurally present, through the performance of a flag song. In this way, Native veterans were not only honoured (again), but Kahnawake's powwow producers diplomatically promoted their own specific nationhood while reconfirming the service they have given to the Canadian state. Finally, this indeterminate aural sign left open to alternative interpretations the question of which flag was being "sung" [the Warrior Society has its own flag]. Indeed this flag could be heard as an honour song for the Mohawk Warriors of the previous summer's "war". (345-346)

This attempt to valorize Mohawk sovereignty and Mohawk commitment to the federal state, Blundell feels, helped to heal the wounds of Oka. In a more ironic and comic fashion, craftspeople at the powwow offered their own symbol of healing: a doll dressed in Warrior garb brandishing a golf club! (348).

Like the post-Oka powwow, Ben Cardinal's play *Generic Warrior and No Name Indians* attempts to

both heal the internal divisions exacerbated by the conflict and honour the courage and commitment of the militant factions. In a more explicit fashion than was observed in the powwow, the play seeks to present the struggle of the Warriors and their allies as fulfilling a specifically historical legacy. Cardinal accomplishes this twofold task by extending the expansionist agenda of the Warriors and linking together both mythic and historical conceptions of time.

Generic Warrior, like so many Canadian history plays, foregoes any attempt at documentary reconstruction of a particular event in favour of selective alteration of the facts which permits a more generalized reading of an event to be advanced. For example, the infamous golf-course of Oka becomes in the unnamed setting of the play a uranium dump, cognitively linking the much-publicized struggles of the Lakota people in the Black Hills region of South Dakota (and perhaps the lesser-known problems of the Ojibway-Cree peoples in the Elliot Lake region of Northern Ontario) with the Oka stand-off. The play's action revolves around the attempts of its main character Musk to halt the exploitation of his reserve by the federal

government. Musk has been mounting a public letter-writing campaign and, in secret, a militant pan-Native occupation of the reserve to culminate in an armed repulsion of government troops from the area. What makes this play fascinating from a historiographic perspective is its expansion of the conflict along both geographic and temporal lines.

Cardinal chooses to understand the resistance movements of contemporary Native peoples as conceptually rooted in the past. However, instead of simply making discrete reference to the past in his play, he presents three stories which take place at critical moments in the development of a Native resistance consciousness. The first story relates the struggle of Musk's ancestor Muskwa in the nineteenth century, while the second presents the story of Musk's father Floyd as a World War II veteran. In the former, Muskwa and his wife Pihew Iskew battle starvation as they try to understand the radical changes wrought upon their way of life by the eradication of the buffalo by the white man. Significantly, Muskwa views his predicament in terms of his traditional paradigms, and formulates his own act of resistance according to a vision

experienced by his wife. This vision is described in an article Musk's daughter Sarah writes for a Native newspaper:

Before the whiteman came to this land Wesa'kecha the trickster lived along side the people and the animals. . . . After the railroad was built across the land, the buffalo had shied away. Some people believe Wesa'kecha got on one of those trains and went searching for the buffalo. The problem is there aren't any more buffalo. So Wesa'kecha just keeps riding the train and doesn't know where to get off. Muskwa and Pihew Iskwew are going to build a fire on top of the railroad tracks. And maybe Wesa'kecha will see the signal. Maybe when the train stops, Wesa'kecha will get off. (28)

It is clear this traditional narrative is to be understood as a prospective statement of resistance rather than a tragic misreading of colonial encroachment. Muskwa's wife tries to convince her husband that her vision is prophecy rather than a prescription for contemporary action: "In another

place our people will gather to fight for our land. We need Wesa'kecha to join us there not here" (17).

In a similar fashion, Cardinal tells the story of Musk's father Floyd who committed suicide out of despair when Musk was a child. Floyd's story is in many ways typical of Native veterans who fought for the Canadian state during WWII, and Floyd's growing awareness of his rights as a Native person is dramatized. At first, Floyd's motivation for enlisting in the army is largely self-interest, where he hoped that by distinguishing himself in service, he would garner personal respect when he returned to Canada. Later, he comes to realize that this respect was also necessary for all Native peoples to feel proud and esteemed as vital members of their own communities. This realization was coupled with an intensely personal commitment to the war when he falls in love with Marlene, a German freedom-fighter whose village is threatened by the Nazis. (Just as the Oka Warriors sought to forge conceptual links in the public's consciousness with international liberation movements like the *Intifada*, Cardinal has Marlene play a major role in Floyd's consciousness-raising,

thereby associating the plight of Native peoples with the German resistance movement.) Other contemporary Native artists, when reflecting upon experiences of Native veterans in their own communities, have emphasized the pervasive disappointment experienced by them upon returning to Canada. In a piece entitled *Memorial Blanket for Eddy (My Marilyn)*, Jim Logan pays tribute to his father in a series of reproduced silk-screened portraits recalling Warhol's portraits of celebrities¹⁵. Logan explains his use of this technique and the puzzling title of this work:

In a lot of ways, my dad and Marilyn Monroe have a lot in common. My dad always wanted to be "somebody," somebody famous or somebody known. He wanted that, and he thought that by coming out of the war and being a veteran would gain him a lot of respect. However, that was never a reality. It never occurred. I think he was disillusioned when he returned, only to find himself being labelled "Indian" again or "Métis" -- no specific rights, poorly educated, and begging for a job

¹⁵ For an extended discussion of Logan's work, see Ryan (1995, 190-197)

- rather than a hero that, I guess, he was kind of envisioning Marilyn Monroe was a person who attained fame and respect. She obtained it, my father didn't, but they both ended up killing themselves -- my father killing himself through alcoholism, Marilyn Monroe through barbiturates and alcohol 'cause she couldn't handle her fame. And my dad couldn't handle not having the fame. (Ryan, 1995: 197-8)

Rather than offering a subtle acknowledgement of their sacrifice (as the powwow organizers had done), Cardinal attempts to refigure the Native veterans' service as a nascent movement for self-determination. But like the powwow, this representation does not elide the unavoidable ideological conflicts between the veterans and the Warriors. Ennis, Musk's father-in-law and Floyd's war buddy, agrees to take up arms to defend the reserve on the condition that he is not asked to fire at his old regiment, whose newest members are set to invade the area (55). The battle fought against federal forces in the play takes place on Remembrance Day, a day traditionally set aside to

commemorate the ways in which the military campaigns of the past make possible the freedom of the present. What strikes me as particularly significant (from a political standpoint) is Cardinal's focus upon the strategic reordering of both past and present Native experience as a continuous struggle for recognition and rights, rather than upon the justification of the Warriors' actions according to contemporary criteria.

In his project of re-presenting Native resistance pan-historically, the playwright deliberately conflates notions of mythic and historical time. The three narratives of resistance, which initially unfold synchronically, come to converge in the present context, where Muskwa, his wife Pihew Iskew and Floyd return to life to aid in the reserve's struggle against the army. Thus, the past is accessed not merely through nostalgia or selective recollection but as a living presence that informs and strengthens present action. What is first introduced as a mythic story of Wesa'kecha's abandonment and a desire for his aid returns throughout the play as an activating historical tactic. An example of the interpenetration of historical narrative with a

mythic impulse is the character of Pihew Iskwew. She begins as a distinctly historical individual, bound by her particular time and place yet made cognizant of future possibilities for struggle through her vision of Wesa'kecha. As the play progresses, she becomes a terrifying symbol of Native resistance, part historical, part mythic. As the battle rages on the reserve, she appears on stage as a metonymic figure, hair standing on-end, holding a huge axe in one hand and a section of steel girder in the other. Inspired by her vision, she describes her difficulty chopping up the "hard trees" (the steel train bridge) in this new time to stop the trains to permit Wesa'kecha to end his centuries-old journey. Much as Britannia, the female symbol of Britain's might, used the human form to epitomize a nation's pride and power, Pihew Iskwew makes manifest a historical struggle which is energized with a mythic sensibility.

Another symbol which bridges myth and history, the buffalo is utilized in the play to unite all three time frames. Musk constructs an armoured munitions carrier which is disguised as a buffalo.

It is a serio-comic homage to the wooden mock-ups made by the Warriors at Oka, but it is also a

symbol which once again has both historical and mythic significance. Muskwa compares this weapon to his first impression of trains, steel buffalos with fire in their bellies (77), while Floyd and Ennis remember that they once nicknamed the personnel carriers of WWII "buffalos" (76). Cardinal's ironic use of the buffalo, typically a symbol of lost Native autonomy and life-ways, as a covert weapon against dominant force illustrates de Certeau's reading of indigenous tactical resistance, where subversion is achieved "not by rejecting or altering [the rituals, representations and laws of the conqueror], but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept" (xiii).

What marks this play as a "history of the present" (Spivak) is the emphasis placed upon the contextualizing of contemporary problems in relation to immanent mythic and historical narratives. Cardinal avoids illusionistic staging techniques in the play, instead re-presenting the past as self-consciously stylized (a good example of this self-consciousness is the staging of Floyd's love scene with Marlene, where stark lighting effects and tableaux evoke the aesthetic

of German Expressionism (22)). The synchronic time-lines that converge in the contemporary narrative forcibly prevent the audience from distinguishing past from present. Like the typical postmodern history play, no past can be reconstructed hermetically. However, what distinguishes *Generic Warrior* from other metatheatrical works is the play's commitment to Native resistance (whether militant or artistic) as an ongoing and historically immanent process. Just as the doll commemorative of the Oka Crisis, both parodic and defiant, can be read as a complicated response to Native militancy, so too Cardinal's play explores the expansionist agenda of the Warriors in theatrical terms. His sympathy for the Warriors is clear, but his focus is upon both the contingency of the present fight for self-determination upon the past, and upon the responsibility of those engaged in this struggle towards the resistant legacy of the past.

In conclusion, I will return to Thomas King's comments regarding the absence of historical narratives in Native literature. Despite his seemingly categorical rejection of history as a fitting subject for Native literature, I have

indicated how the past is almost always present in Native theatre. King himself frequently incorporates historical narratives into his fiction, but with a predictably ironic twist. Such a twist occurs in his story "Joe the Painter and the Deer Island Massacre," and it is with this story that I will leave the discussion of history.

Joe, the non-Native main character of the story, is a social outcast whose only real crime is his faith in absolute honesty at all costs. Joe decides to write and produce a historical pageant which he hopes will be performed during his town's centennial celebrations. He chooses as his subject a particularly ignoble event: the massacre of unfriendly Native inhabitants by encroaching settlers that permitted the town's founding. Joe proceeds with the pageant undaunted by its potential unpopularity, confident in his belief that "it's all history. You can't muck around with history. It ain't always the way we'd like it to be, but there it is. Can't change it" (1987: 105).

What is exciting (and indeed typical) in this story is how King interrogates this assertion of history's inviolability.

In his efforts to add realism to his pageant,

Joe enlists the aid of his Native friend Chief (the narrator of the story), whose task it is to round up as many Natives as needed to act as performers.

Chief manages to convince his relatives and friends to participate, many of whom view Joe and the project with a bemused eye. They all set up camp on Deer Island, the site of the historical massacre, and make use of the occasion to visit and socialize. Chief relates the charmed atmosphere of the gathering:

That first night on Deer Island was soft and quiet. Some of us got propped up against the tight clusters of marsh grass and listened to my father and my uncles tell stories. All the kids were sprawled on top of one another like puppies. After the men got things going, Aunt Amy took over. She was the best storyteller.

Bernie and James got out a drum and started singing a few social songs, and some of the families danced for a while. Mostly, we watched the fires and watched the fog slip in off the mud flats and curl around the tents. You could hear the frogs in the distance, and the water pushing at the edges of the island.

As I went to sleep, I imagined that, in the morning, when the fog lifted, the town and the pulp factory and the marina and Lawson's mansion would be gone, and all you'd be able to see would be the flats stretched out to the trees. (106-107)

The performance, complete with ketchup pouches splattering to simulate blood, is predictably disturbing and offensive to the town's elite, and another more mundane pageant is picked to celebrate the town's inauguration.

Like many of the postmodern "history plays" discussed in this chapter, this story offers a critique of conventional historiography. Joe's conflation of truth and history is shown to be both naively comic and unrepresentative of the general popular desire for historical narratives that flatter rather than challenge. Thus, his pageant does little to shake the town's blithe ignorance of its sordid past. Like Hollingsworth's self-conscious history cycle, King emphasizes the artificiality of historical re-presentation by stressing the incongruous and makeshift materials of the performance, its ketchup blood and drama

department wigs.

If this was the story's only message, King's statements concerning the aridity of historical narrative would appear to be borne out. However, like many of the plays discussed, he also suggests the potential of the past to transform the present. The actors in Joe's pageant are shown constructing a conceptual bridge between the past and the present, and as a result, none of the participants can view the contemporary environment in an historically isolated way. Instead of representing the horror of the massacre, the actors return to the site and rewrite it with a hopeful outcome. The importance of the pageant lies not in its self-conscious challenge to settler authority nor in its verisimilar depiction of unalterable pain, but in its role as catalyst for the affirmation of communal solidarity. In the words of Russian writer Marina Tsvetaeva, "to continue is, after all, to put to the test" (115). By doing so, putting to the test the past's potential as an informing resource for both continuity and cultural change, Native playwrights avoid the transparent self-authentication of narrative form and the opaque figural gesture that can often result in

histories impervious to the possibilities of creative adaptation in the present.

**CHAPTER 5: RED SONS IN THE SAIL SET: TRICKSTER
DISCOURSE AND THE SINCERITY OF FORM**

I feel sorry for coyotes because they
are always in season.

Edward Poitras

A cursory examination of recent critical work on Native North American art will reveal that the trickster has become the favoured episteme of those wishing to articulate the radical challenges to Western thought posed by Native expression. It is equally apparent from such an examination that there is little agreement as to what role the trickster performed in pre-contact indigenous societies, and more importantly in this context, what type of challenges contemporary revisions of this figure encompass. Earlier examinations conducted by anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Paul Radin laid heavy emphasis upon the trickster's function as a marker of archaic cultural anxiety (for Lévi-Strauss, an anxiety borne of irreconcilable opposites, and for Radin, an anxiety produced by the process of social individuation). This emphasis led researchers to examine the trickster figure as a product of and a window into primitive consciousness, a way by which anthropologists could reconstruct the pre-contact

taboos and social structures of a (from their vantage point) severely atrophied or vanished cultural tradition. Criticism of this approach has been widespread and vociferous, with many rejecting the normative premises which underpinned such work. As a result, many early studies of the trickster have languished unread in recent years.

Recently, however, the trickster has been championed by many contemporary scholars as being vital to the understanding of Native North American art and culture, a figure which mediates between the resistant narratives of the past and their radical reconfigurations in the present. In contrast to the largely normative approach of structural anthropology, literary criticism has emphasized the trickster's liberative quality, his ability to transcend barriers and thrive in the interstices between definitional categories. Descriptions of the trickster as a paradigm of transformation and transgression are often distinguished by their unbridled enthusiasm and hyperbole. Here is a representative example taken from Elizabeth Ammons:

Because trickster won't be contained,
trickster strategies and tales provide a way

of pulling together conflicting world views and sets of values into coherent, new identity. This identity is turbulent, shape-changing, contradictory, "bad," culturally central, limnal, powerful, power-interrogating. It is a place to be in and of itself, and for itself -- an authentic, age-old location that is not western-dominated, where the artist . . . can envision and maneuver. It is a place located and constantly reinventable in cultural borderlands or even in a space totally outside white patriarchal control. ("Introduction," xi)

While reflective of the excitement generated by the trickster as a liberative trope, such definitions, with their coupling of opposites and emphasis upon betwixt- and between-, serve to transform the trickster into a generalized (and therefore not very useful) sign of postmodern *frisson*. The trickster becomes, as Barthes has pointed out about the Eiffel Tower, a sign which, by becoming a catch-all container of disparate and contradictory meanings, becomes a sign of nothing.

I feel that it is necessary to address the

central paradox of the trickster, one which despite changing operational premises has remained stubbornly irreducible, in order to understand how this potent transgressor has been selectively recast in contemporary Native discourse. While my own premises are hardly more sturdy than previous ones, I believe that examining the trickster's latest guise of postmodern liberator can reveal both the limits of trickster discourse and its thoroughgoing penetration into Native performance, especially its interrogation of narrative form.

In order to understand the recent transformations of the trickster, one must first turn one's attention to how the subject has been understood in the past. What occupied many discussions of the trickster was the irreconcilable nature of the figure, the essential paradox he was seen to embody. On one hand, the trickster clearly offered through laughable antics an affirmation of the status quo, buffoonery which through constant transgression of tribal taboos served to reveal the necessary inviolability of these taboos. An episode common to many tribal narratives was the Bungling Host or Foolish Imitation story. In this episode, the trickster, enthralled by the magical ability to produce food displayed by a powerful

host, attempts to replicate the host's magic in his own home. Because of the trickster's greedy appetite or arrogance, he ends up humiliating himself in the presence of his guest or family or worse, inflicting grievous bodily injury to himself and those he sought to impress. This episode has been interpreted as an admonishment to those individuals who seek self-aggrandizement or illegitimate access to power in a community (Ballinger, 22-23). By violating the social taboos defining hospitality (the securing of acceptable food, respect towards the roles of both host and guest) and industriousness (the achievement of power and food through legitimate ends), the trickster demonstrates the ridiculous fate of those who step outside the strictures of society. This antinomy -- where one must violate the law in order to reveal its primacy -- serves a normative function, reasserting the rules of the group in opposition to the destructive desires of the individual.

What complicates this depiction of the trickster is his role as a creative experimenter, where his ability to transgress the norms of the community enables him to invent new ways for the community to live and thereby evolve. Often, it is

the very individuality of the trickster, his difference from the norm, that is championed. For example, one Pueblo tradition holds that the trickster helped the people escape from the underworld by making four trees strong enough for climbing through clowning (White, 1962: 116). Even when the trickster's appetites lead to disaster, as in the Winnebago tale where Wakdjunkaga's penis is severely gnawed by a chipmunk when he attempts to copulate with a tree, there are frequently collateral benefits to humankind (in this case, Wakdjunkaga's gnawed penis is transformed into edible roots and berries) (Radin, 38-39). Whether conscious or inadvertent, the trickster's transgressive energy pushes the boundaries of the universe, and in the process demonstrates the necessity of individual experimentation to prevent social stagnation. As the Navaho storyteller Yellowman points out, "if [Coyote] did not do all those things, then those things would not be possible in the world" (Toelken, 155).

This contradiction at the heart of the trickster, between conservative and transgressive (or "culture-hero") function, has been addressed by many researchers on the subject, with the frequent result of subordinating one aspect to the other to

support specific ideological premises. Early efforts by anthropologists often posit the conservative function of the trickster as the dominant characteristic in order to emphasize a taboo/rule-bound reading of Native culture. Radin, for example, asserts in his study of the Winnebago trickster that what had been transmitted from generation to generation as a unified trickster narrative, containing both normative and culture-hero episodes, was in fact the result of a conflation of two distinct narrative traditions (166-167). This discursive move allows Radin the freedom to interpret the Winnebago trickster tales as a linear and unified parable of psychic differentiation and social integration. Wakdjunkaga's adventures involving sexuality and other taboo-bound behaviour are seen by Radin and others to articulate the process through which the human mind learns to understand itself and its environment. As such, the trickster's outrageous antics are the myth of a culture's coming of age, as Jung, in his commentary on Radin, asserts:

Radin's trickster cycle preserves the shadow in its pristine mythological form, and thus points back to a very much earlier stage of

consciousness which existed before the birth of the myth, when the Indian was still groping about in a similar mental darkness. Only when his consciousness reached a higher level could he detach the earlier state from himself and objectify it, that is, say anything about it. So long as his consciousness was itself trickster-like, such a confrontation could not take place. It was possible only when the attainment of a newer and higher level of consciousness enabled him to look back on a lower and inferior state. (202)

When the culture-hero aspect of the trickster, his transgressive power vital to the cultural health of the community, is explained, it is again subordinated to a perceived conservative norm of behaviour that must reject any violation of taboo as dangerously marginal. This view, which owes much to Freud's conception of the unconscious, holds that the impulse to transgress is celebrated and cherished in these trickster narratives because it is suppressed (Makarius, 54).

Because of his straddling of extreme cultural positions, individual and group, transgressive and redemptive, the trickster seems to invite

specifically-directed ideological interpretation. As the literature on him reveals, this invitation has been heeded by both Natives and non-Natives alike. Like the anthropologists who interviewed and interpreted them, early Native informants also cast the trickster into a figure supportive of disparate worldviews. The Winnebago, for example, from whom Radin gleaned his raw material, were divided, at the time of his research, into two competing cultural camps, the "traditional" and the quasi-Christian peyote cult. The former emphasized the trickster's positive culture-hero as part of an overall belief that the past (as conceived by the leaders of the day) had much to teach the Winnebago people in 1912. In contrast to this sympathetic reading of the trickster, the peyote cult followers, who themselves were criticized for their syncretic practices, saw the trickster merely as a buffoon, proof of the outmoded conservative attitudes against which they fought. Accordingly, an episode is praised by the traditionalists as demonstrating the virtues of peace-making, while another is employed by the cultists as a negative example of the Winnebago's inability to update and democratize ancient rituals such as the secret Medicine Rite (Radin, 147-9).

Recent Native uses of the trickster, in similar fashion, continue this tradition. Instead of demarcating internal cultural politics, the trickster often becomes a general sign of Native cultural resurgence and resistance. The ethical and categorical slippage he embodies becomes directed outward in the efforts made by Native artists to evade the totalizing impulses in colonial discourse¹. A common function of the "new" trickster is enforcement of cultural boundaries, an essentially conservative activity where the non-Native interlocutor, as the perceived butt of the trickster's joke, is reminded of his or her outsider status.

Perhaps the most common strategy of cultural gate-keeping is to cast the trickster as a metonym for Native culture itself, in that the trickster takes the form of a Native character who manages to trick non-Native authority figures with a satisfyingly crafty con. In this way, the trickster acts as a wily guardian of Native cultural territory, as in King's poem "The City On The Hill":

¹ The tradition of using trickster narrative to articulate anxiety over settler infiltration of Native culture and territory is a venerable one. For examples of early anti-settler trickster narratives, see Bloomfield and Bright (89-91).

My uncle savages the streets
skates figure eights
around the meters
drums the cars.

He gimmes change from laughing people
wrapped in tight, white skins
and sheepy coats,
round dances round the block
in red-face
clown-crows out the words he carries
on his cuffs.

Until the cops come by
and chauffeur him away
with Marvin and the rest
to Burger King.
A break.
Union rules.

Tough job, he says to Marvin
over fries,
but, hey,
we got to hold the middle class
in line,

and keep them from the woods.

(1990:265)

Tomson Highway understands the trickster to be the Native spiritual counterpart of Christ, both of whom are half-human, half-god. The fundamental difference between them, according to Highway, is the difference between tragedy and comedy, suffering and "hav[ing] one helluva good time" (Morgan, 134). As a spiritual being, the trickster has an incorporeal existence for Highway, who sees him as an extension of a Native person's spirit (Wigston, 9). The trickster for Highway and others is largely a sign of cultural recuperation, and as such, there is often little examination of the more radical and antithetical aspects of his character; the priority is placed upon healing rather than transgression and the indeterminacy it brings. While I think this refiguring of the trickster as culture-hero is an exciting and powerful development, I will, in the rest of this chapter, investigate another avatar of the trickster, one which characteristically plays the game of postmodernism according to his own ever-contingent rules.

* * *

The [AIM] movement had its humorous moments. The Indians of Milwaukee spread the rumour that they were going to invade the Milwaukee Yacht Club so they could have "Red Sons in the Sail Set," but it was rumour, nothing more.

Vine Deloria Jr.

As I have tried to indicate, recent trickster narratives tend to refigure his often destructive and ridiculous antics as Rabelaisian and anti-establishment, strategies of subversion rather than of perversion. The term strategy is used here to denote de Certeau's idea that only ideological positions which are predicated upon coherent and discrete distinctions can engage with and occupy the space of the Other with any degree of confidence. As both gate-keeper and guardian angel, the trickster's more dysfunctional characteristics are subsumed (or excused) by his role as Native culture-hero. Understandably, the trickster whose escapades involve incest, copro- and necrophilia, and rape is less appealing than the trickster whose more endearing qualities are unselfconsciousness, inquisitiveness, and a sense of play. As the prototype of all human behaviour, he is allowed his crimes by his contemporary

adherents, but rarely is he praised for them.

While the trickster is sanitized somewhat by Native artists when he is employed as a protective and conservative trope, there are other artists who attempt to imbue their own work with the uncontrollably transgressive spirit he has always possessed. The trickster's creative approach to problem-solving attracts Native artists who also seek to create new ways of solving aesthetic or ideological problems, especially those involving identity politics. They wish to celebrate the trickster's anarchic freedom to move between opposites rather than reduce it to a structural indicator of archaic binarism, as structural anthropology has done. Similarly, they also would avoid the tendency to fix him as a mischievous but essentially trustworthy metonym of resurgent Native culture, conservative and powerful. The affinity between this valorization of the trickster and postmodern theories of reading/writing is logical, given the latter's emphasis upon contingency, simultaneity and multivalence as a corrective to the master-narratives of modernity, of which the social sciences are a part.

One Native writer who has developed a consciously postmodern conception of the trickster

is Gerald Vizenor. In both his fiction and non-fiction, Vizenor sees his main goal to be the liberation of the imagination, a necessary requirement for the political and creative emancipation of Native peoples:

We can be prisoners, and we are, in our bodies. But we can liberate our minds. Tribal people were brilliant in understanding that a figure, a familiar figure in an imaginative story, could keep their minds free I'm going for trickster consciousness because it's an ideal healing, because it disrupts the opposites and that creates the possibility for discourse that's communal and comic. (Blaeser, 238)

Given this emphasis upon liberative consciousness and imaginative transformation, Vizenor rejects the insights of social science regarding Native culture and history because he sees them as attempts to fix meaning according to prescribed tribal cultural categories constructed by the various disciplines to serve their own needs. From this perspective, social science (structuralism, behaviourism, etc.) seeks to define the trickster as a marker of

specific cultural traits; by explaining the paradox of the trickster as the result of anxiety about opposites (eg. life/death, male/female, individual/group, etc.), social science thereby eliminates his identity as a paradox (he is a sign of *explainable* oppositions). For Vizenor, this is an unexcusable reduction of the trickster's role and power.

Vizenor doesn't engage with social science to offer new and "better" structural reading of tribal material (as other anthropologist critics of Lévi-Strauss have done, cf. Carroll (1981)). Instead, he offers a model of discourse which is predicated upon the freeplay and indeterminacy within language and within the oral tradition of the tribe. "Tribe" becomes the important ontological category here, for Vizenor sees oral traditional stories as presupposing a communal consciousness that cannot be understood in isolation. Meaning in each traditional narrative is constituted by what Vizenor calls the four "interlocutors" which additively determine the story's meaning: the original author of the story, the story's narrator, the story's characters and the audience ("Discourse," 188). Each identity within this model, also called the "comic holotrope" (holotrope

coined by Vizenor to mean the entire figuration) is contingent, and therefore adds the element of indeterminacy to each retelling. For example, a specific narrator might, after "reading" his or her audience, modify certain episodes or characters, and supply a running commentary on the deficiencies or strengths of the original story and of his or her own retelling of it². In this way, narrative discourse is performative and dependent upon one's subject position.

In this model of tribal discourse, the trickster is seen as a semiotic sign rather than a discrete entity with historical pedigree (196). This is important for Vizenor because he sees the emphasis placed in traditional narratives upon the trickster's transformative ability as prefiguring the postmodern concept of wandering signifiers and contingent identity. Throughout his writing, Vizenor links the trickster's traditional role as transformer (of the world and of himself) to philosophical ideas concerning the arbitrary

² This idea is similar to Bakhtin's concept of the double-voiced word, here elaborated by Gary Saul Morson in his discussion of Bakhtin: "The audience of a double-voiced word is therefore meant to hear both a version of the original utterance as an embodiment of its speaker's point of view (or 'semantic position') and the second speaker's evaluation of that utterance from a different point of view. I find it helpful to picture a double-voiced word as a special sort of palimpsest in which the uppermost inscription is a commentary on the one beneath it, which the reader (or

relation between sign and signified. For him, the act of transformation as articulated in trickster narratives, and imaginatively enacted by human beings, permits a freeing of the mind and a closer association with nature:

Our origin myths tell of a human transforming himself into an animal. This is not transcendence or a matter of escaping. There is no ideal place. This is not a metaphor but a state of being. A person envisions himself a bear, and he becomes a bear. He steps out of the bonds created by time, and transforms himself in spirit, with imagination. (Katz, 165-6)

Vizenor frequently refers to the work of Lacan and Derrida, who affirm the transformational nature of the sign, its shifts in meaning motivated by longing rather than logic. Because the trickster is constituted in synergy by the four interlocutors present in discourse, he lives in the gaps that unavoidably occur in communication, between subject and object, word and meaning. He works his con game in and through language, that which

audience) can know only by reading through the commentary

constitutes him and feeds him through its inadequacies³. For Vizenor, each interlocutor participates in the language game that is the trickster, and in a vital sense becomes the trickster ("Discourse," 189)⁴.

This idea that the trickster is in Vizenor's words a "comic deconstructionist" (201) who disrupts both dominant and resistant discourse has been echoed by many analysts of non-European literatures. For example, Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes the traditional figure of the "signifying monkey" in African-American trickster narratives as fulfilling a deconstructive function:

The Signifying Monkey, he who dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language, is our trope for repetition and revision, indeed our trope of chiasmus, repeating and reversing simultaneously as he

that obscures in the very process of evaluating (108).

⁴ While she does not make explicit reference to the concept of the trickster, Kristeva (1984) outlines a model of signification which reveals the subject as fulfilling, in its return to the semiotic, a destabilizing role similar to the one Vizenor attributes to the trickster-subject: "In this moment of heterogeneous contradiction [between the "inside" and "outside" of the subject], the subject breaks through his unifying enclosure and, through a leap (laughter? fiction?), passes into the process of social change that moves through him" (204).

does in one deft discursive act. (1988: 52)⁵

In her article on the writing of Lee Maracle, Susie O'Brien presents a reading of the trickster which also emphasizes his contingent nature as a relational sign:

The meaning of such a contract [between writer and reader] cannot be guaranteed by the sacred power of its words; rather, it must be negotiated within the historical space in which the functions of reader, writer and text are produced. To the place of the Transcendental Signified, the deity in which these functions were once rendered both indivisible and invisible, in steps Trickster, working *within* the historical space of the text to facilitate not a sacred communion, but secular communication between reader and writer, word and world. (86)

⁵ Like Vizenor, Gates sees the deconstructive practices of postmodernism as autochthonous to North America rather than a colonial and elitist imposition. Unlike Vizenor, he views the cultivation of deconstructive tactics by African-Americans to be the result of subaltern status: "Only a black person alienated from black language-use could fail to understand that we have been deconstructing white people's languages and discourses since that dreadful day in 1619 when we were marched off the boat in Virginia. Jacques Derrida did

Similarly, Native writer Marie Annharte Baker expands the notion of the trickster beyond a specific figure to encompass what she calls "the moment of the trickster," the point at which "we trip up and over our very limited human undertakings" ("Trick," 48). While this understanding of the trickster as a poststructuralist trope or state of mind might seem distinctly contemporary, there are instances in the early anthropological work on the trickster that support such an interpretation. For example, the Winnebago story relating how Wakdjunkaga, "the foolish one," got his name suggests that it is his identity that is contingent upon his actions rather than the reverse. After he has feasted upon his own intestines and remarked loudly upon their delicacy, an act which prompts onlookers to mock him, he laments, "Correctly indeed am I named Wakdjunkaga, the foolish one! By being called thus I have actually been turned into a wakdjunkaga, a foolish one" (Radin, 135). The trickster's heroic potential is less as a transhistorical Puckish prankster who protects Native culture through his exploits than as a contingent sign which disrupts the construction of monolithic narratives of

not invent deconstruction; we did!"

identity, narratives which permit the fixing of Native culture that colonialism requires.

Clearly this is dangerous territory. Vizenor's emphasis on semiotic freeplay would appear to hamper the construction of workable and historically grounded subject positions, "disconnect[ing] the fundamental relationship between the word and the world, the symbolic and the concrete," as Karen Oakes charges in her critique of Vizenor (138). What rescues Vizenor's model from the anything-goes category of postmodern indulgence is his belief that there are "tribal realities" (his term) which are immanent in Native history and life that, while inescapably contingent, do provide ethical standards against which Native identity can be judged. He defines these "tribal realities" as being "the pleasures of silence, natural reason, the rights of consciousness, transformations of the marvellous, and the pleasure of trickster stories" (1994: 8). If understood solely in terms of his critical writing, this so-called definition appears quite cryptic and elliptical, and calls into question Vizenor's own rejection of the fixity of Native discourse. However, it is in his fiction that

Vizenor attempts to reconcile the postmodern valorization of the indeterminate sign with the reality of Native cultural survival.

Perhaps the best illustration of Vizenor's tribal realities, especially the concept of natural reason, and how they can potentially transform epistemological categories is his screenplay for the short film *Harold of Orange*. *Harold of Orange* is the story of Harold Sinseer and his Warriors of Orange, who seek to bamboozle funds from a philanthropic organization with a scheme to produce "pinch beans," a supposedly native North American strain of coffee beans, and thereby create a chain of Native-run coffeehouses across North America. Like all of Harold's scams, such as the cultivation of miniature orange groves on reservations, this proposal is pure con. The story unfolds as do many contemporary trickster tales, with Harold and his warriors as trickster figures bent upon manipulating the hypocritical and hegemonic goodwill of the non-Native establishment to further the agendas of Native peoples. In this sense, Vizenor's tale would appear to belie the author's rejection of the trickster's discrete aesthetic presence in other narratives and the oppositional ideology bred of essentialism that this presence

serves to reify. This oppositional strategy is reinforced in the introduction to the film:

Harold and the Warriors of Orange
are descendants of the great trickster
who created the new earth after the flood.

But the trickster was soon word-driven
from the land by the white man,
who claimed the earth as his own
and returned to the trickster
only what he couldn't use.

Now, Harold and the Warriors of Orange
tribal tricksters determined to reclaim
their estate from the white man,
are challenging his very foundations. (1993:
53)

But this initial set-up is misleading: Vizenor's intention is less oppositional than transformational, where he attempts to dramatize the "comic holotrope" and how it opens up meaning and supports liberation of Native identity.

The climax of the screenplay involves a field trip the Warriors organize to sweeten the deal

pending with the foundation's directors who crave some authentic demonstrations of Native culture. Harold organizes a baseball game to be played in a parking lot on reserve land between the directors and the Warriors. Vizenor draws a conscious allusion to previous confrontations between Natives and non-Natives, with the refreshment cart (serving fry bread) bearing the sign "The Last Stand" (68). The difference here in this engagement is that the baseball game becomes the method by which each team transforms itself into its cultural/ideological opposite. The directors and the Warriors don uniforms with the words "Indians" and "Anglos" respectively. Each team plays at being the Other in a carnivalesque inversion of roles, with Harold the trickster emcee moving back and forth between huddles to deliver mock-inspirational speeches to each team. To the "Anglos" (the Warriors), he exhorts:

Listen gang, we are the "Anglos" and we're here to win and win big ... Play by the rules if you must, but rape and plunder to win the game ... When the "Indians" talk about the earth and their sacred ceremonies, steal a

base, win the game like we stole their land, with a smile ... Score, score, score, in the name of god, win, and send those "Indians" back to the reservation as victims, where the slow grass grows ... We'll mine the resources later. (76-77)

To the "Indians" (the directors) he advises:

We are made in dreams and the white man is the one who must win ... When we help him win we are free and soon the white man will want to be like us, and when that happens we can leave him, once and for all times, a winner, on the reservations he made for us ... (77)

Both positions are fraught with irony, articulating oppositional strategies with little space for compromise. The "Indians" enjoy participating in the subversion of non-Native gullibility:

Ted is an "Indian" at first base. Harold talks to Ted.

HAROLD: This is my first visit to a real reservation ... Where is your bingo hall?

TED: Behind the smoke shop, honkie ...

Harold steals to second base. Harold talks to Andrew on second base.

HAROLD: My great grandmother was an Indian princess once ...

ANDREW: Cherokee, no doubt ... Listen, my grandmother was a French duchess ... (78)

But perhaps more radical is the pretend-Indians' ironizing of Native political protest, when Marion, as an "Indian," says, "We blame everything on the Bureau of Indian Affairs ... Even when we win" (78). This is shocking, considering the directors' own ideological power; it would seem that given their positions of entrenched privilege, they don't have the right. This is Vizenor's intention, to parody the metanarratives of resistance as well as of domination, what he calls the "word wars". In the end, the "Anglos" let the "Indians" win the game, less a restatement of tragic colonial themes of defeat than a canny securing of a win-win situation; the Warriors, through their participation in the game, receive the foundation's grant, while the foundation earns a good name and philanthropic esteem. Unlike in other resistant trickster narratives, where the dominant is the

unsuspecting butt of the trickster's joke, the foundation directors are not deceived by the trickster's guile, as this exchange between directors indicates:

ANDREW: Kingsley, tell me, is [Harold] serious?

KINGSLEY: Harold insists that he is a trickster ...

ANDREW: A confidence man?

KINGSLEY: No, a tribal trickster is not the same ... He is rather sincere, even innocent, artless at times ... He believes that he can stop time and change the world through imagination.

Andrew is nonplussed; he pulls his ear and frowns.

ANDREW: With a foundation grant of course ...

KINGSLEY: Of course ... Who could change the world without a foundation grant?

Kingsley and Andrew smile; they share the same secret. (75-76)

Harold's role as trickster is to promote the pleasurable misreading of identity in a communal context. For Vizenor, the language game in which

both dominant and resistant discourse participate is both imaginative and transformational. It is a shared discourse whose power lies not in its depiction of reality but in its ability to (de)construct ideological agendas. Anthropologist Edward Bruner outlines a similar argument in his article "Ethnography as Narrative," where he suggests that the narrative of Native resistance (which came to dominate in discourse after the Second World War) must be understood as a narrative, an ordering of experience, rather than a transparent statement of historical fact. Moreover, this narrative and the narrative non-Natives construct in response to it are "transformations of each other; they are retellings of a narrative derived from the discursive practice of our historical era, instances of never-ceasing reflexivity" (1986: 149). (It is important that Vizenor chooses to have the postcolonial/postmodern rematch staged as a game of baseball, the only game where stealing is part of the legitimate rules of play.) What Vizenor demands from both camps is *sincerity*, where neither pretend that identity is fixed or exempt from interrogation.

One can participate in trickster discourse as long as one is willing to accept the fluidity of

subjecthood. For Vizenor, "my opposite is not the white man. My opposite is the methodology that separates" (Blaeser, 70). It is the manipulation of static and demeaning images of aboriginality in dominant discourse at the expense of Native peoples that Vizenor attacks. The mutual game of deconstruction that is played throughout *Harold of Orange* is threatened when one of the foundation's directors asks Harold about the "genetic" predisposition of Natives to alcoholism. By attempting to reify cultural bias as scientific fact, the director violates the tacit agreement to play the game of provisional identity according to the rules.

The championing of indeterminacy and contingency is part of Vizenor's larger philosophical project, one involving the critical reexamination of how Native identity has and should be maintained. If viewed from the perspective of identity politics, the affirmation of specific cultural positions, trickster discourse, in Vizenor's writings, comes to signify equally specific rejections of many standard empowering Native epistemes. Vizenor attacks what he calls "terminal creeds," fixed identities based upon reified notions of aboriginality:

[Terminal creeds occur] obviously, in written literature and in totalitarian systems. It's a contradiction, again, to balance because it's out of balance if one is in the terminal position. This occurs in invented Indians because we're invented and we're invented from traditional static standards and we are stuck in coins and words like artifacts. So we take up a belief and settle with it, stuck, static. (Bowers and Silet, 47)

Vizenor mocks what he sees to be the "terminal Indian" in many of his fiction writings. In *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*, set in a post-apocalyptic America, the character Belladonna Darwin-Winter Catcher (daughter of a Lakota shaman and a white anthropologist) is a satire of unself-reflexive Native identity. Belladonna's identity is grounded upon New Age spirituality and ersatz pan-Indianism, the Native as wise and intuitive child of Nature, and her refusal to adapt to the new environment and situations produced by the apocalypse reflects Vizenor's belief that identity must be open to change in order to capitalize upon circumstance. As an embodiment of the terminal

creed of "Indianness," she is finally murdered when she eats a cookie laced with poison offered to her by a group of non-Native hunters and animal breeders, who justify its action to her companions by saying "Your mixed-blood friend is a terminal believer and a victim of her own narcissism" (1978: 194). His condemnation of terminal creeds extends to real-life Native spokespeople like Paula Gunn Allen and Russell Means, two Native Americans who have had enormous influence upon Native literature and politics respectively. Both, claims Vizenor, pretend to offer "real" Native discourse, but in fact manipulate standard dominant tropes of power for self-aggrandizement⁶.

Vizenor's consistent point in all of this is not to reject wholesale the resistant narratives that people like Gunn Allen and Means espouse but to view the trickster/postmodern narrative as a perhaps more effective resistance narrative, equally powerful as revolution. Throughout *Harold of Orange*, Vizenor calls for images of the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee to be projected onto Harold, reflecting the continuity of Native resistance with

⁶ Vizenor's criticisms of Allen and Means appear in many of his non-fiction works, but an extended critique appears in *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*.

Harold's own trickster transformations⁷. For Vizenor, it is not agonistic struggle between individuals that determines Native resistance narratives but rather the *form* used to tell the story of this struggle. The form must have freeplay in the postmodern sense to achieve the sincerity (or "natural reason") requisite for ethical action.

In many ways, Vizenor's model of trickster discourse is representative of postmodern trickster narratives. His refiguring of the trickster reflects the changing needs and material conditions of Native peoples. In a purely tribal context, one of the trickster's functions is to teach members of a specific community what is sacred and profane, such as blood taboos, social taboos and the like. But, contemporary Native peoples are not necessarily part of hermetic communities, nor possess consensually shared notions of Native identity, a reality Thomas King underlines:

In our discussions of Native literature, we

⁷ In another piece, Vizenor has one of his characters perform "an urban revision of the Ghost Dance." In the original context, the Ghost Dance was performed in part to rid North America of the colonial invaders, whereas in Vizenor's, when a Native character "cannot see a tree he loses four white faces" (1987: 185). Thus, the Ghost Dance is refigured as trickster resistance.

try to imagine that there is a racial denominator which full-bloods raised in cities, half-bloods raised on farms, quarter-bloods raised on reservations, Indians adopted and raised by white families, Indians who speak their tribal language, Indians who speak only English, traditionally educated Indians, university-trained Indians, Indians with little education, and the like all share. We know, of course, that there is not. ("Introduction," x-xi)

In one sense, given this heterogeneity, it seems impossible for the trickster in contemporary narratives to operate entirely successfully as "the skeleton key for the cultural insider" (López, 21). Because "Native" becomes in this post-contact period a category of being with which one "identifies," consciously or otherwise, the constraints the trickster both flouts and reaffirms become less tied to the tribe than to individual identity, an identity frequently contra dominant discourse. As a result, there is (as I have suggested) a pull towards metonymy when the trickster is reconstructed as a champion/gate-keeper within Native narratives.

Vizenor's model resists the metonymic pull and displaces the subversive function of the trickster into the disruption of narrative form. This form, whether tragedy, comedy or epic, serves the needs of both dominant and resistant discourse and reaffirms their interdependence and mutual stasis. This stasis, argues Vizenor, prevents a truly radical Native identity from emerging. Form in narrative is inescapable and necessary, in the sense of genre, as a shared organizing principle of storytelling that permits inchoate details to be apprehended by an audience. What Vizenor and others demand is the inclusion of narrative form as an element of storytelling open to interrogation. The traditional trickster narratives often reflect a sophisticated awareness of narrative form, especially its permeability as a container of meaning. The Wishram people tell a story about Coyote's attempt to control the stories told about him. One day, he stopped on a journey upriver to suck his own penis. Realizing the damage this incident might cause his reputation, Coyote "locked up the story [of his obscene act]; he did not wish that the people should find out about it. So he headed the story off". He "heads the story off" by making all objects present promise not to "carry it

off". Unfortunately for Coyote, he forgot about the clouds sailing overhead, who free the story from the mountain prison where Coyote had placed it and carry it to the people, who ridicule him (qtd in Kroeber, 87). Just as the story of Coyote's auto-fellation cannot be headed off, the elements which complicate and therefore enrich narrative can never be contained by author or audience. By foregrounding the structure and ideology of narrative forms both dominant and resistant, the form is not destroyed, merely made more "sincere" in its artifice. In this way, Vizenor's *Warriors of Orange* are the perfect postmodern guerrilla fighters as defined by de Certeau, able to move between the oppositional categories of oppressed and oppressor, idealized positions of defense and attack.

* * *

As an example of how trickster discourse denatures form in order to reveal its ideological underpinnings, I have chosen to examine Floyd Favel's play *Lady of Silence* in light of its revision of the detective fiction genre. In this play, the standard counters brought to play in

detective stories are present: a murder, four likely suspects, and a detective tireless in his pursuit of the perpetrator. However, Favel's focus is less upon the successful solution of the crime than upon an often painful exploration of internalized racial self-loathing. Given this goal, the play attempts to foreground the desires often sublimated by the detective form and thereby force the audience to interrogate its own ideas concerning justice.

Tzvetan Todorov, in his formalistic study of detective fiction, distinguishes between two stories that coexist in varying degrees of emphasis within the overall narrative: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation (44). In *Lady of Silence*, the former story is quickly revealed to the audience. A white woman, Jane, is found beaten and stabbed to death outside a seedy "Indian" bar. The four suspects -- Village, Sheila, Ruth and Lisa -- each possess ample motive for the crime. Village is the jilted Native lover of Jane, while the three Native women each have been used and betrayed by Village in his pursuit of her. Clues, such as a charm bracelet with the engraved name "Nestor" left at the scene of the crime and traces of blood on Village, suggest that

a speedy solution to the puzzle is possible through the piecing-together of material and circumstantial evidence. However, we are quickly made aware that this case is far from open-and-shut. Two of the characters (Lisa and Sheila) confess to the murder with mutually exclusive retellings of the event (46-8), and the charm bracelet bears the name of an imaginary lover of Sheila. From its opening scene, the play flouts logical causality and pursues a different goal from the ratiocinative one typical of the genre.

If we, as critic-detectives, examine the play for inferential "clues" that, as Eco suggests, point to "analogous 'topoi,' themes, or motives" outside the bounds of the text (32), we immediately are struck by Favel's choice of name for his Native detective: Belmondo. Pursuing this curious detail, we are led to the morally and aesthetically complex world of French New Wave cinema. Jean-Pierre Belmondo was a prolific actor who starred in several seminal films which were part of the "New Wave" in French cinema, including Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierre Le Fou* (1965) and Jean-Pierre Melville's *Les Doulos* (1962). These films were seen to be in part homages to American film noir of the 1940s, but what distinguished these films from their American

precursors was the increased emphasis placed upon tainted moral codes and opacity of narrative. Critics of detective fiction have plotted the mutation of the form into at least three distinct subgenres, beginning with the "whodunit" (British), giving rise to the "hard boiled" detective story (American) (or *série noire* in France), which in turn was adapted along postmodern lines, resulting in the "anti-detective" story (many French novels characterized as *nouveau roman*, such as Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommés* (1953), can be placed in this category). Put baldly, the changes the genre underwent involved a shift in focus away from the story of the crime (preeminently vital in whodunit stories in the Arthur Conan Doyle-Agatha Christie tradition) to the story of the investigation, the tribulations of the slightly shady detective in his brush with corruption (Todorov).

Unlike the distanced and mathematical detective policing the boundaries of British polite society, the typical hard-boiled detective was vulnerable to both physical and moral attack, but, as Stephano Tani suggests, the hard-boiled detective of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett possessed "the professional highmindedness of the hardened but good 'knight' who fights within a

corrupt society":

. . . . the hard-boiled school, emphasizing realism and committed to a social and moral message (the corruption of society and the importance of the individual stand against it, no matter how ineffectual) creates a late disguised form of romance in which the hero must be idealistic and "tough" as well, because that is what is required of him by the corrupt society in which he operates. (25)

Because these stories frequently involved the detective's immersion in morally ambiguous situations, the reader could vicariously enjoy a brief glimpse of moral dissolution before the detective, as society's shabby but nonetheless noble protector, meted out justice. It is upon this very risk of moral dissolution that the anti-detective story was to capitalize, creating an ethical no-man's-land where the Law was shown to be a trope without legitimizing force. Melville's film *Les Doulos*, in which Belmondo plays a police informer, is a perfect example of this anti-detective type. In it, informers, police and

crooks all have "honest" and "dishonest" complicity with one another, with no clearcut distinctions between where one ethical category ends and the other begins. The detective's immunity to this contingency is forfeit; he must negotiate it and alter his own standards according to context. Similarly, the audience watching the film is drawn into this contingent relationship, forced constantly to shift its allegiance from one equally amoral character to another, as Robin Buss points out:

Melville shows us which side we are on, tricks us into believing that we have a clear case against the central character, then allows him to argue us into an uncertainty that obliges us to choose between mutually exclusive versions of the "truth". (72)

It is not by coincidence that Melville chooses the detective form to explore the subversion of moral absolutes. Many critics have suggested that the detective story is fundamentally an expression of the positivist paradigm of Enlightenment philosophy, and as such, ripe for post-positivist tweaking. In "The Detective and the Boundary,"

William Spanos writes:

For just as the form of the detective story has its source in the comforting certainty that an acute "eye," private or otherwise, can solve the crime with resounding finality by inferring causal relationships between clues which point to it (they are "leads," suggesting the primacy of rigid linear narrative sequence), so the "form" of the well-made positivistic universe is grounded in the equally comforting certainty that the scientist and/or psychoanalyst can solve the immediate problem by the inductive method, a process involving the inference of relationships between discontinuous "facts" that point to or lead straight to an explanation of the "mystery," the "crime" of contingent existence. . . . It is, therefore, no accident that the paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination is the anti-detective story (and its anti-psychoanalytical analogue), the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to "detect" and/or to psychoanalyse in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime

(or find the cause of the neurosis). (250-254)

Thus, the anti-detective story denatures generic structure and expectation in order to challenge the master narrative of totality and rationality it is perceived to articulate⁸. In these postmodern revisions (Ionesco's *Victims of Duty* is a theatrical version of this type), the relations between crime and solution, wrongdoing and culpability, are intentionally obscured and rendered absurd, and as a result, the desire for justice and the closure it promises are foregrounded and thwarted.

Like the diligent detective, we arrive, after the extended pursuit of a string of clues, full circle, back at the scene of the crime. The use by Favel of the name Belmondo for his detective incorporates the register of *série noire* and its ethical ambiguity into the play, an appropriate intertext given the play's subversion of generic form. As I have indicated, both the story of the crime and of the investigation are filled with ambiguity and paradox. Like other anti-detective stories, there is an explicit awareness of the

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For an argument similar to Spanos', see Ewert.

human need to witness the process through which order emerges out of chaos. Impatient with the slowness of his investigation, Belmondo reminds his suspects that "the clock is ticking, and our audience waits. It's a confession they want, it's a confession we must find" (36). While the play resembles anti-detective plays like *Victims of Duty* in its self-reflexive parody of formal convention, it (in the manner of many of the works examined in this thesis) does not manipulate these conventions to suggest a vaguely nihilistic or existential position often espoused in postmodern parody⁹. While the play parodies the standard signs of detective narrative, there are both real crimes and equally real culprits, not in bourgeois drawing rooms or seedy flophouses, but in the realm of identity politics.

Lady of Silence is primarily about the self-hatred suffered by Native peoples living in an environment where the ideals of beauty and worth are determined by the non-Native dominant discourse. Village, the jilted lover, is masterful in his manipulation of dominant tropes of

⁹ Ionesco's comment that all his plays are various meditations on the idea that "the comic is tragic and man's tragedy a matter of derision" (167) is a concise statement of the post-positivist tendency towards the detachment I suggest.

aboriginality, in turn strutting the stage mouthing the animalistic similes of Native male potency and begging victim status due to his genetic inferiority (7-8). He is the image of Other-directed Native identity, constantly pursuing the non-Native perfection that the murdered Jane comes to represent. For the three Native women, Jane, too, is a symbol of the promised land, but one which serves to remind them of their perpetual banishment:

Sheila: She was born among the marble ruins of a dead civilization, chalk white and slender as a yew tree. Her blue eyes sparkled mediterranean blue, azure. Lips blew kisses soft as pussy willows. Against her whiteness our hate pounded its teeth and nails, until there was only blood and shreds of skin. Our screams died to hoarse whispers in our dazed oppression. (24)

Just as the narrative in traditional detective form profluently reveals the hidden relationship between cause and effect in a positivist sense, Belmondo's investigation in the play mirrors a racial/cultural search for cause and effect in the sphere of

identity. In hard-boiled fiction, we as readers are attracted by the quasi-sociological nature of the investigation of marginal characters and their environments, a guided tour that also serves to stimulate our voyeuristic appetite for the Other. In this case, the crime under investigation, the murder of Jane, is of secondary interest to the audience, who needs to "know" the causes of Native violence and self-abuse which have resulted in the effect of murder. And because the crime was interracial, a white woman murdered by Natives, the discovery of guilt and motive is, from a non-Native perspective, vital to either the reestablishment of amicable intercultural relations or the reentrenchment of cultural hegemony.

Like other "ethnic" or "marginal" detective stories, such as Rick Shiome's play *Yellow Fever*, the detective's investigation of both guilt and motive is necessarily an investigation of group cohesion and cultural identification as markers of centre/periphery status. In Shiome's play, for example, the hard-boiled form is mimicked without obvious subversion, with the second-generation Japanese-Canadian gumshoe Sam Shikaze investigating the mysterious disappearance of the Cherry Blossom Queen from a Vancouver neighbourhood. It is in the

elucidation of motive that the play reveals its cultural critique, which is framed not in psychoanalytic or individual, but rather in cultural/political terms. Each suspect's motive, whether to commit the crime or hinder its solution, is shown to reflect the individual's role in the reaffirmation of dominant (non-Japanese) hegemony, and the implicit crime in *Yellow Fever* is collusion with those who seek to break down Japanese-Canadian solidarity.

In similar fashion, *Lady of Silence* also interrogates the ways in which Native identity is threatened by colonizing forces, but unlike *Shiome*, Favel subverts the detective formula in explicit ways. In addition to the narrative's self-consciousness which I have already mentioned, the play is framed as a particular performance of a ceremony which all the characters are doomed to repeat nightly, as Belmondo warns Village: "until this cancerous crime is burned from the cells of your body you will remain here under the harsh light where no secret stays hidden for long, the curtain will not drop" (6). This ceremonial frame is reinforced by the play's staging, where Belmondo, as detective/priest, officiates over the proceedings from a raised altar on which are placed

ritual objects such as roses, a silver chalice and a silver bell. By presenting the investigation story in the heightened style of ritualized action and speech (typically, notes Todorov, the story of the investigation in standard narratives attempts to render itself transparent in order to act as mediator between the reader and the story of the crime (46)), Favel accomplishes two very important things. First, he reveals the submerged identity of the standard detective form as ceremony, in that in the detective story group solidarity and communal health are restored by the expiation of both the sacrificial victim and the scapegoat murderer¹⁰. But perhaps in a more important sense, the representation of the investigation in ritual terms illuminates the goal of the performance, namely a reorientation of how identity is constructed. Ritual, in its basic sense, involves not the narration of fact but rather the narration of recombination, where the reordering of cultural elements effects a change in the subject's consciousness, thereby restoring harmony on both an individual and communal level. Despite the confessions of both Sheila and Lisa to the murder

¹⁰ For an extended discussion of the detective story as the ritual cementing of social identity through sacrifice, see Heissenbüttel.

of Jane, it is Village, as the principal actor in this ceremony, who must "confess his crime" of racial self-hatred using the death of Jane as a catalyst (Belmondo admonishes him that he will be incapable of love until he does (7)).

When Village stands over the battered body of his former lover, he expresses the shame at the root of his desire:

I looked into the pools of her blood. I saw my reflection and I thought that, surely, I was made in the image of God hisself. I looked back into the bloody mirror to slick back my hair, and I saw ... my heavy Indian features ... Lice check! Indians on one side! We are standing in a line at the front of the class. Mrs. Phillips searches our heads for lice. Pink rosy cheeked children witness our lousiness. I see an open schoolbook in front of the little girl in the front row. I disappear into the pages and I am Dick and she is Jane. My dirty pudgy hand creeps her rosy thigh to the edge of her yellow skirt. All the time I am wishing, please don't let me have lice, please don't let me have lice. And I want to disappear under her skirt to a

secret garden where only her and I will roam
like first man and first woman. See Jane run.
Run Jane run. Run, run, run! Little Village
has lice!! (47)

Just as the hard boiled detective is unavoidably tainted by the company he is forced to keep, Belmondo too is implicated in the crime of self-hatred. Under harsh questioning, Village accuses him of hypocrisy, claiming that given the same circumstances, Belmondo would have behaved as Village had (12). The shaken detective, no longer the imperious orchestrator of the ceremony, closes the play with a confession of his own culpability:

To look deep into the well is to see your own dark eyes. I remember I took the fork and began to gouge out my eyes to feed the crows, until my mother stopped me. I hate you! I hate you! Let the crows take my eyes! Come crows! I can't bear the burden of this tainted sight. My people, what have they done to you? To peer deep into the well is to have self knowledge or eternal hate. (50)

What becomes apparent throughout the play is the

role Jane plays as a signifier of Native longing and self-loathing. Her corpse is never shown on stage, only signified by a white dress and a bouquet of red roses. She is eulogized in a hymn sung during a procession of the characters who bear her relics at the start of the play:

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
rose of memory
rose of forgetfulness
exhausted and lifegiving
worried reposeful
the single rose in now the garden
where all loves end
where all loves end (5)

This union of opposites reflects Jane's symbolic importance in the minds of the characters, but also reinforces her unreality as a murder victim. She is not a body murdered but a body desired, and her murder is a kind of *felix culpa* ("blessed fall") which holds the promise of Native redemption. On one hand, this self-conscious manipulation of non-Native women as symbols of threat rather than

threats in and of themselves is more sophisticated than the more literal attack found in Nahanee's *Three Native Women* discussed in Chapter 3. However, as with the "symbolic" rape of Patsy/Nanabush in Highway's *Dry Lips*, non-Native female spectators of this play might well exclaim, as Ann-Marie MacDonald does in reference to Shakespeare, "good going, boys, but get your fucking metaphors off my body!" (Rudakoff and Much, 143). While not minimizing this problematic use of the signs of female-directed violence, I feel it is Favel's refusal to present a "true crime" easily solvable by ratiocinative means which forces the audience to examine its own desire for certain knowledge of Native identity, its "fallen nature". Between the standard trope of detective fiction and its postmodern subversion, absolute order versus absolute disorder, Favel constructs a morality tale about Native self-image that partakes of both but legitimates neither.

In an important sense, what distinguishes *Lady of Silence* as trickster discourse is its performative demonstration of how truth is contingent upon the means whereby we attempt to articulate it. The notion that meaning is both contingent and affective can perhaps be usefully

illustrated by reference to the tradition of the ritual clown in Native cultures. Clowns in a tribal context are the revealers of artifice at the heart of ritual. Often, the ritual clown will parody and burlesque ceremonies held sacred by the community, as in the Navaho Mountain Chant, where the clown will clumsily imitate the shaman's sleight-of-hand performances, revealing their secrets (Tedlock, 108). These transgressions are not destructive of ritual but are instead revelatory of a higher truth, that human actions are symbolic representations of ineffable power, signifiers rather than signifieds. Performance is vital to the understanding of metaphysical forces, where human symbolic acts are deictic signs that do not obscure their contingent role. The gaps between subjective meaning and artifice, instead of causing anxiety, are an integral part of the enjoyment of the ritual by its audience. In his description of Kwakiutl ritual performance, Stanley Walens points out how performative fiction easily coexists with the metaphysical truths that can only be approached through this fiction:

. . . . rituals often seem to focus on the revelation that reality is merely a fiction, a

presentation that humans make for one another. Vast secrets are revealed as being mere mechanical tricks; the spirit in the mask turns out to have the same birthmark behind his left knee as does Uncle Ralph. We may marvel at the technical ability of an Uncle Ralph or a Laurence Olivier to make us temporarily suspend our disbelief that we are watching them and for a moment to see only a Hamlet, or a cannibal bird. (57)

And it is this movement between artifice and subjective meaning that distinguishes *Lady of Silence* as trickster discourse. No "true" demonstration of what it means to be authentically Native is ever enacted in the play; instead, Favel shows through absence (of corpse and of Native self) the gaps in identity that need to be filled with affirmative self-worth. Through the foregrounding of the impulses latent in detective form, this form is made more "sincere" in Vizenor's sense of the term, in that the audience recognizes how the form of narrative helps determine what is permitted within its confines. In the standard detective form, the identity of each interlocutor (eg. reader, detective, and suspects) is fixed, and

the multiple effects of a crime are traced back to their ordinary cause. Here, the determination of whether there was indeed a crime is left in doubt, and the multiplication of motives and confessions obscures the relations between victim, perpetrator, and detective. Guilt and innocence are shown to be contingent upon one's perspective with no "true" version of events taking precedence. There is no trickster figure here to contain the immanent disorder in the events, only a freeplay of elements which at once invite order and frustrate it through parodic inversion. The play reveals itself to be a story told to a group, each member of which will laugh or shudder at different points in the telling according to his or her perspective as to who is the butt of a suspiciously trickster-like joke.

CONCLUSION: COYOTE HANGS THE STARS

[When the people emerged from the Underworld it was dark, so they made stars and told the War Twins to go place them properly.] Coyote said to himself, "I will go with the two boys." They put the seven together, the Pleiades, in a good position, and those six, Orion, they put them together, and the biggest one they put towards the east, and another they put on the south side, and another on the west side, and another on the north side. Then they put up the dipper Just when they had put all these up, Coyote said to himself, "It is a big job!" He said to the boys, "We shall never finish this work, we shall all die first, why can't we do this?" He took the stars and threw them in every direction, improperly Then [the people] saw stars scattered all over the sky. The people said, "Bad Coyote, did you do that?" -- "Yes," he said. -- "If you had not gone with them, all the stars would be well placed. But you are bad Coyote; you scattered them all over the sky." They were very angry. Coyote said, "That's all right, it's a lot of work to put them all into good positions, better to scatter them around."

(qtd in Pueblo Animals and Myths)

Once a grizzly bear, coming down a narrow mountain trail, met a mouse coming up the trail. The mouse stood up and looked the grizzly bear in the eyes. Then he said, "Is your name Kak?" The bear got so agitated at being called such a silly name that he fell off the mountain. (I got that story from reading Claude Lévis Strauss.) Your name really is Kak. You will not fall down just by me saying it, but if millions of us say it over and over maybe you will fall down, and that would be very good for you. I want to say my own things to the world, and so, of course, given history, part of "my own things" is that you don't let me say things. Another part is that your name is Kak. You may think these are the main things I have to say; you probably think I am your mouse. You think I am *your* Other.

Jimmie Durham

To write by fragments: the fragments are then so many stones on the perimeter of a circle: I spread myself around: my whole little universe in crumbs: at the center, what?

Roland Barthes

Throughout my examination of Native performance (on stage, on print, or in the visual arts), I have attempted to illustrate how these performances articulate a sense of self that is at once multivalent and grounded, both destabilizing rigid definitions of identity and championing a "Native" subjectivity. This project is, clearly, fraught with difficulty. On one hand, the evaluation of Native performance as postmodern can co-opt a politically dynamic artistic practice to serve largely non-Native philosophical agendas, either to illustrate the dissolution of coherent resistant narratives, or to give postmodern theorists uncomfortable with the political ramifications of their premises hope that deconstruction can be employed by the marginal "friendlies" to achieve ends they themselves can recognize as valid. On the other, the postmodern label can help facilitate the political disenfranchisement of Native peoples, who become wandering signifiers in a language game without inalienable rights to culture and property. In this light, N. Scott Momaday's assertion that "an Indian is an idea which a given man has of himself" (96) has both a certain power and an equally certain risk. In this conclusion, I will offer a

discussion of the concept of *bricolage* as developed by Lévi-Strauss and Derrida to suggest how the suspension of both contingency and specificity in Native performance can facilitate a real reordering of how Native experience is perceived in theatre.

In his work *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss attempts to define the essential differences between what he calls "mythic thought" and "scientific thought" through the analogy of the engineer versus the *bricoleur*. The engineer, using the methods of science, constructs a plan and designs tools to complete a specific project, while the *bricoleur*, the odd-job Jack-of-all-trades, makes use of leftovers from previous projects and cobbles them together according to need. The *bricoleur*, writes Lévi-Strauss,

is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand," that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is

always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions. (1966: 17)

The engineer performs an editorial and proscriptive role in the use of structure, in that by envisioning a project to be completed according to a plan, this plan or structure creates the events that unfold in accordance with it. In contrast, the makeshift tools and materials employed by the *bricoleur* are not premeditated, and thus their final structure does not preexist them (22). This distinction between instrumentality and contingency is central to Lévi-Strauss' concept of cultural difference, and to the understanding of how Native performance operates¹.

¹ I am aware of the irony of using Lévi-Strauss as an activating model in a study that is ostensibly post-structural in its emphasis upon agency, given his belief that "the ultimate goal of the human sciences [is] not to constitute, but to dissolve man" (247). However, I see his model as articulating a useful way in which to understand how cultural processes operate. And like the *bricoleur*, I am using bits and pieces of Lévi-Strauss while ignoring his overarching

For Lévi-Strauss, the tribal mind could best be understood as a cultural *bricoleur*, apprehending the piecemeal ephemera of experience and reordering it into the coherent categories of myth. Because the tribal mind, according to the anthropologist, could not conceive of transcendent cultural patterning or teleological imperatives, the mythic products of Native culture lacked the self-consciousness and reliance upon preexisting notions of structure that often distinguished Western philosophical enquiry. However, in the context of contemporary Native expression, this linking of *bricolage* to a tribally contingent worldview becomes in an important sense more complicated.

As I have argued, Native artists like Tomson Highway often are reified by both Native and non-Native observers as impersonal revealers of inviolable cultural truths about Native culture. Hungry to replace the tired and sterile images of the past with ones more representative of Native life and history, audiences are tempted to believe the Native artist to be in possession of strictly bounded conceptual frameworks out of which Native stories are generated. Since, as Lévi-Strauss writes, "the engineer works by means of concepts

engineer-like goals.

and the *bricoleur* by means of signs" (19-20), the Native artist is seen to operate more as an engineer who proceeds with conceptual foreknowledge of the project of cultural expression, and whose artistry lies in the deft deployment of his or her specially designed tools, the certain signs of culture, in completion of this project. In discourse, both dominant and resistant tropes are all too frequently predicated on the engineer model as the source of and justification for Native images, and this model in turn serves the editorial function of eliminating elements not consonant with, not "native enough" for, a tacitly or explicitly conceived project. In his famous discussion of Lévi-Strauss, Derrida argues that the very notion of the engineer as an ontological category is an impossibility, since such an entity would have to be "the absolute origin of his own discourse," creating "the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon" (1970: 256). For Derrida, all discourse is *bricolage*, bound by "the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined" (255). The audience's desire for the Native engineer is motivated by a fundamental need for a cultural subject, one open to either cooption or

enshrinement as a transcendental truth of being. The "myth" of the engineer, structure and tools designed for a specifically conceived end, has instrumental force to shape how aboriginality is understood. What I feel is necessary in the study of Native performance is the recognition of the Native performer's status as *bricoleur*, engaged in the recombination of idiosyncratic and contingent elements of Native culture. Highway, Moses, Nolan and others are not simply "showing us" Native culture as product; they are sharing with us highly personal dialogues with culture that are often filled with elision, tactical irony, and questions left unanswered.

In his discussion of *bricolage*, Lévi-Strauss sees the products of tribal expression as being determined by three contingent circumstances: the occasion for the work, the execution of the work, and the purpose for which the work is intended. The first, the occasion, is both exterior and prior to the creative act, and inspires the artist in his or her fashioning of the materials at hand. The second type of contingency lies in the limitations of the material, illustrated by Lévi-Strauss' example of the wood sculptor, where the contingent effects the execution of the work in "the size or

shape of the piece of wood the sculptor lays hands on, in the direction and quality of its grain, in the imperfection of his tools, in the resistance which his materials or project offer to the work in the course of its accomplishment, in the unforeseen incidents arising during work" (27). The third type involves an awareness of how the work will be utilized, whether as ornament, tool, or sacred object. These three types of contingency can be illustrated in action by a delightful anecdote given by the Navaho informant Little Wagon and recorded by the anthropologist Barre Toelken:

A small family passing by on horseback had stopped or the night, according to the usual custom. Outside it had begun to snow lightly, and one of the travellers' children asked where snow came from. Little Wagon, in answer, began a long and involved story about an ancestor who had found a piece of beautiful burning material, had guarded it carefully for several months until some spirits came to claim it, and had asked then that the spirits allow him to retain a piece of it. This they would not allow, but they would see what they could do for him. In the

meantime he was to perform a number of complicated and dedicated tasks to test his endurance. Finally, the spirits told him that in token of his fine behavior they would throw all the ashes from their own fireplace into Montezuma Canyon each year when they cleaned house. Sometimes they fail to keep their word, and sometimes they throw down too much; but in all, they turn their attention to us regularly, here in Montezuma Canyon. When this long story had been completed, there was a respectful silence for a moment, and then the young questioner put in: "It snows at Blanding, too. Why is that?" "I don't know," the old man replied immediately, "You'll have to make up your own story for that." (146-7)

In his commentary on the episode, Toelken emphasizes the contingent nature of Little Wagon's story:

I found by questioning [Little Wagon] that he did not in fact consider it an etiological story and did not in any way believe that that was the way snow originated; rather, if the

story was "about" anything, it was about moral values, and the deportment of a young protagonist whose actions showed a properly reciprocal relationship between himself and nature. (147)

Little Wagon's story is both eminently flexible and grounded in the moment in its use of localized geography, the vagaries of seasonal weather changes, and an awareness of his audience. But, it is also important to note, these contingent circumstances are incorporated to communicate traditional tribal beliefs which are in turn unaffected by their contingent context. Their power is in fact demonstrated by their plastic adaptability to various circumstances and narrative vehicles. The beliefs' import is not dependent upon a fixed causal structure but instead upon an active personal engagement in the process of myth-making, hence Little Wagon's encouragement to his listener to "make up your own story".

This contingency in the service of affective meaning-constructions found in traditional narratives, I strongly believe, can also be discerned in contemporary Native plays. As I have shown in earlier chapters, many Native plays can be

viewed as creative responses to specific elements in both dominant and resistant discourse (such as the Indian Act, the popular narratives of history, or the liberation of traditional trickster discourse). The contingency of execution is perhaps the most crucial type in my discussion of Native theatre, for it is the limitations of the medium or cultural materials, the resistance they offer to the artist, that fuels the creative agonism in the plays themselves. Whether it is the materiality of the body, the constraints of traditional narrative form, or the bonds of language itself, each play grapples with the at once finite and suggestive limitations of theatrical performance, and the produced works foreground the resistance encountered in the process of cultural construction. The third type of contingency, the work's teleological relation to future use, is also incorporated into the performance, where the play's usefulness as an articulation of Native subjecthood or its vulnerability to cooption within dominant or resistant discourse is questioned.

As a direction for future research, this threefold model of contingency might prove useful in its focus upon the material and occasional influences on creativity. Given that Native

theatre can be seen in the light of its relation to contingency, plays by Native Canadians could be interrogated in terms of their specific relations to occasion, execution and teleology. For example, the issue of gender construction in Native theatre is highly contentious, and involves many complex and competing factors including sexual orientation. Many of the higher-profile male Native playwrights are gay, and this fact might upon examination be seen to bear directly upon how Native genders are conceived on stage. Some playwrights, like Billy Merasty, attempt to reinterpret the traditional role of berdache, the cross-gendered male endowed with spiritual power, in light of contemporary images of gayness. In his book *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*, Walter Williams documents the mutually informing relationship between the berdache tradition and twentieth-century gay identity in terms of both empathy and divergence. Such a study could also be initiated treating Native theatre as a locus for creative cultural explorations of sexual identity and sexual difference. Another approach which would undoubtedly bear fruit would be one which explored how both background and ethnic hybridity shapes Native performance. The questions

concerning background might ask how a playwright's relation to a specific community, on a reserve or in an urban setting, affects the amount of teleological signalling or interrogation of reception in his or her work. I have suggested briefly how ethnic hybridity can be either elided or championed according to ideology, and since many Native-identified playwrights are of mixed parentage, questions relating to cross-cultural critique in their works would perhaps generate useful insight. The guiding principle in all these investigations of Native *bricolage* needs to be that description and interpretation, and not proscription and cultural gate-keeping, is the aim of critical work. My own study of Native performance is consciously discursive and designed (I hope) to open up the field of study rather than circumscribe it. Whatever the tack, I feel that it is important to understand Native performance as being sensitive to the localized and constantly shifting terrain of Native experience, and not providing a rigid template against which this experience is proscriptively measured.

While Lévi-Strauss' delineation of contingency in mythic thought can be valuable as a critical tool in the examination of Native performance, one

must be aware of the different premises in operation in a contemporary context. *Bricolage*, after all, is in Lévi-Strauss' model the supreme mark of unself-consciousness, a quality very hard to come by in recent Canadian theatre. Because *bricolage's* contingency is dependent upon the absence of preexistent structure, once it is adopted as a conscious model for cultural expression, it risks becoming a disguised form of engineering, "a project to be without a project" as David Carroll warns (167). This being said, I feel that the self-conscious *bricolage* in Native performance aims not for absolute instrumentality, but instead to reveal how all cultural positions are contingent. Even the elements presented as instrumental, such as the body in Native women's performance, Mojica's historicity or Kane's community of women in *Moonlodge*, are shown to be contingent upon other equally contingent elements for their affective meaning (eg. the body upon gender and culture, historical events upon successive interpretation, the community upon notions of individual need). No element is an absolute identity; it must be invested with meaning through performance. This sense of performed identity is intrinsic to the constant process of

rediscovering one's ethnicity. All people are in a key sense performers, as Michael M.J. Fischer cogently suggests:

[it is] the paradoxical sense that ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual and that it is often something quite puzzling to the individual, something over which he or she lacks control. Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic . . . something that emerges in full -- often liberating -- flower only through struggle. (195)

And it is in this context of struggle, for political rights, for the right to affirm heterogeneous subject positions, that Native *bricolage* is self-conscious, in that it is utilized to elude the totalizing impulses inherent in both dominant and resistant discourse. Lévi-Strauss' etymology of the term is illuminating here:

In its old sense the verb "bricoleur" applied to ball games and billiards, to hunting,

shooting and riding. It was however always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle. (16)

It is this "extraneous movement," "swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle," that captures the evasive manoeuvring of postmodern Native performance, its ironic feint and tactical deployment of excess signification.

In my Introduction, I stated that this postmodern spirit presents a "new" conception of Native subjecthood. The term "new" is clearly deceptive in its suggestion of a break with what has come before. As I have illustrated, Native theatre engages acutely with the past, rediscovering ways of opening up the tropes of aboriginality to fresh interpretation. As the canny tale told by Little Wagon or the emanating words of the wampum belt indicate, Native narratives are designed to be reinterpreted by successive generations and adapted to their unique circumstances. Charlotte Townsend-Gault (1992), in her discussion of the refashioning of ritual in contemporary Native art, argues that ritual becomes

politically charged when it is seen as a process, "ritualizing," embodying an "idea in transformation" rather than a static model of coherence:

"Ritualizing," then, is taken to mean both a social process involving an audience and an act of cultural assertion. . . . This definition of ritualizing permits the combination of elements that grow out of cultural knowledge and practice, or what is taken to be such, drawing on its known efficacy, with other elements that are speculative, exploratory, inventive. In the former, meanings draw on shared knowledge; the latter attempt to deal with the slipped signifiers. (53)

This doubled focus of critique and assertion, she suggests, renders Native artists both complicit with and detached from the cultural processes they make manifest. Despite the risks inherent in such a position, Townsend-Gault argues that these risks are necessary if truly polyvocal subject positions are to be constructed. What enables Native performance to thrive in this interstitial gap

between complicity and critique is its heightened awareness of the human desire for order in representation, and the equally powerful desire to thwart this order. In the quotation from the Pueblo creation story that serves as one of the epigraphs to this conclusion, Coyote, the consummate *bricoleur*, hangs the stars in glorious disarray not only out of laziness, but also because pure order is only one aspect of human desire and endeavour. Order here or in performance isn't rejected, only reexamined for the kinds of experience it includes or excludes.

And this, centrally, is the political import of Native performance. Many Native artists are reticent to adopt overtly didactic roles in the political arena, as Kathryn Brownsey points out in her examination of West Coast "Native art"². She explains this conspicuous absence as reflecting a traditional respect for the divergent roles in Native communities, especially those performed by Native political and activist figures (126). This positing of a division of labour is accurate only to a point. I would argue that much contemporary Native art, especially performance, fulfils a

² There are, of course, exceptions to this rule even in the context of West Coast artists (Bill Reid being one notable example), as Brownsey acknowledges.

profoundly political function in its revelation that identity is inherently and tactically contingent. By challenging notions of Native culture and the narratives we use to articulate Native experience, this art forces the audience to recognize the threatened status of this experience within totalizing ideological discourse. Cautious of simplification here, I think many of the conflicts facing aboriginal peoples throughout the world -- self-determination, use of resources, just compensation for colonial crimes -- involve the fundamental right to choose one's own destiny. Native performance enacts the volatile process of this choice, its onerous responsibilities and its promise of liberative possibilities.

In closing, I feel that the greatest success of Native performance lies in its unpredictability, the audience's wondering of what will happen next. Will the Native performer tell us a traditional story, provide a critique of this story, reflect upon current events, incorporate a motif from Greek mythology, or execute a slapstick pratfall? All seem equally possible, and equally exciting. I was reminded of this delight of the unforeseen when I was asked by two undergraduate students to provide a short scene from a Native play for them to

perform for their Native literature class. At the time, I was working on Chapter 3 of this thesis, and had been savouring what I had seen to be the controlled irony of Yvette Nolan's *Child*. They took to the piece immediately and mounted a performance of it for the class. During this performance, I experienced "the moment of the trickster" that Baker has described, the point at which "we trip up and over our very limited human undertakings". In my analysis of the piece, I had focused on its message of cross-cultural understanding, and had seen its effect largely in terms of its cautiously ironic technique. I hadn't foreseen the intensely emotional content of the work, its wrenching evocation of a child's experience of being lost and found. The performance left the audience (including myself) intensely moved and grateful for the passionate rendering given it by its performers. I was reminded quite graphically of the power of Native performance to combine emotional honesty and self-conscious critique in an irresistible way. Kathleen Shannon, the pioneering feminist-documentary filmmaker with the National Film Board, relates a similar instance in her career when she helped a Native community make a film about itself:

I worked on a film that a crew of young Native people had shot and we'd taken the rushes for that film around to a number of Native communities. There was one shot that I would have gotten rid of because to my eye, it looked like a repetition of the shot that was previous to it. But in Native communities that shot always got a laugh Finally I said to someone "What's going on in that shot that's so funny?" He said "Oh, it's that policeman who loses his hat". . . . I looked at it closely, and there was something happening a way up in the corner of the frame and I had not noticed it in the hundreds of times that I had seen that shot. Yet an audience of Native people had seen that the first time 'round I was taught to look at what's relevant, discard what's not part of the action the fact was, I had not seen the full frame³.

In ways vital to Native cultural reinvention, Native performers "act Indian," with all the

³ Kathleen Shannon. Interview. *Harpur's Heaven and*

metatheatre and survival instinct the action connotes. I believe that by sensitizing ourselves to how this performance operates, we can more responsibly respond to its nuances. Edward Bruner sums up this challenge nicely: "Rather than ask what culture is, ask how culture is achieved, produced, and made believable" (1993: 324).

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