CHANGING THE SUBJECT
Objectivity, Trickster and the Transformation of the Western Academy

by

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In this discussion, the supervaluation of scientific objectivity is critiqued in the context of its foundational role in the legitimization/delegitimization of knowledges. It is proposed that the quest for an 'absolute' objectivity constitutes a dominant Western strategy employed to maintain inequitable power relations over and against identified Others, and that therefore a powerful critique must be applied. It is also maintained that this paradigm informs the Western academy and thus shapes all educational experiences in the West. Transforming the dominant academy then into one which seeks to address a global spectrum of human knowledge requires strategies grounded in a powerful dialectical critique of dualistic objectivity. This critique may be found in the extant traditional and contemporary knowledges of indigenous peoples, particularly in the trickster narratives, the particular characteristics of which, I contend, constitute a profound challenge to, and subversion of, narrow quests for an absolute objectivity.
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Introduction
A fore-note on my own academic location

As a card-carrying member of the dominant group, by lineage if not by agenda, I have focused my scholarship on the construction and effects of dominant epistemology, accessing these themes via personal experiences and reflections on my own privileged history. While I, as a white Euro-Canadian heterosexual male, can write with no legitimate personal experience of material felt consequences of racism, heterosexism or sexism, my intention is to investigate potential intersections between oppressions in an attempt to relate my own experiences of both (limited) oppression and (unlimited) privilege to issues of marginalization. I believe that fundamental intersections and foundations do exist, and that theorizing on these intersections/foundations may inform subversive praxes and coalition-building in the cause of social justice.

My scholarship has focused largely on the issues and history of North American Aboriginal peoples, peoples whose fundamental traditional\(^1\) epistemologies I relate to as powerfully true. In this thesis, I have endeavored, wherever possible, to allow the authors/speakers of indigenous\(^2\) words to speak directly to the reader. While I take responsibility for the framing of this discussion, I defer credit for the fundamental ideas and the profound words which inspire and inform it. I have sought out original indigenous authors - embodied commentators

\(^1\) The term 'traditional', as contrasted to 'indigenous' (see footnote number 2), refers in this discussion to those statements, beliefs, stories, values, practices, etc. that constitute a living multigenerational text of a people's history, contemporary struggles and achievements, and aspirations.

\(^2\) When using the term 'indigenous', I am referring to that expressly political definition of a people engaged in an anti-colonial resistance to domination and, sometimes, genocide. This definition is based on a people's self-definition according to local, traditional criteria.
rather than disembodied Western commentateurs - wherever possible, and have attempted to apply an ongoing critique of my own commentary. I must clarify at this point, as part of my self-critique, that while many of the authors cited below have been subject to a critique from within the North American Aboriginal community, as well as the anti-racist scholarly community, regarding their orientation to gender and sexual orientation, my critique of their words and thoughts has been limited to the discussion at hand. I have not taken up the particular issues of Aboriginal women, for example, within the trickster tradition, nor have I addressed sexual orientation amongst Aboriginal communities. I understand that these omissions constitute the potential for proposing a conflated experience as the generalized experience of all indigenous persons. It is my hope that other communities and scholars will effect a critique of this discussion specific to their own embodied voices and concerns, such that the text may be enriched, animated, problematized and contextualized.

Vine Deloria Jr., in his classic “manifesto” Custer Died For Your Sins, sardonically quips that

Anyone and everyone who knows an Indian or who is interested, immediately

3 In this discussion, the terms “West” and “Western” will be used to denote a relatively unified theory and set of practices, grounded in a history of ideas which has found its fullest expression in the Western European eighteenth-century intellectual movement, the Enlightenment. This movement was itself grounded, according to historian E.J. Hobsbawm (1962), in “the conviction of the progress of human knowledge, rationality, wealth, civilization, and control over nature...” drawing its’ strength “primarily from the evident progress of production, trade, and the economic and scientific rationality believed to be associated inevitably with both.” (37) Enlightenment values promote technology, rationality, and utilitarian philosophy in opposition to metaphysics and traditional religion/spirituality. (Dunan, 1968: 129) Historian Marcel Dunan (1968) emphasizes that a “small [Western] cultural elite,” including mathematicians, philosophers and scientists, spearheaded the supervaluation of reason and rationality which became the foundation of Enlightenment thought. (129) I agree with Brayton Polka (1986,1990) and others that the foundations of Enlightenment dualism predate the eighteenth-century, having antiquitous origins in Greco-Roman philosophy and literature, and that this dualism survives today both in popular folk wisdom and many scientific academic contexts. “West” and “Western” then, in this discussion, refer to a set of historical, dualistic themes and principles which have become gradually (though not linearly or without challenge) entrenched throughout the course of the last two millennia of Western civilization, and which have become fully institutionalized in many contemporary thought systems and knowledges.
and thoroughly understands them... There is no subject on earth so easily understood as that of the American Indian. (Deloria, 1969: 5)

Let me state unequivocally that I neither possess nor hope to gain any such "easy knowledge about Indians." (Deloria, 1969: 5) My desire to locate intersections of oppression pushes me to learn about specific peoples living in specific spaces and inhabiting bodies which are not my own (as like or unlike my own as they may be.) My analysis (consciously) presupposes no simplistic, patronizing and projecting, ‘immediate knowledge’ of Aboriginal men or Aboriginal women, or of their embodied experience. This smacks of obscuring colonial discourse with good intentions: certainly, I remain a white, European academic reflecting on epistemologies that I do not own but can relate on some level to as powerfully supportive of my own beliefs and convictions. Despite all of this, Nanabush and Coyote, if I understand them a little, regularly remind me that I am at all times susceptible to the filter of my colonizing Eurocentric heritage, and may rank with the best of fools at times. Perhaps I will be delivered up as an epistemological wannabe and nothing more. I’m willing to risk it. It is my sincere hope that future readers of this work will reframe such foolishness and properly restore the work to a ‘right relation’ through principled, ‘circular’ critique. It is also my hope that, in the event of being shown to be an unconscious rationalizing ‘fool,’ I will be able to overcome my European epistemological lineage enough to respond to such profound humiliation.

Michel scholar Sharilyn Calliou reminds us that:

In undoing the misrepresented politics of identity, the learner must guard against a pervasive reductionism that posits an inflexible and inaccurate Pan-Indianism. (Battiste & Barman, 1995:6)

It might be argued that my representation of the Aboriginal trickster figure, a slippery transformer figure even within specific traditions, reflects a desire on my part to
reduce her/him to a flat, predictable illustration of those attributes which I would conveniently and globally ascribe to her/him. It is evident that I must address this possibility constantly, such that my desire to identify a ‘Pan-Indian’ epistemology does not encourage the need to decontextualize and reduce. I have attempted to combat this temptation by cross-referencing wherever possible, seeking out compatible framings of the trickster in the recorded understandings of a range of indigenous peoples. It certainly is my contention that fundamental intersections exist between these various trickster narratives and their (anti?) heroes. I hope that by contextualizing these figures, and by drawing out parallels between such tricksters as Raven and Coyote, and between Nanabush and Bruh Rabbit, the characterizations developed in this text may be examined as revealing epistemological consistencies among indigenous peoples rather than be seen as the manifested reductionist puppets of my own self-interested creation.

Cree writer Marilyn Dumont addresses this in “Circle the Wagons,” a reflection that might appear to be a damning indictment of my discussion of Aboriginal circle concepts⁴. She narrates:

There it is again, the circle, that goddamned circle, as if we thought in circles, judged things on the merit of their circularity, as if all we ate was bologna and bannock, drank Tetley tea, so many time 'we are' the circle, the medicine wheel, the moon, the womb, and sacred hoops, you'd think we were one big tribe, is there nothing more than the circle in the deep structure of native literature? (Dumont in Moses & Goldie, 1998: 392)

Dumont comments that her own writing will not be considered ‘Native enough’ if not replete with the standard Indianisms and tokenist references. This discussion might seem to buy directly into such glorification of dominant-sanctioned Aboriginal themes, perhaps minimizing other non-traditional Aboriginal experiences. I can only

⁴ See Chapter 1.
hope that just as Dumont does not wish to be pigeon-holed and explicitly mandated with regards to the topics and themes of her writing, I will not be similarly disqualified from exploring traditional themes that have been systematically appropriated and diluted by the dominant culture. I understand that this is problematic, particularly given my identity as a dominant-lineage writer. My intention is not reductionist, although my choice of themes might hint at such surface treatment of Aboriginal experience and knowledges. I hope that by critically revisiting a hackneyed theme, the dominant agenda contained within the stereotype might be exposed and the theme might be reclaimed, not according to its value in Western eyes, but resplendent with traditional indigenous value. Sacred hoops are certainly less sacred when strained through the filter of dominant agendas; interrogation of the dominant conceptualization and framing is central to revisitation. At no point in "Circle the Wagons" does Dumont dismiss these themes; but she laments that the dominant world wishes to reduce her experience to these themes, or rather, to a Western reductionist treatment of these themes.

If I am to write about Aboriginal peoples, it seems to me that I must write from a position both identified with and profoundly critical of the dominant culture that has historically oppressed these identified Others.⁵ I must write from a position of intimate, first-hand knowledge of Western privilege, employing this privileged access to expose dominant agendas and the process of socialization which accompanies domination. This critique may uniquely be accomplished from within the body of a critical dominant culture writer, a body without intimate knowledge of the experience of oppression, but armed with a lifetime of privilege and a commitment to examining

⁵ I introduce the language of ‘Other’ and ‘Othering’ as developed by Miles to address those strategic dominant representations of colonized peoples which serve to marginalize and disqualify. (see Miles, 1989)
that history in the light of unequal relations and power inequities. This critique may prove useful in the context of dialogue and coalition-building between groups traditionally polarized by their heritage and experience, if only to inspire a newfound trust through an honest, humble illumination of dominant agendas and epistemology. Lakota activist Russell Means holds that:

Caucasians have a more positive vision to offer humanity than European culture. I believe this. But in order to attain this vision it is necessary for Caucasians to step outside European culture - alongside the rest of humanity - to see Europe for what it is and what it does. (Means, 1995: 553)

One of the aims of this discussion is to effectively bridge and marry distance and relation (borrowing Martin Buber's terms), employing an explicit acknowledgement and exposition, even embracing, of distance in the quest to establish a qualitatively new relation, this, I believe, a truly ‘tricksterian’ agenda.

A brief note regarding methodology

The sources for this discussion are multidisciplinary by necessity. The central themes emerge from, and live within, dense ideological patchworks of poetic, scientific, technical, and fantastic ideas and conceptualizations. Rather than resort to limiting or conflating the sources of wide-ranging concepts such as Western objectivity, I have chosen to draw from a multiplicity of often seemingly antagonistic spheres, seeking intersections between such apparent polarities as oral narrative and laboratory science. Significantly, the indigenous sources cited frequently experience little conflict between these spheres of knowledge, and often argue (as explicitly does Vine Deloria Jr.) for such a multidisciplinary approach to critical study. My method then betrays an unapologetic sympathy with traditional and contemporary indigenous structures (and perhaps antagonism to Western disciplinary polarism),
while the analysis, I contend, employs a mode of critical evaluation common to many knowledge systems worldwide (a dialectical analysis, to be developed below).

**Strategic differences**

Anishenabe scholar Basil Johnston recalls Seneca orator Red Jacket who

"...on behalf of his people rejected the missionaries' overture with words in his language that meant 'Kitchi-Manitou has given us a different understanding.'"

(Johnston in Ross, 1992:vii) While the truth of Red Jacket's words cannot be overstated, the traditional dominant framing of 'difference' has led to effects which go well beyond any simple acknowledgement of alternate, mutually exclusive understandings. In the first chapter of this discussion, I have forwarded the example of circles and the effects of 'different' understandings of the circle concept in an attempt to propose that differences, particularly epistemological differences, have been employed strategically by the west in the cause of the domination of non-Western peoples. In making this claim, I contend that Western epistemologies have developed, at least insofar as they foundationally conflict with indigenous epistemologies, expressly to strategically fulfill the agendas of domination. Again quoting Means, "people are not genetically encoded to hold this ['European'] outlook; they are acculturated to hold it. (Means, 1995: 552) It is my contention, to be developed throughout this discussion, that Western peoples are 'acculturated' for the explicit purpose of the protection and perpetuation of dominant privilege. It seems to me untenable that an epistemology that informs so effective and pervasive a set of legitimation and maintenance practices, effecting hegemonic control over identified Others, might be coincidentally and naively constructed over time. Neither is it plausible that the steady, linear advance of human knowledges, has led to the
contemporary Western world view, when countless formerly-valued and highly sophisticated knowledges have been disqualified along the way only insofar as they challenge those uncompromising agendas which inform what has become the dominant, Western epistemology. Social commentator Noam Chomsky reflects:

All this talk about capitalism and freedom has got to be a conscious fraud. As soon as you move into the real world, you see that nobody could actually believe that nonsense. (Chomsky, 1998: 14)

In this discussion, I will be primarily concerned with one of the less 'conscious,' but equally pervasive and destructive, frauds of Western epistemology, the cultish notion of objectivity. I will argue that the calculated, legitimized Western notion of objectivity has become practically invisible to the Western observer while effectively operating to frame dominant-Other disrelations and perpetuate hegemonic control over identified Others. Finally, on this point, I will argue that this notion has poisoned and paralyzed the Western academy insofar as the academy claims to be a repository and promoter of universal knowledges.

The return of Nanabush

If this discussion begins with the ‘winter’ of post-contact Western-indigenous relations it inexorably moves to the ‘spring’ of post-colonial transformation of these relations. True to the spirit and strategy of indigenous circular teachings, optimism may be experienced even in the darkest days of this harsh winter of dominance. The Anishenabe Nanabush narratives are particularly informative, even prophetic, here.

According to Basil Johnston's (1995) renderings of traditional Anishenabe teachings, 6

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6 Throughout this discussion, I will interchangeably use a variety of local names for specific tricksters, endeavoring, wherever possible, to use the precise translation offered by the speaker or indigenous nation in question. A full description of the tricksters and their origins may be found in chapter 5 of this discussion.
the trickster Nanabush - a figure who is to be presented in this discussion as s/he who powerfully and cleverly undermines any simplistic notions of ‘absolute’ objectivity, while often falling prey her/himself to similar pridefulness and suffering the consequences - decides, disillusioned with the state of Anishenabe existence (both spiritual and physical) since contact, to leave the Anishenabe people, taking his grandmother, a symbol of the wisdom of the elders, and his particular brand of subversion with her/him. S/he feels saddened that the Anishenabe have embraced, or perhaps succumbed to, European epistemologies, worldviews that discount her/his very value and reality. When s/he leaves in the canoe, no-one is there to bid her/him farewell, symbolic of the Anishenabe’s alienation from - their tangible distance from - the traditional teachings and knowledges. Tomson Highway’s comic contemporary character Pelajia laments about this state of affairs:

And the old stories, the old language. Almost all gone...was a time Nanabush and Windigo and everyone here could rattle away in Indian fast as Bingo Betty could lay her bingo chips down on a hot night...Everyone here’s crazy. No jobs. Nothing to do but drink and screw each other’s wives and husbands and forget about our Nanabush. (Highway in King, 1996: 75)

In traditional narratives, Nanabush’s departure marks the demise of the Anishenabe nation and culture. Similarly, Glooskap, trickster of the Maritimes’ Micmac and Malecite peoples departs, also with his grandmother, traveling far to the north. (Gooderham, 1969:177) Yet both Nanabush and Glooskap make a more or less explicit promise to return, bridging the distance to establish a new relation between the old ways and knowledges. and the contemporary post-contact world. The rise of the Ghost Dance among the Cheyenne in the late 1880’s represents a similar desire for a return to the old ways in an infinitely and irreversibly changed world. (Churchill, 1997: 243) Johnston reports that “They say that [Nanabush]...left word that he would
return some day when his people were ready to welcome him into their lives once more.” (Johnston, 1995: 95) In the discussion to follow, I will argue that Nanabush’s return is more than a nostalgic lament, but rather represents an essential step in the transformation of the Western academy, and thus a revitalization and legitimation of traditional teachings and values. When Nana'b'oozhoo dances slyly up the steps of the academy and slips unnoticed into the hallowed halls, transformation is on the wind.

Central questions and discursive framework

This discussion may be framed according to the following questions:

1. How does the quest for objectivity create conditions for injustice?
2. How can traditional knowledges address fatal flaws in the Western academy?
3. How can transformative education build bridges between traditional knowledges and contemporary Western knowledges in the academy?

In addressing these questions, my aim is to propose a grounded socio-philosophical response to the humility-poor Western academy, a critique that may be taken up and entrenched within specific transformative educational initiatives. This discussion builds its critique employing both a western linearity and an aboriginal circularity, introducing themes and then revisiting them in the context of the emerging whole. I begin with the overarching problematic of ‘framing’, critiquing alternative, often antagonistic, conceptualizations of a common theme, the circle. The strategic power of dualistic framing is further examined as a central and pervasive agent of colonial practice through the example of the dichotomous Western frame of objectivity.
and objectification. Indigenous concepts of object and subject are contrasted to this frame, and the values inherent in each conceptualization are examined. In an attempt to present a traditional champion of humility, an institutionalized and valued aboriginal agent of deconstruction, the text then moves into the sphere of indigenous oral narrative, looking carefully at one mode of narrative in particular, the trickster story. The trickster her/himself, the trickster narrative, and the narrator’s role, are examined with respect to their function as subversive agents in the context of absolutist, essentializing objectivism (both in the West and within indigenous societies themselves). Having established sharp divisions between Western and indigenous value systems, the final section of the discussion suggests the potential ground of intersections between Western and non-Western knowledges. In the context of a dialectical, transformational educational praxis, where transformation is understood to reject dualistic oppositions in the service of building qualitatively original bridges between cultures, knowledges, and epistemologies. Throughout, the traditional trickster narrative is held aloft as a unifying and profound metaphor, embodying and illuminating both spirit and practice of transformation.

I. The power politics of framing

linear circles

This discussion is built upon the contention that dominant framing has a profound effect on knowledge production and the effects of such production. In this prologue, I will develop one example of the effects of such a frame, a junction where Western epistemology becomes strategic in the service of domination.

The circle is commonly understood in the rationalist West as a series of points
which ends precisely where it began, a cycle which perpetually repeats. (Stein, 1979: 267) Understood in this way, a circle is predictable, hence mathematically measurable, perfect in form, all points on its curved edges equidistant from the center. Although an abstraction, the circle's perfection of form, its absolute symmetry along the diameter, is powerfully appealing as a symbol of an ordered, comprehensible universe. However, even within this positive framing of the concept of circle is the seed of its limitation in Western eyes: as a path or pursuit, it is fatally limited to a predetermined course. Its very predictability, while reassuring on some levels, precludes the possibility of progress or growth. The circle has become an effective illustration of the Western dichotomy between the natural and the human: while the natural world is limited to a fixed, unwavering path, a certain destiny, human existence is marked by the ability to deviate from, evade, even control and rise above, the natural course of events. And as circles have become naturalized, they are denigrated and primitivized, seen as an additional illustration that a hierarchy of existence is legitimate and proven out by the natural world.

The concept of linear progress, that human capacity to rise above the limits of the natural, is predicated upon a desire to reach up ever closer towards God or, in recent centuries, the eternal truths of science. Progressive history attaches this notion to time: any society which cannot ('objectively') demonstrate a chronological, technological progression is understood as patently inferior to one which can. Similarly, any society which does not 'improve' the productivity of the land it

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7 History of Ideas writer E.H. Carr (1983) challenges that contemporary scientists might understand the method of science (for example) as more "reciprocal" or 'spiralling' than "circular," acknowledging the impossibility (and undesirability) of returning to a precise point in one's investigations; and yet by this qualification, Carr presents, in rejecting it, the very limited Western understanding of the circle that I propose here. That is, Carr is unwilling to 'save' the circle from its assigned conceptual limits, although he clearly understands the associations and ramifications of the long-accepted Western framing of the circle. (58, 59)
possesses is to be cast as either lazy or at best technologically inept. To be anchored in such a linear, vertical notion of progress is to necessarily reject, as the result of strategic framing, cyclic movement. The cycle, as movement which apparently has a terminal ending at its own beginning, is no defendable progression at all. Vertical movement, on the contrary, fixes its sights, in an eternal linear ray, on the heavens and the great mysteries of existence, a lofty and appropriate goal for both organized religion and investigative science.

Theologians, philosophers and scientists have extended this valorization of the linear and denigration of the circular to the realm of discourse and communication. The circular argument and the circuitous path of logic are held up as the antithesis of reasoned discourse. Stein defines the circular argument as one which “ostensibly [proves] a conclusion [while] actually assuming the conclusion or its equivalent as a premise,” this also known as a “vicious circle.” (Stein, 1979: 268) That is, the circular argument is a tautology, a childish misrepresentation of logical reasoning. Circular thinking, or "circular logic," is commonly criticized as muddled thinking, suggesting faulty, preordained propositions or grounds and an unthought-through process: it is often criticized for leading one to a self-fulfilling, prescribed conclusion. This criticism is based on precisely the theoretical model of circles outlined above: it is grounded upon the conviction that returning to the same point on any circle means, definitionally, a literal return to precisely the same location, an unchanged point/thought stagnating, waiting at a lower hierarchical rung, uncontaminated and unchanged by the lapse in time and/or space since the previous visit. The return is seen as unproductive, inefficient, redundant, and simply repetitious. This type of argument shrinks in stark contrast to a progressive argument, one which demonstrates growth, movement and change, but also
continuous improvement towards the goal of enlightenment, or at least towards a convincing change-of-mind of the listener. Those who reason circuitously are simply chasing their own tails in a futile, fated dance.

This Western framing of the circle I will call the *linear circle*, insofar as it may only be understood as representing a literal return to an unchanged, fixed point previously visited: that is, the circle is simply an accurately curved and joined linear line segment, the beginning and end of which are conflated into the same point. However, an alternative framing of the circle is present in ancient and contemporary indigenous epistemologies, one which is neither grounded in a valorization of, not confined conceptually to, the linear model of paths.

Chickasaw writer Eber Hampton describes his experience with the linear circle concept in the context of his scholarship:

> The structure of [my] chapter is iterative rather than linear...Almost all the pieces by Third World authors were criticized by the other editors [of the *Harvard Educational Review*] as repetitious, while I found new meaning in each turn of the spiral. (Hampton in Battiste & Barman, 1995: 6)

Hampton chooses to return to central ideas regularly in his writing, characterizing his own process as “iterative,” or repetitious. Yet repetition, in the realm of discourse generally and academic scholarship specifically, is understood as pejorative, a weakness, the manifestation of weak authorship and sloppy editing. What does Hampton mean when he claims to find “new meaning” in such repetition? Is not repetition, by definition, a simple restatement of previous outlined points? Isn’t Hampton simply rationalizing a poorly-organized piece?

Painter Gerald McMaster engages this issue with his statement, “No two tipis are ever pitched the same.” (McMaster, Smart & Coyle, 1997: cover) McMaster
implies that although Aboriginal peoples have been pitching tipis using the same techniques, materials and process for thousands of years, there exists no simple repetition. That is not to suggest that there is no relation between these acts. To posit a non-linear framing of the circle, we are forced to encounter such a relation between repetition and originality. Within a dualistic framework, repetition and originality are mutually exclusive, definitionally opposed. If one returns to a previously visited place, her/his arrival cannot be considered an original one, nor a discovery, and hardly progress: the return implies a previous, original visit. Within the frame of the linear circle, the return is to the actual point of origin. So what can be meant by McMaster's claim? May this not be considered, in the same light as Hampton's scholarship, as unapologetic evidence that Aboriginal formulations are simply muddled, simplistic, even contradictory? What can the west learn from this?

Oglala Sioux Black Elk's famous formulation seems to buy into the glorification of this philosophically impotent concept:

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round..... The Sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nest in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours.... Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. (Black Elk in Hill, 1994: xi)

Black Elk consciously affirms the link between Aboriginal understandings of the circle and circle manifestations in the natural world. From a Western standpoint, this accurately illustrates the yawning chasm dividing indigenous conviction and epistemology and Western 'progress': Aboriginal life, as self-defined and understood, identifies itself with the unconscious repetition of natural cycles,
whereas the Western ideal celebrates humanity's willed escape from such restriction and limit. On this count, the west is both absolutely wrong and absolutely right. Yes, such a chasm exists. Yes, indigenous traditions embrace repetition, inspired by the natural world. Yes, the west embraces the notion of limitless 'progress.' And no, indigenous repetition is neither mindless nor unconscious. Neither is the human endeavor without limit, although the west may envision it so.

From an indigenous standpoint, Black Elk's statements are grounded in a powerful respect for, and humility in the face of, profound repetition. As in the west, indigenous repetition is captured powerfully in the metaphor of the circle. However, each perspective's conceptualization of both circle and repetition constitutes a powerful illustration of the epistemological chasm which has marked Native-European relations since contact. Hampton chooses to return to central themes and issues not to obscure the thesis of his paper but rather to allow the argument to unfold as the reader engages these 'same' themes in several contexts. McMaster celebrates the ritual quality of teepee construction, acknowledging the preplanned sequence of the act, but suggesting that each teepee-raising is a unique, original event, both alike and unlike every raising before and after it. Black Elk's words suggest that Aboriginal observations of the cyclic nature of the universe have led to both a powerful humility in the face of limits and an ecstatic appreciation of repetition as growth. The dualistic Western 'law of contradiction' states that a thing cannot both be and not be: this constitutes muddled, simplistic thinking within the frame of indigenous epistemology. The circle, indigenously-understood, represents both repetition and originality, engaged in a dialectical\(^8\) relation. This circle of relation

\(^8\) Dialectic is understood here in the Freirian sense, as developed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and elsewhere: the dialectic position both embraces and critiques essentialist polarities, examining their fundamental relationship rather than their infinite distance, arriving at a qualitatively different moment of criticism which rejects simplistic, binary Other-designations.
represents an absolute rejection of the pejorative connotations of the finite, linear circle.

Perhaps the distinction is very simple. The west has always felt that the natural world could and should be changed and improved, to the advantage of humans generally, of a privileged human group specifically; for example, uncleared, usable North American land has traditionally been considered non-productive and underexploited as a resource. Progress has always been associated with economically productive change, with little regard for the long-term consequences or imbalances incurred. Indigenous peoples contrarily have traditionally regarded the natural universe as a perfect, if mysterious, system, one to be accommodated to, listened to, respected and celebrated - but altered only with the greatest trepidation lest fragile ecological balances be upset. In the west, not to change is a luxury, only to be endured when utility permits; for indigenous peoples, both change and non-change are steeped in the deepest humility and respect for the interrelationships which fragmented change might interrupt. Anishenabe writer Barbra Nahwegahbow asserts:

For Native people, the taking of anything from the environment is seen as tampering with the sacred circle of life. Consequently, killing animals, cutting trees and harvesting wild rice are acts that carry a tremendous responsibility. (Nahwegahbow, 1996: 8)

Indigenous peoples have rejected a dualistic glorification of change in favour of a relation between that change that is mindful of tradition and ecological interrelations (the natural and supernatural world-as-is,) and non-change which is mindful of growth. This dialectic of change coheres well with the dialectical circle which is at once both repetitious and original. Yes, things change and do not change; yes,
things repeat and do not repeat.

An eternally changing subject, which is also unchanged in many aspects, returns to revisit a familiar though absolutely original and unvisited point. Can s/he or it return essentially unchanged by her/his/its experiences in the universe? The roundness of the journey represents the necessary revisitation to powerful themes, places, events. This journey represents the steps of many others beyond oneself, a whole tradition and ritual path. Driven by more than instinct, but equally deeply-rooted, these revisitations constitute growth that cannot be reduced to progress: the goal is not to escape or exceed the limits of the path, but rather to more fully understand the great power and majesty of that same path. Stoney elder John Snow relates that “the bald eagle soars to great heights and takes pride in the strength of his wings. He does not pretend to be something else,” (Snow, 1977: 8) rather flying the course of her/his predecessors: similarly, a child is not encouraged to attempt to elevate her/his station to a place which ranks higher in public esteem than her/his parents, or even to achieve greater fame or accomplishments. The child is encouraged to more fully understand and appreciate, to be ‘proud’ of, the traditional world and relationships into which s/he was born. No, this will not constitute ‘progress’ in Western eyes; yes, it may constitute human growth.

When one begins to search for justification of the linear circle in either the natural or human worlds, it cannot be readily found outside of the sphere of unequal human relations: that is, the linear circle exists only as a strategic, abstract concept which functions ideologically to support dominant politics. Revisitations may constitute re-membering - the reconstitution of member parts. Re-membering the history and traditions of a relationship is a form of self-critique in which old injustices and unresolved issues may creep back into the consciousness. The subversive and
decentering potential of such revisitation is contained by the Western frame of the circle: such re-membering is simply 'going over old ground,' or 'crying over spilled milk.' Victims of dominant propaganda are told to 'get over it' or 'look on the bright side.' The implication is that nothing is to be gained, no progress may be counted, from revisiting familiar sites. Personal counseling still retains the stigma thrust upon it by dominant society; individuals in need of counseling must suffer the indignity of being told that they can't cope with the stresses of daily life, implying that they have failed to negotiate the socio-corporate ladder. They are told to uncritically accept the values and agendas of the dominant world. Refusing to allow individuals to envision circular processes as anything other than backsliding towards a lower evolutionary site serves to effectively silence all critique. In a world that dualistically supervalue the individual over the collective, those in therapy are framed as defective individuals, dependent and thus somehow pathetic and personally impotent. At this among innumerable other political sites, the linear frame and its normative demands works to maintain dominant politics, politics which will not tolerate investigations into their foundations.

Western dialogue and debate is grounded in the linear circle frame. While indigenous circles are characterized by patience, reflectiveness and turn-taking, a traditionally granting of the right to speak or pass on many occasions, and the regular contextualized revisiting of pertinent issues, Western-style round-table discussions are product-driven and oppositional in format, seeking conclusive answers to

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9 On the relation between individual and society, Cree writer Willie Ermine notes, "yet, within the Aboriginal community a paradox seemingly exists. In no other place did the individual have more integrity or receive more honour than in the Aboriginal community...There was explicit recognition of the individual's right in the collective to experience his or her own life. No one could dictate the path that must be followed..." (Battiste, 1996:108) Here, Ermine illuminates the indigenous dialectic of dependency, which might also be framed as interdependency or interrelation, a frame often lost in the dualism of Western thought.
carefully prescribed 'problems.' The need to interject during such discussions, to make a point or to clarify a point, seems based upon the notion that we must always act to keep an idea on-track, focused and moving towards a conclusion, ostensibly because we cannot trust our own memories, or perhaps do not trust one another to faithfully and directly pursue the stated objective of the discussion. Traditional circle process demands that we hold onto our thoughts, allowing them to percolate in the context of the discussion and others' formulations and interpretations; the notion that we should interject during another's formulation is not only disrespectful, it also reveals the extend to which the west worships the concept of a personal monopoly on interpretive wisdom, a power-granting monopoly. In this sense, Western discussions are typically little more than a string of monologues, perhaps spurred on by the comments of others but largely issuing from the prideful, isolated perspectives of individuals. Dialogues and debates promise little more, grounded in binary opposition rather than mutual respect. Indigenous value afforded to silence can only be interpreted, within this frame, as a passive failure to contribute rather than as an active, humble acknowledgement of personal limits to knowledge. Indigenous circles are doomed to be interpreted as circuitous, meandering, and unproductive wastes of valuable meeting time, this interpretation again the product of a particular frame, one with the power to denounce such circles and their process as inconclusive tail-chasing, thus stripped of their legitimacy.

Social activist organizer Saul Alinsky astutely observes that "...the definition of a crank is an object which makes revolutions." (Alinsky, 1989: 27) Understood in the context of linear circle frames, that person who embodies a conviction of the power and necessity of revolutionary critique - the revisitation to the original site of injustice in order to remake an existential situation - can only be framed by the dominant as a
"crank," an irrational agent of disorder who seeks simply to replace the dominant regime with another less well-represented. This frame can only imagine a return to unjust origins, and the concomitant critique that this may engender, as a literal starting over and rejection of the dominant order. While this may in fact be the case - Alinsky clearly delights in the literality of his aphorism - the revolution of the indigenous circle embodies a much more powerful critique and demand for change than simple replacement under the same terms and conditions. Indigenous circle concepts value cyclical returns as an opportunity to learn and grow, as well as a demand for some things to die. This is not understood as a choice but rather an inevitability, or a "prophecy" as Russell Means terms it. (Means, 1995: 551-2)

American Indian Movement activist Means contends that:

> It is the role of American Indian peoples, the role of all natural beings, to survive. A part of our survival is to resist... We don't want power over white institutions; we want white institutions to disappear. That's revolution... American Indian people will survive; harmony will be reestablished... (Means, 1995: 552)

Means' radical stance clearly rejects any simple interchange of one power group for another: he understands that unjust power relations must be qualitatively altered, and that unjust institutions and systems must (and will) die. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., writing in the midst of the American civil rights movement of the 1960's, quotes Thomas Carlyle's famous line, "no lie can live forever." (Washington, 1986: 257)

Both King and Means envision this death of the unjust paradoxically as a rebirth rather than a replacement, the offspring of struggle and history, grounded in both tradition and the relation of dominant to oppressed. Both seek an epistemological shift which will constitute a profound and lasting existential change - a set of altered conditions born of the truest aspects of both change and tradition. Both seek a
reestabishment of what Calliou calls the ‘law of right relation,’ a law powerfully captured in the metaphor of the circle or medicine wheel. (Battiste & Barman, 1995: 6) King envisions this as an “inescapable network of mutuality” reflecting “the interrelated structure of reality.” (Washington, 1986: 254) This revolution must constitute an acknowledgement of interrelations, an acknowledgement powerfully informed by humility in the face of mystery rather than certainty.

The African proverb, ‘you can never step in the same river twice,’ accurately summarizes the distinction between linear and dialectical, relational circles. By the linear formulation, one may indeed step twice in the same river, just as, continuing along a prescribed circular path, one would revisit the same spot on the circle. However, this mechanistic model is as abstract as the concept of two-dimensionality: it is a model which cannot accurately represent the reality of cyclic revisitation, but rather merely sketches the superficial appearance or shadow of it. In actuality, as the proverb suggests, both stepper and river are infinitely changing, if unchanged in many ways. Afrocentric scholar Asante comments on this phenomenon in the context of Afrocentrism:

Afrocentricity takes a simultensense form once it is a fact in one’s life; it is not linear, cannot be analyzed in a single line, and is inherently circular. I speak of it as a transforming agent in which all things that were old become new and a transformation of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour results. It becomes everywhere sensed, and is everywhere present. A new reality is invoked; a new vision is introduced. (Asante, 1996: 1-2)

In this sense, the adoption of an Afrocentric worldview changes the epistemological rules: ever after, the individual returns to step into a familiar river. S/he will never leave this worldview behind on a linear lifeline as a past if significant experience. Rather, Afrocentrism transforms her/his everyday experience such that each moment
is original while powerfully informed by history and tradition. Progress within this worldview may only be understood as a fuller, more profound understanding of one's place in the traditional indigenous world; that is, moving forward profoundly demands a return to that which both was and never was - where "all things that were old become new."

Indigenous knowledges embrace both dialectical change and repetition, acknowledging repetition while refusing to dualistically oppose it to progress; acknowledging change without dualistically opposing it to stasis or 'objective' passivity: humans both return and do not return; both progress and return, progressing through the return; both repeat and create anew; we see once and never see the same thing or way again, yet our seeing is ultimately related to each instance of seeing. There is both loss and profound gain: the loss of the original point coupled with the gain of a new, more thoughtful perspective on it.

'Alternate' understandings of the circle illustrate the epistemological variance between Western and indigenous knowledges. Throughout this paper, I will argue that the many permutations of the Western frame are and have been carefully constructed and nurtured as silencing and trivializing strategies. I contend that this epistemological stance, in its many guises, is not simply a 'different' understanding, one born of alternative circumstances and traditions of thought, but rather one embraced precisely to inform and support the ideology of domination. I will argue that linearity and 'objectivity,' understood from a Western perspective, are intimately linked insofar as both presume a literal, finite order to the universe, an order that is within human comprehension, this illustrative of an unapologetic lack of humility in the face of an ostensibly solvable universe. Both notions flatten and misrepresent, indeed misdefine, the experiences under consideration, and, I contend, they do this
deliberately, driven by an agenda of domination over and against identified Others.

II. The Quest for Absolute Objectivity

Subjects and Objects

In this chapter, I will examine Western notions of linearity and objectivity in the specific context of subject-object relations in Western thought across academic disciplines, and expose the strategic nature of the employment of such understandings in the marginalization of non-dominant knowledges, institutions and peoples.

The Columbia Encyclopedia reports that the essential processes of science, observation and experimentation, were present in the earliest human societies, while modern interest in investigating the natural world began with Benjamin Franklin and his amateur contemporaries in the eighteenth century. The specialization of science began to emerge towards the close of the nineteenth century, building on the work of Newton, Darwin and Pasteur. (Ansley, 1947: 1590-1) The Random House Dictionary defines “science” as:

...a branch of knowledge or study dealing with a body of facts or truths systematically arranged and showing the operation of general laws. (Stein, 1979: 1279)

Speaking about such a “body of facts,” or what he terms “a corpus of ascertained facts” collected into a “common sense view of history,” (Carr, 1983: 9) historian E.H. Carr relates that:

Classical theories of knowledge which prevailed throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, all assumed a sharp dichotomy between the knowing subject and the object known, (Carr, 1983: 72)

continuing, that “the empirical theory of knowledge [from Locke to Russell]
presupposes a complete separation between subject and object. “ (1983: 9)
A central paradox (rather, frequently, a contradiction) of scientific investigation is
contained within the above definitions: so-considered objective "facts" are "arranged"
subjectively by human subjects. Once apprehended by human consciousness, the
object is no longer pure, insofar as we can never fully ascertain the degree or
manner of our participation in this apprehension, contradicting popular earlier
convictions that the "process of reception is passive." (Carr, 1983: 9) Therefore, the
original state of the object -- that is, its condition prior to human apprehension,
unpolluted by human consciousness -- must be sought at all costs: the process of
science then becomes an attempt to suppress human participation when
apprehending the physical world. Clearly this is a maddening task, given the primary
quandary of choosing both what to study in the first place and the object(s) with which
it may be compared. Yet if science is to claim truth value, it must face the pesky gnat
of scientific narcissism: the constant possibility of self-deception while conducting
science, indeed while thinking at all, drives scientists to an obsessive search for the
purity of an absolute object. If one could prove that s/he did not participate (or
participated insignificantly) in the creation of the object, then the vast vault of Nature
might be unlocked -- perhaps even the hand of God might be revealed. In this sense,
the desire is to become an 'absolute subject,' simple, self-contained and agenda-
free, viewing an 'absolute object' without politics, without complicity. One often
obscured connection between rigid scientific and religious orthodoxy becomes
apparent in this context: the critique of both obsessive scientific pursuits (as
dramatized in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* for example) and the idolatrous\(^{10}\) pursuit of God (as in, for example, the biblical Tower of Babel narrative) are identical theoretically — both misguided labours are the manifestation of an obsession with the acquisition/ownership of absolute, deific knowledge (of absolute objects,) an obsession which perhaps demarcates the strange bedfellow intersection of political right-wing and American Christian right politics and agendas. Lakota leader Tatanka Yotanka ("Sitting Bull") noted over a century ago that "...the love of possession is a disease with [Europeans]." (McLuhan, 1971: 90) The motive seems clear: should one accomplish this gargantuan, even mystical, feat then proof and critical analysis become redundant: objects emerge from the obscurity of human limitation, observable in their original, 'natural,' virgin state, thus presenting themselves as immediately knowable. (see Deloria, 1969: 5) Further, to possess such vision may be understood as nothing short of a direct line to God: it is to possess the truth, to identify oneself with the truth (and with God presumably) without fear of contradiction or resistance. It is unnecessary to detail the enormous power that this promises.

While such illusions of Olympian grandeur seem absurd when presented as a deliberate agenda, the very definitions of objective and subjective employed in common (and scientific) discourse contain the operative seeds of such megalomania.

**Western certainty**

Flowing effortlessly from the aforementioned assumption of a dichotomous

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\(^{10}\) In his Christian apologetic treatise *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, C.S. Lewis asserts that "a naturalistic Christianity leaves out all that is specifically Christian," (1984: 72) claiming that the supernatural, the incorporeal non-objective, must be embraced in any profound understanding of Christian faith.
disrelation between subject and object, based on an inexhaustible confidence in the potential of scientific endeavour, is the supervaluation and privileging of both the object (as the real) and the goal of 'objective' academic pursuit. This kind of dichotomous valuation has necessarily cast the subject and subjective experience as essentially unreal, that is, insubstantial and ephemeral because intangible and unquantifiable. A sort of religious zeal quickly accompanied scientific and historical efforts to capture the objective essence of things, complete with a new 'constitution for the sciences,' what Novick (1988) terms the “objectivist creed.”

Probing the character of this “creed,” Novick notes three parallel assumptions upon which objective study rests: “a sharp separation between between knower and known, between fact and value, and, above all, between history and fiction.” (1988: 2) This supreme confidence that all natural mystery would eventually be uncovered by science has led to an astonishing arrogance in the face of the unknown. Further, the “disinterested” Western “knower,” when disciplined by a kind of scientific Hippocratic Oath to be honest and fair, remains, conveniently and coincidentally, accountable for the world that s/he ‘discovers’ while on the colonial mission. “The process of reception is passive,” (Carr 1983: 9) according to scientific dogma: “whatever patterns exist in history are [understood to have been] 'found, not 'made...Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation.” (Novick, 1988: 2) And without interpretation or creative involvement, surely there can be no complicity.

Remaining with the study of dominant discourse for the time being, I will turn briefly to Eric Auerbach who, in Mimesis, illuminates something of the antiquitous echo of the desire to establish absolute objects. Auerbach asserts that classical Greek authors characteristically sought to establish a floodlit reality where, “clearly outlined, brightly and uniformly illuminated, men and things stand out in a realm
where everything is visible; and not less clear - wholly expressed, orderly even in their ardor - are the feelings and thoughts of the persons involved." (Auerbach, 1974: 3)

He continues that, “nor do psychological processes receive any other treatment; here too nothing must remain hidden and unexpressed.” (Auerbach, 1974: 6) An internal-external duality is embraced, establishing absolute objectivity as a central goal of narrative - something which gives power and truth-value to the narrative (and, hence, to the narrator.) Storytellers must strive towards a “complete externalization” of each element of, and relationship within, the story “as to leave nothing in obscurity.” (Auerbach, 1974: 4) Needless to say, this agenda leads (arguably) to a stultifyingly stiff and lifeless narrative, straightjacketed by its obsessive quest for authenticity through objective exposition.

Afrocentric scholar Asante picks up this metaphor, and more specifically its effects, in the context of post-colonial empowerment, relating, “No longer are we looking wistfully through a tunnel lit with the artificial beams of Europe.” (Asante, 1996: 1) Such floodlight beams flatten and whitewash, ostensibly in the name of concrete and full illumination, actually supporting the agenda of marginalization and suppression of subjective experience. I contend that object and subject are maintained, here and elsewhere, in a dualistic relationship (often on the level of subconscious but active cultural scripts) in order to establish the legitimacy of dominant practice (including scientific practice and theory). In fact, in the absence of this entrenched polarity in common/dominant discourse, hegemonic structures would crumble under the weight of the dominant's untenable rationalizations.

Random House definitions juxtapose the “object of thought” to the “thinking subject”, the objective dealing with “things external to the mind” as contrasted to the “thoughts and feelings” of the subject. (Stein, 1979: 993) While this might seem an academic
distinction, profitably maintained to serve the purpose of analysis -- for example, to maintain humility in the apprehension and understanding of an object -- this dualism has been accepted at face-value into the canon of dominant truisms, and employed in the legitimation of countless hegemonic strategies and effects. This distinction would have us believe that a "general or universal experience" exists independent from human consciousness and participation. (Stein, 1979: 1415) To understand just exactly how a scientist, politician or philosopher would arrive at that conclusion, independent of her/his own thought process and agenda, is problematic at best.

I intend to interrogate this subject-object dualism then as a dominant strategy, not simply operating in academic discourse, but vitally operative in everyday social structures and relationships. I will contend that the dominant’s desperate desire to apprehend innocently is intimately informative of racist practices and beliefs. I will draw briefly upon both family systems theory and, more extensively, on the long history of stereotyped visions of Canadian aboriginal peoples to provide specific context-based examples.

Subject-object relationships: contradiction or paradox?

I have introduced the language of 'absolutes' with regard to subject-object distinctions into this discussion in part to create a bridge between my critique and post-modern criticisms of "essentialism." The concept of an 'absolute' subject or object may be interrogated with the same ferocity as that bestowed upon the 'essential' sciences, dominant discourses, philosophical systems, etc. of the Enlightenment period and subsequent years. As introduced above, the concept of an

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11 I refer to the psycho-sociological research and theory pioneered by Virginia Satir, Alice Miller, Murray Bowen, and others over the past several decades, work which has addressed such a dominant desire to 'apprehend innocently' in the service of ongoing domination and the destruction of Other-subjectivities.
absolute object contains the notion of infallibility; that is, the absolute object is exempt from critical analysis by virtue of its infallibility. Pure and unpolluted, the absolute object very simply 'is what it is,' in a distinctly literal sense. It is value-free, given the absence of human interpretation in its apprehension: it does not reflect human values, is neither evil nor holy, negative nor positive -- it is simply 'true.' As such, the absolute object may be entered into a controversy as absolute evidence, itself incontrovertible and telling. The absolute object rises above partisan and petty, even grandiose, human politics, soaring up to the dizzying heights of the Platonic form. Scientists have sought to establish such absolutes on the basis of hypothesis, experimentation and verification of conclusions, striving, convinced of the limitless scope and potential of human reason, to acquire a glimpse of the extra human through their efforts.

It follows that those seeking absolute objectivity attempt to accomplish this by establishing themselves as 'absolute subjects,' absolutely self-contained and unprojecting, neither influenced by objects nor influencing them. The contradiction that arises when this dualism is embraced is evident: how can an absolutely self-contained subject apprehend any object which resides, by definition, outside of, or external to, itself? Put another way, how is relation possible between mutually exclusive entities? How can we, as subject, possibly 'know' anything of that which is definitionally alienated from us? I will resist the temptation to discuss issues of race at this junction, but will pursue the obvious connections in context below.

The acknowledgement of this contradiction allows for only two fundamentally juxtaposed responses, it seems to me. I'd like to explore these responses through the frame of family systems theory, a frame which has consistently addressed the relationship between subject and object in dominant relationships.
One response has two polar faces (which collapse into a conflated sameness): the first, to fatalistically surrender as paralyzed, passive subject, crushed by ones own potential for self-deception and projection; the second, to push on untroubled, as arrogant, aggressive and exploitative subject, driven by narcissistic megalomania, conscience assuaged by a belief in personal non-complicity. Co-dependent relationships inherent in abusive families may play out the two faces of this response. The abused co-dependent cannot escape her/his own prison of doubt, shame and blame: that is, s/he cannot/will not rupture the complex 'truth' of her/his own complicity in the abuse, conversely other-blaming and self-shaming, while resigned to the inevitability of (and thus maintaining) the dependent and abusive character of the relationship. To other-blame or to self-shame is to be 'objective' about the reality of the relationship. The abuser, privileged with absolute power, exploits the dualistic inequity of the disrelation, asserting her/himself as 'master' over and against the 'slave', while also rejecting complicity (for completely different but complementary reasons.) For the abuser, the 'way it is' is the way it should be (and is meant to be.): 'the way it is' is the objective reality, innocent of power agendas12. For both abused subject and abuser subject, the relationship to the abuse itself is one of subject to 'absolute object': the abuse is considered legitimate on some (often highly-distorted) level, unmitigated by 'subjective' influence. It must be noted that such dualistic positions not only echo and mirror each other (for example, the controlling passive aggression of the self-styled victim), but also have fragile identities themselves, where an incomplete self-definition will splinter occasionally. Resistance does not always follow traditional lines of

12 John Berger usefully notes that "The world as-it-is is more than objective fact, it includes consciousness," (Berger, 1985:11) that is, an apprehending subject.
reactionary (thus impotent) dualistic opposition, even within rigid role-bound relationships: mysteriously, praxical, reflective resistance is sometimes born in an apparently immaculate conception. I have dealt with the unexplainable appearance of 'ghosts' of resistance elsewhere. Suffice it to say that dualistic roles are fragile and constitute a central site of resistance.

In this example, both paralyzed and hyper-mobilized subjects envision the distance between themselves (as subject) and others (as object) as an infinite, yawning chasm, unbridgeable and eternal. Both abused and abuser deny, or remain blind to, their own complicity in the oppression, thus any insight into their own personal subjectivity, and its operation in relationships, is lost. The abused suffers from the loss of any 'legitimate' appeal to objectivity to mediate her/his crippling subjectivity (identifying her/himself, and identified by oppressive others, as 'all subjective,' in the narrow dualistic sense); the abuser denies any subjective complicity in her/his apprehension of their relations (asserting her/himself as 'all objective'). The subject-object dualism, fully embraced and employed to establish rigid, dualistic role-boundedness, both silences resistance and maintains status-quo oppression. The abused is characterized/self-characterized, thus silenced, as 'crazy' (divorced from objective reality,) 'nagging' (completely self-absorbed,) etc., all caricatures of absolute subjectivity. When the abuser wishes to most firmly devalidate the integrity of the abused's resistance, the language of overt subjectivity is employed, identifying the abuser, conversely, with the concrete, absolute object of truth about the relationship.

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13 Please refer to my paper The Spirit of Resistance, Sociology in Education Dep't, OISE, December, 1996.
14 In the social arena, 'special interest groups' often bear this characterization as paralyzed by their own irrevocable partisanism.
15 See footnote #26 for a significant comparison of 'craziness.'
Dualistic relationships, at their 'best,' simply involve a series of compromises negotiated between, passively accepted, or enforced upon, mutually exclusive subjects. The dualistic foundation of the 'relationship' itself determines this, operating largely unconsciously but with profound effects. The abuser-subject identifies her/himself with the absolute object of infinite justice (possessing absolute knowledge of the objective truth of relationships); the abused-subject identifies her/himself as the absolute victim of the abuser's objective vision of relationship. In this way, both absolutes may continue unchallenged, supporting and maintaining one another to perpetuate unequal power relations at this specific site. It is evident that the abuser has much to gain from ensuring that the abused remain trapped within their prison of paralyzing 'subjectivity,' particularly given that, for one dualistic pole to exist legitimately, the other pole must be maintained and legitimated.

A second, antithetical response to the subject-object contradiction is to transform the disrelation into a paradox, tirelessly rooting out the dialectical relation between subject and object where both and neither exist simultaneously (this as the total rejection of dualisms in favour of dialectical relations.) Acknowledging complicity, but refusing to become paralyzed by the daunting task of self-critique, subjects build bridges of understanding based upon a recognition of the creativity of apprehension. Neither subject nor object need be obliterated, nor uncritically and fatally embraced as unchangeable or 'pure'; rather, a qualitatively different relation may be born. Through reflection on the nature of human apprehension, this response recognizes the 'objectivity' (the material/immaterial 'reality') of subjective experience, as it does the 'subjectivity' (the personal interpretation) involved in apprehending objective phenomena.

These two responses have historically not been equally promoted by Western
societies. Clearly the former response serves to disguise and maintain status-quo power inequities and the ideology of dominant individuals and groups; equally as clearly, the second response serves to inform the interrogation of accepted dogmas, as well as constituting a stance of resistance via critical inquiry. The glorification of ‘reason’ of the last two centuries has legitimized an undervaluing of the subjective, even one's own subjectivity, insofar as the subjective is prone to irrationality, thus cannot be ‘objective’. In the quest for legitimacy, powers align themselves with the rational, the reasonable, the logical (thus the infallible): in a dualistic ideological universe, to embrace this dualistic objectivity is to necessarily renounce subjectivity (in order to repress it), as frivolous, fanciful, illegitimate: and, I will argue, it is to fear subjectivity, because of its self-reflexive character, as potentially dangerous. To examine one’s own subjective implication in apprehension will inevitably reveal as untenable the autocratic objectification of persons. Shakespeare's Lear, mortified after a challenge to his regal and paternal authority, decries, “Better thou hadst not been born than not t'have pleased me better.” (Shakespeare, 1985: 69) The potential loss of privilege necessitates that the dominant will not bear a significant challenge to its legitimacy, knowing that it cannot.

The academy

Dominant commentators on Western science have remained relatively enamored with the 'success' of the scientific project over the last several centuries, this despite (or because of, depending on one's orientation) science's role in valorizing the opposition of subject and object. Science writer Porter (1988) notes, in an enigmatically mock-apologetic yet somehow gloating manner, that:

For good or ill, European, or latterly, Western civilization has come to master
the globe over the last five centuries. And no small part in that conquest - a
campaign of the environment, of other empires, and not the least of minds -
have come through the unique strength of Western science. (8)

Here Porter directly links the scientific enterprise to the practice of colonialism,
liberally employing the language of control and power. He continues:

    it would be presumptuous and short-sighted to dismiss everything else as
ignorance and error, and to assume that our science possesses a monopoly
of truth, still less of wisdom. *All the same*, all our experience daily tells us of
the unmatched power of our science...Western science has now become
world science. (8-9) [emphasis added]

Somehow the reader is left with the impression that the daily experience of sheer
colonial might through Western scientific discourse eclipses any concerns about
trivializing other knowledges, simply by virtue of science's ability to coerce.

Maintaining that "Individualism and science...have gone hand in hand," (1988: 12)
Porter defends the competitive pursuit of individualistic glory and wealth as the key to
science's progress. The legitimized objectification of both lands and others has
served the scientist and colonizer well in this regard. Science commentator Jacob
Bronokowski illustrates his profession's offhand acceptance of the ultimate truth of
such dichotomies, contending that while "It may happen that [the scientists's]
emotions are immature...so are the intellects of many poets." (Gingerich 1986: i)

Implicit in this comment of course is that while scientists (the objective observers)
perhaps shouldn't waste their time trying to feel, poets (the subjective experiencers)
should equally give up any pretensions to intellectual pursuit (including critique.)

Deloria (1995) notes that in the academy:

    A view of the natural world as primarily physical matter with little spiritual
content took hold and became the practical metaphysics for human affairs.
(16)

Family systems theorist John Bradshaw (1994) expands usefully on this:
In tribal and Eastern cultures, God is in the world. Matter is never stuff without a soul. There is soul in everything...In the West the sense of the Divine has always been outside of the world. The [Greco-Roman] gods or [Judeo-Christian] God are transcendent. Human beings have a relationship to God, but the relationship is always one that transcends the universe. The patterns of sacred relationship are human-to-human and human-to-God. The earth itself is not sacred in this worldview. The world is material, the primal stuff, which is to be transcended through the human spirit. (349)

The objectification of all matter is accompanied by a necessary despiritualization of the earth, insofar as ‘spirit’ is understood to be a human, subjective phenomenon, thus residing outside the purview of its antithesis, legitimate objective science. In contemporary dominant society, the notion that ‘things’ are inanimate, and certainly unspiritual, belongs in the canon of ‘common-sense’. George Dei (1998) supports this assessment, asserting that:

...Western science views the universe as a mechanical system, and defines the ‘essence’ of society as a competitive struggle for existence. Western science enthuses the dualistic/binary mode of thought and a hierarchical ordering of knowledge. (8)

Armed with the Christian-colonial agenda to “control” and ultimately conquer nature (Porter, 1988: 8, Gingerich, 1986: 3, Ross, 1992: 51,) Western scientists have entrenched themselves in an adversarial relation to the literalized ‘object’ of study, and have positioned themselves ‘hierarchically’ as the only ones qualified to theorize/control (by virtue of their disinterested distance from the object of study.) Science is to be understood as our golden road to salvation, and scientists are to be revered as our pure-hearted (and objective) knights. Deloria acknowledges and laments this state of affairs, rhetorically asking “why is such knowledge only valid and valuable when white scientists document and articulate it?” (1995: 59)

In Red Earth, White Lies (1995), Deloria unleashes a bitter critique of the apparent disinterestedness of these knight-scholars, in fact comparing them directly
to partisan religious zealots, charging that "as many lies are told to protect scientific doctrine as were ever told to protect 'the church,'" (18) His critique echoes an earlier work by sociologist Peter Berger in which Berger (1963) laments that "the sane child is the one who believes in what it says in the school records. The normal adult is the one who lives within his assigned coordinates." (67) Deloria asserts that not only do the scientists and historians determine what should be included in and omitted from the records of the academy, they themselves become bound by the theoretical straitjacket of this canon of knowledge. (1995: 19) Thus the academy, at its worst, becomes an institution incestuously devoted to creating then maintaining a body of knowledge/theory acceptable to its own members, and accountable to no-one but the academy. One branch of this theory concerns definitions of identified others that can only be framed (critically) as racist. In the following section, I'd like to address the connection between racism and dualistic 'objectivity' in the academy.

**Yearning for an 'objective racism'**

A common justification for eliminating the term 'race' from sociological discourse is by virtue of the concept's scientific untenability. Yet a fairly widespread acknowledgement of this scientific untenability has not made objective concepts of race disappear from the dominant/common discourse (media, etc.). Perhaps this is because dominant commentators have much more at stake than responsibly presenting scientific fact when considering phenotype-determined characterization. Cornel West is unequivocal about the relationship between race and science:

The "scientific" racist logic which promotes the observing, measuring, ordering and comparing of human bodies in light of Greco-Roman aesthetic standards associates racist practices with bodily ugliness, cultural deficiency and intellectual inferiority...This logic... [relegates] black people to walking abstractions, lustful creatures or invisible objects. All three white-supremacist
It is my assertion that the ongoing yearning for an naturalistically objective basis to race and racism is foundationally informed by a belief in the absolute, objective difference of the non-Western, non-caucasian Other, a belief born of the desperate desire to protect dominant privilege. Given that dominant commentators consider themselves fundamentally different from, and intellectually/culturally superior to, non-dominant peoples, they cast themselves (in the grand tradition of Western science) in the role of absolute subjects apprehending absolute Other-worldly objects. Of particular salience is the perhaps unconscious recognition that in order to establish oneself as absolute subject, thus an infallible and unimplicated observer, the essential, fixed quality of the Other-object must be established (or sought - or created) and consequently devalued. This conflation of identified Others with absolute objects is not only convenient, but also makes perfect sense in the context of a dualistic dominant worldview and its agenda.

To summarize: the pursuit of an objective reality to Otherness (via race concepts in particular, though not exclusively) is intimately tied to the legitimation of dominant powers as superior, hence worthy of 'master' status over identified Other-'slaves.' I find it patently obvious, though perhaps worth stating\(^\text{16}\), that the sciences, while wrapped in the innocent-seeming robes of useful and agenda-less investigative process, can clearly make no claim to a detached investigation of race; that is, useful and honest race studies must always contain a powerful self-critique which deliberately seeks to undermine dominant, racist interests. In this sense, this paper is in support of aggressively anti-racist academic research in all fields, given

\(^{16}\) This becomes worth stating in the context of Philip Rushton's work, and the work others.
the pervasive operation of such dominant modes of thought in the cloistered chambers of the academy.

In the next phase of this discussion, I will investigate how the dominant's yearning for absolute objectivity informs and perpetuates racist cultural scripts.

**Realists and racists**

Nature has long been valorized as operating above and beyond human justice and philosophy, insofar as it operates automatically, unfailingly, predictably, and independent of human intervention. Religiously understood, Nature is created and maintained by God, the original 'unmoved mover' or absolute subject. Science has similarly always been interested in the 'natural order of things.' Scientists have sought to achieve a perfect vision of the natural world, that is, one absent of complicity through participation. They seem to have attempted to adopt Gustave Flaubert's agenda for post-Romantic writers where "the ["realist"] author, in his work, must be like God in the Universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere." (Realism in The New Grolier) Yet Flaubert was intimately aware that while the author/subject could perhaps be invisible to the reader, that is 'unseen', s/he could not be 'unseeing:' he knew full well that the author is present in the creation of the object, even if apparently absent (this, in fact, is the very source of the author's power to influence the reader.) The task for the "realist" writer is to appear absent. Perhaps this has become the goal for the 'realist' scientist also (without the crucial critical reflection on the creator's implication)? Certainly dominant scholars have become adept at remaining invisible.

Within the scientific community itself, the facade of objectivity has regularly been ruptured by those unwilling to remain 'invisible'. Physicist Werner
Hiesenberg’s work in quantum mechanics (circa 1928) led him to address the paradox of this discussion with his “uncertainty” or “indeterminacy” principle, defined as, “…the precept that accurate measurement of an observable quantity necessarily produces uncertainties in one’s knowledge of the values of other observables.” (Parker, 1989: 22) Isaac Asimov (1994) notes that while this principle completely ruptures a notion of scientific omnipotence so pervasive that it that “seemed axiomatic,” issuing forth fears of relativist chaos, it also provides the foundation for an alternative epistemological vision based on limits, or a kind of scientific humility. (Asimov, 1994: 563) Heisenberg challenges the scientific community to redefine the relationship between subject and object, between the student and the studied; the notion of a neutral observer comes into serious question. And yet, despite the theoretical legitimacy afforded this stance by the scientific community,¹⁷ self-critical analysis such as this has consistently been marginalized to the perimeter of dominant lay discourse, and the pursuit of absolute objectivity by absolute subjects has pushed on unabated.

Cree writer Willie Ermine comments on the traditional Western approach that has survived Heisenberg’s critique:

The intellectual tendency in Western science is the acquisition and synthesis of total human knowledge within a world view that seeks to understand the outer space objectively…In viewing the world objectively, Western science has habitually fragmented and measured the external space in an attempt to understand it in all its complexity…Fragmentation has become embedded in the Western worldview and is the cornerstone of Western ideology. (Ermine in Battiste, 1996: 102-3)

One such area of undaunted inquiry has been the search for essential (as synonymous with ‘natural’) human qualities. In this area, scientists (both before and

¹⁷ Weisenberg was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1932 for his work on the ‘indeterminacy principle.’
after Heisenberg) have historically evaded, repressed and/or manipulated the central contradiction/paradox expressed in Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle by establishing certain groups of human beings as resident in the category ‘natural’, hence objectively apprehendable. Omi and Winant note that

...before (roughly) World War II, before the rise of Nazism, before the end of the great European empires and before the decolonization of Africa, before the urbanization of the U.S. Black population and the rise of the modern civil rights movement, race was still largely seen in Europe and North America (and elsewhere as well) as an essence, a natural phenomenon, whose meaning was fixed—constant as a southern star. (Omi & Winant, 1993: 3)

Significantly, the designation 'human' has historically been reserved for those observers who consider themselves absolute subjects (the 'unmoved movers'), while identified Others have become associated with the natural world of objects. The implication is that, while all humans may be studied objectively, the scientist can come closer to the goal of the absolute object by studying those human creatures most technologically inferior, thus closest to nature (as identified primarily by race.) A further implication of this is that for the dominant observer to position her/himself as “an autonomous researcher perceiving an external world,” (McKee) it will be necessary to frame the Other as absolute object: Western science, much like colonial economies, will ‘progress’ only on the back of the reified, naturalized Other. In his essay “In Search of a Majority,” James Baldwin asserts that:

[We are] driven by some nameless fear that has nothing to do with Negroes...No, it has everything to do with ourselves and this is one of the reasons that for all these generations we have disguised this problem in the most incredible jargon. One of the reasons we are so fond of sociological reports and research and investigational committees is because they hide something. As long as we can deal with the Negro as a kind of statistic, as

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18 One manifestation of this necessity is the search for race distinctions which are independent of dominant complicity or construction (ie. 'absolute' race distinctions which hearken back to earlier theories of racial purity.)
something [objective] to be manipulated, something to be fled from, or something to be given something to, there is something we can avoid, and what we avoid is what he really, really means to us. (Baldwin, 1993: 135)

For the scientific community to suggest, as it has recently, that the first humans in all likelihood emerged from Africa (thus were probably dark-skinned) ruffles few dominant feathers: given Western faith in racist progressive history, it would be the expectation that the most primitive (thus most different) of humans would be black. The concept that whites and blacks likely share a common ancestor is, rather than an opportunity for reflection on relatable aspects of human experience, a moot point for dominant observers: whites have clearly benefited from successful evolutionary adaptation, and blacks...? The 'necessary' connection between identified Others (in particular, blacks and aboriginal peoples) and the natural world is particularly salient in the context of this discussion. For the dominant to be an absolute subject observing absolute objects, the Other must be naturalized, thus objectified (thus dehumanized). It is worth examining how Western dominant discourses have played out this script in specific contexts.

**Savages and 'sons of Adam'**

In *Defeathering the Indian*, Emma LaRoque identifies two stereotypical visions of the Canadian Aboriginal: the nature lover (what Anishenabe scholar Rodney Bobiwash calls the 'ecosavage'), and the dirty Indian/savage.¹⁹ (LaRoque, 1975: 33)

While both characterizations identify the Aboriginal person directly with Nature, they seem to have mutually exclusive implications of value.

¹⁹ I would, agreeing with the University of Toronto's Rodney Bobiwash, add a third, more recent characterization, that of the militant fanatic Indian, a stereotype obviously connected to, but not immediately salient to, this discussion. The perceived blind, unconscious and uncontrollable rage of the militant (perhaps a Russell Means or Dennis Banks, for example) is clearly related to the world of animals and instinct.
Rousseau perhaps best articulated the Enlightenment vision of the “natural man” or “noble savage,” defining a creature “who lived harmoniously with nature, free from selfishness, want, possessiveness, and jealousy.” (The New Grolier) Rousseau’s Emile (1762) is an extended treatise on the application of this vision to the education of young children. This liberal, humanist vision was immediately inspired by, and identified with, not only children but also Aboriginal peoples (perhaps helping to cement the concept of the relationship between the colonial Crown and the colonized as one of father to child.) Rousseau and fellow liberals charged that society had ‘perverted’ the natural man from his original, unpolluted Edenic state; it is no great stretch to reframe this notion of original, primal virtue, presumably residing at some literal juncture in human history (although Rousseau himself doubted it ever had,) as the ultimate truth claimed to be resident in discoverable absolute objects. Such a reframing calls into question the apparent social justice orientation of this ‘perversion' theory: the object that Rousseau seeks is as much a product of the same dominant worldview that he critiques as corrupt. Put another way, the corrupting perspective itself, grounded in dualistic subject-object relations as it reifies persons, alienating them from functional human relations, shares a common foundation with that purportedly activist perspective which seeks to glorify human potential through a romantic projection of an idealized ‘natural state.’ I contend that the articulation of the “noble savage” ideal emerges from, and itself becomes, a dominant strategy, one effortlessly racialized and employable in the agenda of colonialism. The “natural man”’s object status reinforces his Otherness (as fundamentally distinct from dominant, absolute subject observers.) Naturally (no pun intended), this particular Other will be encountered in the wilderness, that Other-
space, the resource-rich forests and jungles of the colonies, and is phenotypically identifiable. In a spasm of conflation, we witness the creation of the 'absolute object-other-Indian.' In her/his complete identification with Nature, the Aboriginal becomes legitimately enslaveable. After all, is not the Native's closeness to human origins, as outlined above, simply evidence of his barbarity/degeneracy in the absence of civilizing conditions?

Despite the genocidal effects of such a characterization, Rousseau's stereotype is the more sentimental, even kindly, of the two outlined by LaRoque. The dirty Indian, the savage, the wild Indian, is identified with a more characteristic dominant framing of Nature, one which dualistically opposes the natural/bestial to the human. Rather than speaking through an eighteenth-century liberal voice, the dominant asserts its actual judgment unsubtly: the Indian is an animal, in the most pejorative sense. The characterization of the Indian as less-than-human savage regularly emerges through historical and contemporary stereotypes, often targeting those Aboriginal peoples too close to mainstream spaces. The urban version of the wild Indian stereotype has become the 'dirty Indian,' the incorrigible alcoholic who lives from welfare cheque to welfare cheque. Perhaps these face-to-face encounters with contemporary Aboriginals inspire, greater than ever, the need in the dominant to distance themselves from any implication in the Indian's condition. Certainly original European settlers, finding themselves in direct competition with Natives for resources, understood that they were empowered (as dominant group members) to crush such competition wherever they desired. In both cases, justification for racist 

20 I contend that 'Other-spaces' always contain resources desired by the dominant, hence become 'Otherized' largely in an attempt to justify dominant exploitation of such resources.

21 Historically, the Canadian government has sought to locate reserves in locations as remote from major centers as possible, ostensibly to allow Aboriginals to preserve their culture and lifestyles: this might profitably be interrogated, looking instead at the agenda of reducing personal encounters between the dominant and the dominated (ie. creating colonized/racialized spaces.)
practices suffered upon the First Nations rests upon both racist Other-designations, and the ability to objectify Native peoples.

All stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples, indeed all stereotypes, from the super-spiritual new age protector of the environment image to the degenerate urban alcoholic, betray an agenda of disempowerment accomplished through misinformation and strategic framing of the Other. Perhaps the more insidious agenda, however, is the dominant’s desperate desire to avoid implication in the creation of the actual material conditions of Aboriginal peoples, for it is this avoidance which allows hegemonic practices to continue unchallenged.

Silencing subjectivity

Implicit in the objectification of a people is the necessary annihilation of their subjectivities. This silencing has been investigated and framed in many contexts, finding shape in formulations ranging from supernaturalist Charles Fort’s “excommunicated data”22 to family systems pioneer Alice Miller’s “banished knowledges.”23 John Berger, on the topic of art criticism, expresses it this way: the dominant’s “fear of the present leads to mystification of the past.” (Berger, 1985: 11)

If the object speaks, what might it say? Who might it implicate? Clearly, the marginal voice must remain disqualified, mystified, excommunicated or banished from dominant discourses, insofar as it represents the threat of resistance, that is, insofar as it claims subject status. As explored above, to legitimate the subjectivity of an object is a distinctly subversive practice, inviting a dialectical, critical analysis of relations between subjects. One wonders, if dominant scientists could talk to the

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animal world, would it be in their best interests to do so? When marginalized subjects speak through dominant filters, potentially subversive subjectivities are systematically strained, allowing the flavour of the subject, but not the subject, or her/his authentic voice, to filter into common discourse. Aboriginal justice commentator Rupert Ross reflects:

...I wondered once again what it must be like to suspect, from past dealings, that the [federal legal system] outsiders who possess all the power don't really want to hear a single thing you have to say. For how many decades had they been hearing that kind of a message, and in how many ways? (Ross, 1996: 12)

However, Indianness and the Indian presence, when properly strained for impurities (those qualities and agendas disqualified from objective stereotypes), is absolutely acceptable in the common discourse. Atlanta Braves and the tomahawk chop, no problem. But what about the sudden appearance of the quick-witted and bitter bastard Indian child of the colonial King, the ward-child conceived and invented/framed in the colonies, but long denied and never accepted into the Western 'castle'? Permitting the subject’s authentic voice to enter the common discourse carries an extremely subversive action potential, particularly when guarding one’s innocent pose. Therefore, the absolute objectification of the Other may be understood to accomplish a very significant function in the maintenance of hegemonic structures: it operates to squash resistance by allowing the mere shadows of subjectivities to be heard, while simultaneously filtering and dismissing (by reframing) authentic voices, indigenous voices in particular, as 'subjective,' self-absorbed, bitter -- that is, non-objective. The dominant’s relentless polemic against authentic subjectivity in other spheres and discourses permits this disqualification to go unchallenged.
Colonial agendas

I'm not sure that any discussion of anti-hegemonic resistance can begin outside of an overview of global dominance of indigenous peoples. Lingering colonial relations have informed generations of genocidal practices, practices designed to impoverish, assimilate, silence, murder; practices designed to remove all remaining vestiges of aboriginal residence and heritage in colonized spaces.

Noam Chomsky (1993) lists several key aspects of this dominant colonial agenda in the Americas: the centralization of state power; the protection of privilege and Western authority; the organized use of “savage violence;” the contempt for democracy and freedom; and the self-righteousness in which the entire colonial process and its effects are clothed. (19) In an earlier work, Chomsky (1987) identifies the particular role assigned to indigenous peoples in this scenario:

The main enemy is the indigenous population who attempt to steal our resources that happen to be in their countries, who are concerned with vague and idealistic objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization, and who, in their backwardness and folly, find it difficult to understand that their “function” is to “complement the industrial economies of the West” (including Japan) and to serve the needs of the privileged groups that dominate these societies. (27-8)

This kind of ideological arrogance, openly displayed by colonial powers, itself a marginalizing strategy, is complemented by strategies of construction and incorporation, whereby indigenous peoples, in a process appropriately enough echoing the mercantilist system, have their own cultures and identities sold back to them at a substantially higher price: the potential loss of self. (Winant 1994: 268)

These new 'identities' represent a facile, depoliticized and non-threatening coptation of traditional knowledges, and self-understandings.
Privilege

The protection of Western, usually white, privilege remains a central justification for hegemonic control. The sometimes-stated, often subterranean, agenda to protect ones privilege creates a pressing need for justification, both to oneself and to the world. Woven from a linked and elaborate thread of lies and omissions, blanketing discourses are draped over the truth of indigenous experiences of oppression. These discourses of justification are themselves informed by a desperate need to submerge complicity (thus also sidestepping any concomitant demands made for reparation or change.) In the context of racism, Sleeter notes that "white people usually seek to explain persistent racial inequity in a way that does not implicate white society." (McCarthy 1993: 160) The dominant knows that the acknowledgement of complicity will seriously compromise her/his privilege, thus `legitimate' discourses must be constructed to provide an `explanation' that engenders no sacrifice. Naturally, within such a context of lies, self-critical reflection is valued just above (or perhaps may be equated to) suicide.

In proposing an “elected stewardship” of the land that might serve to provide unborn generations with a land base for growth, Canadian Aboriginal activist Gary Potts notes:

That is the hardest part for non-native Canadians to live with. It is difficult for them because it will probably mean lowering their expectations as to how much wealth can be generated from the natural resources. (Engelstad & Bird 1992: 37)

To the dominant industrialist, the value of wealth/surplus cannot be overestimated, and certainly will not be usurped by sentimental considerations of `unborn' local consumers. Of course, it sounds downright unsympathetic and callous to just come right out and say that, thus lies must be woven (in justifiable service of ones colonial
right to protect one's personal assets.)

In the context of this discussion, the privilege lost will be that of "certainty," a heavy loss indeed. When engaged in constructing discourses of evasion, having to give up ready access to objective certainty is a debilitating obstacle. Sioux scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. comments on this:

until religious studies, as well as every other social science, adopts new language and a new orientation—unless EuroAmericans grow up about what it is they think they know—they will simply continue to perpetuate misconceptions and misperceptions.... (Grimes, 1995)

Included in this new orientation would be a challenge to the "incredible smugness" with which non-Native scholars talk about "the little they do know" about things Native." (Grimes, 1995)

Competing visions of the real

In a conversation with David Barsamian about American foreign policies and practices, Noam Chomsky reports that:

[Former Reagan administrator Thomas Carothers] says the US seeks to create a form of top-democracy [worldwide] that leaves traditional structures of power - basically corporations and their allies - in effective control. Any form of democracy that leaves the traditional structures essentially unchallenged is admissible. Any form that undermines their power is as intolerable as ever. (Chomsky, 1987: 6)

This statement exposes the agenda that has informed several centuries of colonial domination, and the central contradiction of American democracy in particular. Toni Morrison draws out this particular limiting vision of a controlling democracy in the context of early post-contact North American history:

What was distinctive in the New [World] was, first of all, its claim to freedom, and second, the presence of the unfree within the heart of the democratic experiment - the critical absence of democracy... (Morrison, 1993: 48)
This undemocratic democracy is no paradox; that is, it contains no profound relation which synthesizes non-polarizeable options. Rather it is a straight-forward contradiction in its constitution as a dualistic opposition, privileging one pole over another. The competing voices of "claim" (the objectified, stated discourse of reality) and "presence" (the subjective experience of colonized peoples) are conceptualized by Western narrators in an anti-relation of dominance, a master-slave dynamic effortlessly racialized in the context of Eurocentric institutions.

The privileging of Western objective visions of reality, together with the above-mentioned agenda to suppress racialized subjectivities, has provided the ground for the marginalization of Aboriginal and African-American spirituality, particularly insofar as this spirituality makes claims to represent the 'real.' Roxanna Ng's dichotomy of positivist versus non-positivist worldviews\(^\text{24}\) is helpful here to describe the chasm between the definitional, scientifio-objective Western vision and the indigenous understanding of a relational and dynamic universe. Laguna-Siouc poet Caroi Lee Sanchez outlines this distinction:

Our science studies living things; how they interact and how they maintain a balanced existence. Your science disregards -- even denies -- the spirit world: ours believes in it and remains connected to it. (Brant, 1988: 165)

The spirit world, as it encompasses the inner lives of all creatures, human and animal, in relation to the creator spirit (or Great Spirit,) is the site and context of most Aboriginal narratives. Yet that should not be surprising given the inseparability of religion and everyday life for traditional Aboriginal peoples.\(^\text{25}\) These narratives, in my estimation much like the biblical parables, and as expressions of metaphor, make

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\(^{24}\) Ng outlines these positions in her *Sociology of Minority Groups, Multiculturalism and Policy Making in Education* course at OISE.

\(^{25}\) Again, refer to Tanner (1983.)
no concrete distinction between the actual and the spiritual: the listener is left to situate these tales in her/his own life, culture and history. In this sense, faith, as a profoundly subjective experience, is intimately related to the responsibility of authorship. While these tales are not understood as literally 'real' in any simplistic or finite sense, they are experienced as powerfully 'real' expressions of relation. The west infantilizes this kind of narrative as 'fantasy,' that is, as ungrounded nihilistic construction - any attribution of these narratives to the real is marginalized as simple projection in Freudian terms. Wiget, considering this negation, laments the "...the loss of vitality that comes when belief is institutionalized in normative practices." (Wiget, 1985: 19) Gramsci's notion of 'common sense' is helpful to describe the dominant's utter negation and flattening of traditional indigenous narratives as they deviate from "normative practices." hooks takes this a step farther insisting that:

A culture of domination demands of all of its citizens self-negation. The more marginalized, the more intense the demand. (hooks, 1992: 19)

The implication is that the Western negation of indigenous spirituality is intimately bound up with the negation of self and subjectivity. One strategy of such negation is the attempted homogenization of those mysterious aspects of experience embraced in their paradox by indigenous peoples:

[There is a] compulsion in Western thought to collapse multiplicity into sameness and to replace multiple viewpoints with the Western gaze; the collective noun 'difference' often erases, rather than examines, differences. (Carr, 1996: 12)

When all difference is framed dualistically as other-than-the (European) norm, difference becomes marginalized in opposition to privileged aspects of Eurocentric ideology and practice. Robert Regnier's reflections on Canadian Aboriginal spirituality make explicit the dominant concerns which fuel this agenda of negation:
[The “unified eclecticism” of Aboriginal] spirituality had a revolutionary force because it was grounded in aboriginal subjectivity, which visualized the emancipatory possibility of constructing an aboriginal national identity that could be self-determining. (Regnier in Ng, 1995: 70)

The dominant knows that the greatest danger to hegemonic control is the oppressed's self-assignment of value grounded in their subjective experience of domination. The dominant response has been largely two-fold: to crush the self-value of the colonized, and to silence their voices of resistance; and, of particular salience to this discussion, to present the experience and agenda of the colonizer as uncomplicated and common-sensical (in the Gramscian sense,) grounded in objective universal truth and observable reality. However, scholarship in the field of anti-racism has consistently pointed out that power is always contested, at each site of domination. It took Glooskap and Coyote no time at all to recognize that the very source of pride that puffed up the dominant self-conception, the very notion that all experience was brightly-lit and rationally available, would be the colonizer's Achilles Heel.

Jonathan Goldberg, following Derrida's formulations, notes usefully that "dominant discourses allow their own subversion precisely because hegemonic control is an impossible dream, a self-defeating fantasy." (Hillman, 1992: 2) The central problem, as Wiget points out, is that the human capacity for self-deception will always find expression, despite the chimera of "control," often precipitating the downfall of the proud. (Wiget, 1985: 18) The dominant, in a yearning for (and weak imitation of) the omniscience of God, attempts to construct a controllable universe, enthroning her/himself above it. Carl Jung, while revealing Eurocentric blinders of his own (to be discussed below,) comments insightfully on the inevitable outcome of such megalomania:
The so-called civilized man has forgotten the trickster... He never suspects that his own hidden and apparently harmless shadow has qualities whose dangerousness exceeds his wildest dreams. (Jung, 1973: 147)

James P. Driscoll continues on the same theme:

The self-deceived know nothing about their suppressed shadow; it emerges unexpectedly in confused, yet sometimes ruling, motives. (Hillman, 1992: 9)

Traditional indigenous societies have never forgotten the “shadow” conscience of the proud, the trickster; on the contrary, it is the trickster who is frequently enthroned as culture-hero. While the trickster originally sought to humiliate those members of indigenous societies who would be so proud as to deny their own capacity for self-deceit, Wiget concludes that:

the effectiveness of Trickster in undermining social order makes him the appropriate vehicle for attacking the pomposity and revealing the ulterior motives of invading peoples as well...[poking] fun at the white man’s avarice or stupidity by taking advantage of his preoccupation with power and self-importance. (Wiget, 1985: 18)

The Cree call her/him Weesageechak. (Highway in York, 1990: viii) The trickster’s role in to constantly trip up those seeking absolutes: to humiliate them, in the sense that humiliation may be understood as demanding humility in the face of a mysterious universe. Weesageechak reminds Aboriginal listeners that quests for certainty and sureness should be treated with humour and pity, that these quests are the folly of those who have forgotten their relatedness to the world.

In discussing one example of the collision between the Western pursuit for absolute objectivity and Aboriginal convictions of the folly of such pursuits, Rupert Ross relates the frequent experience of Native witnesses in the Western legal system:

What [the court] regard[s] as their “uncertainty” lessens their credibility and

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26 This is expressed in the Navajo maxim, quoted in Ross: “He acts as though he had no relatives,” this the definition of acting ‘crazy’ (Ross, 1996: 67)
destroys the impact of their evidence. (Ross, 1996: 71)

The ‘subjectivity’ of traditional Aboriginal perspectives is used pejoratively to
disqualify Native peoples from legitimate legal discourse and effects, just as
‘subjective knowing’ is devalued as partisan, unscientific practice. Obviously, it is my
contention that, insofar as Aboriginal world views respect and honour the subjective,
mysterious and uncertain apprehension of a slippery universe, and thus reject
megalomaniac quests for certainty and God-like apprehension, the west has much
to learn from those it has crushed – yet it has much more to gain by maintaining
Indigenous silence.

Paulo Freire reflects that:

In reality, consciousness is not just a copy of the real, nor is the real only a
capricious construction of consciousness. (Freire, 1087: 153)

He reminds us that only critical investigations which maintain the dialectical
relationship between consciousness and ‘the real, between subject and object,
where the spirit of the trickster plays a fundamental role in ‘humiliating’ us, can
bring us closer to ‘true’ apprehensions of our world, properly orienting us with
humility to our paradoxically objective subjectivity and subjective objectivity.

III. Aboriginal epistemology and Indigenous knowledges.

In the following chapter, the indigenous trickster’s epistemological context will
be explored, particularly insofar as it contrasts with, and represents a fundamental
challenge to, dominant Western knowledges.
“Different understandings”

...Red Jacket, a celebrated [Six Nations] Seneca orator, on behalf of his people rejected the missionaries’ overture with words in his language that meant “Kitchi-Manitou has given us a different understanding.” (Basil Johnston in Ross 1992: vii)

Although Red Jacket’s rejection of missionary versions of Western epistemology may have come at a time when cultural differences between Europeans and First Nations were more marked (circa 1802), these differences have not been significantly eroded in the succeeding centuries, despite both massive technological change and significant challenges to the Christian faith. Representing a culture bred on binary oppositions, not the least significant of which being the savage-civilized dualism, European colonizers have been and remain quick to frame Aboriginal difference as primitive and idolatrous, exemplifying the unsophisticated darkness of the primordial (i.e. pre-contact) past. For the past five centuries, Indigenous peoples around the world have been effortlessly cast as naturalized (thus dehumanized) ‘objects’ of study for Western academics, and have suffered the same fate as their colonized native environments, pillaged for their resources. This pejorative concept of difference, a particularly useful one for the colonial enterprise, has informed dominant relations with North, South and Central American Aboriginal peoples from the moment of contact with few exceptions.27 The West has muted authentic Indigenous voices seeking to articulate Red Jacket’s notion of difference through consistently violent, pervasive and ultimately genocidal practice and theorizing. Northern Ontario crown attorney Rupert Ross (1996), in his refreshingly humble discussion of Aboriginal reality, notes that, for Canadian First Nations peoples:

27 The Columbus diaries of Spanish priest De Las Casas provide one such rare example of truth-telling among the histories which accompanied early colonial ventures to the Americas.
[Residential schools] were the closing punctuation mark in a loud, long declaration saying that nothing Aboriginal could possibly be of value to anyone...just an exclamation mark ending the sentence that declared: All things Aboriginal are inferior at best, and dangerous at worst. (46)

A beginning, then, to challenging the dominant notion of difference in the North American context is to attempt to understand what Red Jacket might have been saying, and why that embodiment of difference was/is so threatening to the colonizers.

**Indigenous Knowledges**

At this point I’d like to introduce the term “indigenous knowledges” into the discussion in an attempt to describe, generally speaking, some aspects of this ‘different,’ identifiably and philosophically consistent indigenous epistemology.

George Dei asserts that:

Indigenousness refers to the traditional norms and social values, as well as mental constructs which guide, organize and regulate African ways of living and making sense of their world. Indigenous knowledge differs from conventional knowledge because of an absence of colonial and imperial imposition...it also recognizes the multiple and collective origins as well as collaborative dimensions of knowledge and affirms that the interpretation or analysis of social reality is subject to different and sometimes oppositional perspectives. (1998: 96)

There are several keys aspects noted here that will be dealt with in context below: traditional cultural values and practices; the absence of, thus resistance to, colonial agendas; and the embracing of multiple perspectives and realities (fueled, I will contend, by a profound humility.) bell hooks (1992) notes that “Africans brought with them [to the Americas] ways of knowing akin to that of Native American people - a reverence for nature, for life, for ancestors,” (179-80) these shared values suggesting a powerfully complementary epistemological ground. Folklorist Van Laan (1995)
supports this by drawing out concrete intersections between African and First Nations oral narrative. (6,79) Of particular saliency to this discussion are those thematic cross-cultural intersections which, when drawn together, identify a unified body of traditional theory and praxis which stands in marked contrast to dominant Western knowledge.

**Relation**

The indigenous concept of relation, what Calliou refers to as "the law of right relationship" (Battiste & Barman, 1995: 6) as represented by the circle/medicine wheel, might be defended as the foundation of Aboriginal epistemology. Deloria recounts that in the contemporary academy "many scientists believe that all things are related...The proposition, however, still seems to be an intellectual concept that lacks the sense of emotional involvement." (1995: 57) Traditional knowledges grant relation more than intellectual truth status; rather, relation is understood to be a central commandment of existence, governing the desired and necessary conduct of humans and non-humans alike. Ross (1996) notes Navaho teachings which place a proper relatedness to all creation at the center of the human project. In this context the statement "he acts as though he had no relatives" may be understood, beyond a simple rebuke of bad manners and self interestedness, ultimately to constitute a diagnosis of madness (the symbolic disintegration of the mind's relation to creation.) (67) Ross notes that Western notions of insanity, interestingly enough, seem to center upon extended 'delusions' of relatedness (to trees, animals, etc.): it seems that incorporated within the West's valorization of rational objectivity is a fear, or at least mistrust, of any relationships not bound or informed by linear logic. Taken to its 'logical' summation, this might lead one to the conclusion that the restriction of
relations, particularly those not quantifiable in a lab (genetics, etc..) is an advisable condition to encourage progressive human growth. The scientists might reframe their contention as ‘all things are related, insofar as they may be understood as things’ (objects,) thus negating the possibility of profound human relationships with non-human ‘things.’ Of course, the West’s reification of everything from forests to fellow human beings creates quite a volume of ‘things’ that one cannot enter into a profound relation with (thus cannot hold up as valuable.) This seems to constitute a serious limit on the definition of “relative,” a limit which traditionally has not bound Aboriginal epistemology.

If, as John Berger (1985) notes, “to touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it,” (8) in this sense, all apprehension, including that of the scientists, establishes a relation, and thus a complicity. Clearly then, the more than may be objectified (thus cast as outside of human relations,) the less that one may be held accountable for: relation, with its demand of implication, becomes an enemy.

Laguna/Sioux poet Carol Lee Sanchez distinguishes Aboriginal science from dominant models:

Our science studies living things; how they interact and how they maintain a balanced existence. Your science disregards -- even denies -- the spirit world: ours believes in it and remains connected to it. (Brant, 1988: 165)

Deloria affirms this Aboriginal connection between life/animation and spirit:

The major difference between American Indian views of the physical world and Western science lies in the premise accepted by Indians and rejected by scientists: the world in which we live is alive. (1995: 55)

Both authors seem to contend that the removal of spirit (and “emotional involvement”) from ‘scientific’ investigation has served to extinguish the animate spark of the ‘objects’ of study. And Western commentators would likely agree insofar as the
proper attitude towards the object is understood to be one of sober detachment and disrelation: ‘spirit,’ as resident in the realm of human subjectivity, must necessarily be relegated to the pursuits of other (equally fragmented) disciplines. For Sanchez and Deloria, acknowledging one’s relatedness to all aspects of creation, including the mysterious worlds beyond our apprehension, is the only way to animate scientific study; conversely, the finitization of human experience encourages an undertaker’s approach to science.

Willie Ermine points out another significantly ‘different understanding’ of relation in the context of community, where, in the West, the individual and the social are frequently posited in an antagonistic disrelation. Commenting on this in an overview of Aboriginal education (1995), Chickasaw Eber Hampton notes that:

The second standard of Indian education is service. Education is to serve the people. Its purpose is not individual advancement or status. As Levine and White point out, Western society and education too often promote and glorify individual options for achievement at the expense of the social connections that make achievement meaningful. There is an inevitable conflict between Western education and Indian education on this point. (Hampton in Battiste & Barman, 1995: 21)

Informed by the Western stance, traditional Aboriginal society, with its emphasis on cooperation and group valuation over and above individual accomplishments, seemingly runs counter to Western commitments to individual ambition and progress. The social is Westernly understood to paralyze individual potential, and can only represent the devaluation of both individual contributions and that human progress engendered by the rise of great individuals. Here we see once again ‘different’ framed as tantamount to backward, unsophisticated - opposed to progress. Ermine has an alternative take on this:

Yet, within the Aboriginal community a paradox seemingly exists. In no other
place did the individual have more integrity or receive more honour than in the Aboriginal community... There was explicit recognition of the individual’s right in the collective to experience his or her own life. No one could dictate the path that must be followed... Ultimately, the knowledge that comes from the inner space in the individual gives rise to a subjective world view out onto the external world. (Ermine in Battiste, 1996: 108)

Ermine points to the inevitable devaluing of both individual and social emerging from the dualistic opposition of such fundamentally intersecting terms. In the West, power is granted absolutely, to be wielded mercilessly, either by an individual or a social group. Politics represents a relentless (usually corrupt) war between self-interested individuals and groups. Within traditional Aboriginal societies, no such individual/social dichotomy exists; rather individuals and groups are understood to exist in paradoxical, what I have termed dialectical, relation, where both are valued, but neither insofar as they exclude the interests of the other. In one example, outlined at length in Rupert Ross’ books (1992, 1996), traditional methods of influencing inappropriate youth behaviour consistently involve storytelling rather than punishment, where the individual’s right not be coerced is respected. Instead, the individual’s subjective interpretation, informed by her/his sense of commitment to the community, is appealed to, thus avoiding direct attacks on a person’s sense of worth. The ‘truth’ is suggested rather than directly imparted from an owner of correct universal interpretation to a naive and unknowing novice. Within this traditional practice, both individual and community are valued equally, sacrificing neither personal self-worth or growth nor the interests of the community. The power resides within the collective wisdom of traditional narratives, not within one person, nor within the coercive potential of a community. Both individual and collective, and their relation, remain disciplined by the ever-present demand of humility.
Humility

In Nation to Nation, (1992) Dene Georges Erasmus and Joe Sanders proclaim that “Native people have the enormous job of tapping people on the shoulder and saying, ‘This is not the way it’s supposed to be.’” (6) While this might appear to be flagrant grandstanding particularly in this context of Aboriginal sovereignty, I think that it is arguably true, and is, paradoxically, informed by the ethic of humility. Humility, in the Aboriginal context, manifests as anything but passive; rather, it seems to embrace a powerful self-critique that necessarily extends this demand to all others. In fact, as Weesageechak frequently demonstrates, the self-demand for humility is profoundly married to the occasional necessity to ‘humiliate’ others; that is, to gently or not-so-gently usher them into a relation of humility, that relation commanded by the Great Spirit. If relation is the grounding philosophical concept for Aboriginal epistemology, then humility, informed by an acknowledgement of our multiple relations, is its central tenet and demand.

According to Stein’s (1979) definition, to be humble is to reject self-glorifying pride and arrogance in favour of a feeling of relative insignificance. (691) Regular reference is made, throughout this rather lengthy definition, to hierarchical rank and position: it appears that to be humble one must reject such hierarchies and opt out of their binding locations, or, pejoratively, have ones assigned rank (which ostensibly one values) reduced, creating a feeling of inferiority. The definition itself suggests, in the context of this discussion, both an Aboriginal and a Western concept of ‘humbleness’ and being ‘humbled.’ Stein’s definition of ‘humility’ seems to capture the spirit of Aboriginal understandings of this term most effectively, where humility refers to an individual’s “modest sense of one’s own importance.” (1979: 692) Significantly, ‘humiliation’ is characterized as an aggressive action designed to
"lower the pride or self-respect of" another. (Stein, 1979: 692) While I maintain the importance of preserving this agenda to address inappropriate pride, I'd also like to suggest that a more dialectical and less adversarial form of humiliation is embodied within Aboriginal narratives. I will develop this theme further when discussing Weesageechak her/himself. Dene George Blondin (1990) relates the story of a Dene elder who says to his prideful son (who desires to be wise as quickly as possible,) “If you would slow down a little, maybe you could understand simple Raven talk... You’d better slow down - you don’t know how long you will live.” (18) The father reminds his son of how little he knows even to this point, a gentle humiliation designed to reorient the boy towards a 'right relation' to creation and a reverence for non-linear discovery.

**Acquisition & Possession**

John Berger (1985) notes that “when [Western observers] 'see' a landscape, we situate ourselves in it.” (11) Understood dialectically, the observer acknowledges both her/his relation to the seen and her/his complicity (though not complete ownership) in constructing it. Understood from a colonial perspective, this seeing constitutes nothing less than the frontiers of possession, the ownership of a desired object infinitely separate from oneself: here there is no acknowledgement of relationship. This distinction informs Aboriginal and Western concepts of both acquisition and possession/ownership. Both Western and indigenous knowledges presuppose the accepted value of acquisition and possession, yet there are fundamental differences.

Aboriginal acquisition might be framed as the ability to preserve traditional knowledges in the bodies and voices of individuals who may then reproduce it precisely for future generations: this orientation is community-centred, although it clearly benefits individual members of the society. Contrarily, acquisition may also be understood as the desire to increase one's own wealth and status relative to the group: this is self-serving, and, if necessary, operates to the exclusion of others' needs in the
clearly benefits individual members of the society. Contrarily, acquisition may also be understood as the desire to increase one's own wealth and status relative to the group: this is self-serving, and, if necessary, operates to the exclusion of others' needs in the context of competition for resources. Martin (1978) comments that:

The avarice of individual [fur] traders registered profoundly in the minds of their Indian counterparts, who despised such baseness of character -- and bluntly said so. The usual theory advanced by the incredulous Natives, who found themselves spectators to European intrigue and bad manners, was that Europe must be impoverished of such-and-such an item. For what else could prompt these people to seek so desperately to provide themselves with such prodigious quantities of it for transshipment? (152)

One of the many things that Weesageechak regularly gets rebuked for is hoarding; this purely selfish action seems to be, in traditional Aboriginal epistemologies, one of the most repugnant manifestations of `acting as though one has no relations’ imaginable. In a world where maintaining harmony (one of Weesageechak’s assigned tasks, Dickason, 1997:60) and cooperation are understood as critical to survival in an often harsh environment, not to mention philosophically consistent with the ethic of relation, this distorted selfishness would traditionally have been condemned and ridiculed.

Place

Anishenabe activist Gary Potts effectively frames another powerful intersection which informs indigenous knowledges, one intimately tied to concepts of ownership: the valuing of place. Potts notes:

Our basic disagreement with the government, with the environmentalists and with the logging companies centers on where the authority comes from to decide what can be done on the land. They believe it’s up to the Ministry of Natural Resources to make the decisions, based on what all the user groups want. We say the authority comes from the land itself. You assess what the
forest needs to sustain itself and be healthy...The land is the boss. (Potts in Engelstad & Bird 1992: 36)

Barre Toelken contends that this “sense of locality [and] feeling for place - both geographic and sacred,” (Lopez 1977: xiv) this sense of the authority of the land, “infuses” Aboriginal narratives, particularly those about Coyote, the Midwestern American trickster. Harvey Knight provides context adding that:

Geographical knowledge of plains, lakes, rivers and mountain ranges was crucial to [Saulteaux] survival because it was on these vast areas that they roamed, hunting and gathering food, evading and confronting their traditional enemies. (Wolfe 1989: viii)

The connection between survival, the spiritual/sacred and the land cannot be overstated in importance: the ground of an indigenous peoples is literally the ground of their epistemology. Willie Ermine goes further:

Those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward have a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed Aboriginal epistemology. (Ermine in Battiste, 1996: 103)

Ermine suggests that Aboriginal ways of knowing are foundationally informed by a valuation of the subjective in apprehending the objective universe: understood in this way, the land and the people are inseparable and incomprehensible when dichotomized. This must be understood as distinct from that position which frames Aboriginal people as natural, that is, conflated and identified with a dualistic, objectified notion of land. The first notion posits a dialectical relation, the second reduction and dehumanization.

Traditional narratives, while frequently transplanted, constantly refer back to a time and place revered by the elders, a place where creation took place. Deloria, in his above mentioned text, categorically denies the scientific validity of Bering Strait
theories, understanding them as colonial strategies specifically designed to undermine Aboriginal histories and knowledges. After all, if we are indeed ‘all immigrants,’ then land ownership is up for negotiation, and aboriginal title is merely sentimentalizing a shallow, brief history. However, if indigenous North American peoples were, as traditional narratives relate, ‘always here,’ then the European quest to acquire aboriginal lands can only be understood as an invasion. The intersection of land and identity for indigenous peoples is a profound theme throughout traditional narratives, and genocidal practices effected by colonial powers have not coincidentally operated at both levels simultaneously.

**Living knowledges.**

The grandfathers were gone, but not their stories. (Wolfe, 1988: xii)

In large part due, no doubt, to the primitivization engendered with the early objectification of Aboriginal peoples, indigenous knowledges., particularly those transmitted through oral narrative, have been assigned to the Western ethnographer’s canon of endangered or even extinct folkways. Contemporary Aboriginal scholarship however refutes this point contentiously and consistently (seemingly in every preface and editorial I have come across!) George Blondin contends that “some things do not change. Many younger Dene no longer live the traditional life, but they know it and understand its values.” (1990: 246) Ross agrees, reflecting on northern Ontario Aboriginal communities:

> The spiritual plane clearly continues to play an important part in Native life, despite the fact that many traditional ceremonies were actually banned by our law and virtually all were denigrated as heathen practices. If anything, traditional ceremonies and practices are making a determined comeback and will once again be a very visible component of daily Native life. (1992: 54)

Nor has this reawakening of Aboriginal tradition been a recent event, according to
Metis historian Olive Dickason (1997):

The reaffirmation of Aboriginal identity has not been a sudden development; Amerindians have always had a clear idea of who they are. What is new is the demand for recognition of this by the dominant society. (413)

This demand constitutes a call for the valuation of Aboriginal subjectivities by those same institutions that have benefited from the systematic objectification of Native peoples. In this sense, they seek an entrance into the academy, such that new histories with revised valuations might be contributed to the canon of academy knowledge. A related recognition sought is for the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of oral narratives as 'serious' literature and history; as vehicles transmitting foundational truths about Aboriginal reality and identity. Blackfoot elder Percy Bullchild (1985) writes that, in the contemporary world, "some of these stories may sound a little foolish, but they are very true. And they have much influence over all of the people of this world, even now as we all live." (3) Knight contends that, far from constituting a dead practice, "oral stories abound in various forms...Oral tradition is still an important and integral part of Indian societies." (Wolfe 1989: vii)

The trickster narrative perfectly illustrates the dynamic adaptiveness of indigenous knowledges. In the face of colonialism, shifting easily from an intra-cultural demand for humility to an inter-cultural one. Cree Playwright Tomson Highway (1989) asserts:

Some say that Nanabush left this continent when the white man came. We believe s/he is still here among us - albeit a little the worse for wear and tear - having assumed other guises. Without the continued presence of this extraordinary figure, the core of Indian culture would be gone forever. (12)

George Dei asserts that a central argument supporting the movement of indigenous knowledges into the academy focuses on the answering of this question:

...how do we ensure that learners are informed by the complete history of
ideas and events that have shaped and continue to shape human growth and social development? (1998: 96)

Implicit in this question is the demand to challenge hegemonic Western discourses and their monopoly of legitimised knowledge, not simply through the inclusion of indigenous knowledges and teachers on the curricula of the academy, but also through the demand for critical transformation contained within these knowledges themselves. Nowhere is this demand explicated so frequently or profoundly than in the indigenous trickster narrative.

IV. Indigenous Oral Narrative

The North American Aboriginal and African-American trickster figure, the slippery hero of this discussion, lives within the oral narrative tradition of diverse indigenous peoples. Andrew Wiget usefully notes that, “Contemporary readers, forgetting the origins of Western epic, lyric, and dramatic forms, are easily disposed to think of 'literature' only as something written,” (Wiget, 1985: 1) suggesting a Western hierarchizing of narrative forms. Oral traditions have become co-opted, “eaten” in bell hooks’ formulation, reduced to comprising the primitive, precultural origins of legitimate (i.e. Western) literature. This historical framing has created a context where oral traditions have become easily racialized, thus marginalized, as unintellectual, frivolous, unserious - ostensibly mirroring the ascribed unsophistication of their 'primitive' authors.

When investigated independent of the constraints of Eurocentric historicizing however, oral traditions may be seen to embody a profound sophistication whereby narratives take shape as ‘evolving communications,’ (Wiget, 1985: 2) as dependent on the listener as on the narrator: these "speech-events" (Wiget, 1985: 2) become
relational events, implicitly anchored in specific historical, personal and social circumstances. Efforts to record these slippery indigenous communication events (usually by Western anthropologists and folklorists) have served to further marginalize the oral story from the canons of legitimized literature. Wiget comments that "...transcribing an oral performance is, to borrow Alfred Lord's phrase, like 'photographing Proteus;’" (2) that is, to colonize the speech event, to attempt a decontextualized Western transcription, is to unalterably pollute and transform it. A powerfully moving Aboriginal oral narrative may be imprisoned within a Western anthology as a stylistically-weak poem by Eurocentric standards.

Indigenous understandings of narrative as fluid and dynamic echo, or more correctly contain, a vision of "reality as eternal, but in a continuous state of transformation," (Henderson in Ross, 1996:115) this in stark contrast to the linear model of time and objective nature of reality proposed by Western science. A salient example of this fundamental disagreement may be drawn from the time model imposed by the industrial revolution, whereby efficiency and effective work management demanded the rigid containment of time, and the individual's adherence to arbitrary mechanical schedules. Within this model, time unstructured and underutilized (with reference to creating a surplus) became profit lost. This work-ethic took on ideological justifications, as bell hooks notes: "Many 19th-century Christians saw all forms of idle activity as evil, or at least a breeding ground for wrong-doing." (hooks, 1995: 91) This capitalist rationalization of worker control for profit met its antithesis in the colonies where "for Native Americans and Africans, idle time was space for reverie and contemplation." (hooks, 1995: 91) Once again it must be noted that this 'different understanding' has been greeted in the West not with acknowledgement as simply an apolitical and alternative approach, but rather with
derision and outright condemnation, insofar as it challenges the profit agenda that informs the industrial West.

Wiget notes the existence of “a widespread Native American sense of narrative time...” (Wiget, 1985: 3) which coincides and complements an indigenous understanding of time as cyclic, unrestrained and uncontainable (hence maddeningly inefficient to Western managers). Within this notion of fluid time, cultural institutions are understood both as created/subjective and mirroring eternal verities. (Wiget, 1985: 3) Stories, like histories, take shape as metaphors of lasting truths, and as metaphors, shift location constantly with the teller and hearer. Valuing both subjective tellers/hearers and traditional truths equally, indigenous narrative is always relational within a fluid and uncontainable sense of time. Humility in the face of this is foundational to Aboriginal worldviews.28 It is my contention that a lack of humility, enshrined the belief in the fixedness, the containability, the mechanistic objectification and manipulation of time (ie. the uncontainable), is central to Eurocentric capitalist thinking. To acknowledge the subjectivity of time, an institution or story is to recognize its fallibility and the inevitability of manager/author complicity, frightening notions to a world hiding behind the justification of objective detachment. Any radical resistance to hegemonic knowledge production must address this desire to objectify, thus colonize, both time and stories.

Coeur D'Alene author Janet Campbell Hale simultaneously laments and celebrates that “making fiction is a mysterious process.” (Hale, 1993: xxii) Here she reflects on the essentially autobiographical, the non-fictional and subjective, nature of all fictive writing, yet embraces this paradox as central to responsible and self-

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28 For one commentator’s side-by-side comparison of traditional Aboriginal values as compared to Western values, see A. Tanner’s The Politics of Indianness (1983).
conscious authorship. Pawnee writer Anna Lee Walters expresses this paradox through the elder character Lena in *The Devil and Sister Lena*:

> We can't see ever thing what's in the world, baby. They's lotsa things in the world sides jest what we see...We not the only ones what lives. Us peoples knows. Some others may think they's the only ones what live. And too, things ain't always what they look like. (Walters in Brant, 1988: 145)

This passage expresses the kind of humility necessary when attempting to tell the truth: all true stories must contain a self-consciousness of their own artifice. In so doing, the true narrative contains the demand of an interrogation of all that the reader and author knows. (Wiget, 1985: 21) This challenge illuminates the powerfully subversive potential of situating oneself within an articulated, critical subject-position: objectified truths, the same essentialized narratives that bear the brunt of postmodern critique, are ruthlessly exposed insofar as they repress the artificiality, the constructed nature, of their origins. Aboriginal oral narratives thrive within this paradox, experiencing no contradiction, and yet (thus) are read by the dominant observer as childish and irrational. These narratives are crushed when forced into a dualistic, finite, objectivistic strait-jacket of a frame. Helen Carr summarizes this point:

> Narrative is a form of epistemology; it shapes the way we understand the world. That is why it is imperative to deconstruct the narratives that have naturalized colonial power. That is why it has been so essential for those in opposition to a colonial power to go on retelling and reinventing their own stories. (Carr, 1996: 256)

The trivialization of trickster tales has, I contend, been the result of an equally imperative and desperate need for colonial cultures to limit the subversive potential of non-dominant narratives by attacking indigenous subjectivity. Whereas “Trickster tales [openly] proclaim their own artificiality,” (Wiget, 1985: 20) dominant discourses
desperately propose and defend the objective truth of their own narratives, subsequently employing Aboriginal humility against indigenous narratives, strategically marginalizing and trivializing them. Indigenous narratives as framed as untrue stories, dualistically fictive insofar as content and meaning coexist in a simple means–ends orientation. As admittedly subjective they, Westernly understood, renounce any claim to objective truth.

Anthologist Petrone challenges this Western understanding of fiction:

Myth...in the mind-set of a non-Indian reader, is considered as fiction. But the traditional narratives that whites have characterized as myth are not regarded by natives as untrue. All Indian traditions are valid guides to reality. (Petrone, 1990:12)

Trickster narratives have historically and fundamentally operated to interrogate any notion of fixed, objective reality and easily-knowable truth, originally addressing those `insane' enough to deny the primary relationship between all living things (and the appropriate stance of humility in the face of this) within indigenous cultures, acknowledging the universality of human pride and the capacity for self-deception. A traditional First Nations poem asserts the relational quality of all Aboriginal experience:

In a circle, a fire is built.  
In a circle, a song is danced.  
In a circle, a story is told. (Van Laan, 1995: p.6)

These circles, understood indigenously (as developed in the preface), represent the concrete valuation of intersecting relations: these relations inform ceremony, prayer and narrative - that is, all experience from the most immediate to the most.

29 Rupert Ross', in Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice, expounds upon this indigenous understanding of relational detachment as insanity, one which runs profoundly counter to Western notions which contrarily conceptualize the seeking of relationships with all living things (including trees and lakes) as `madness.'
mysterious. The story is told in a circle to establish, among other things, the narrator as both the origin of the interpretation and the repository of, and vehicle for, cultural tradition and experience. The individual and the social are inextricably, dialectically married, and the narrator bears the humility to acknowledge that s/he cannot separate her/himself from the community and its traditional wisdom: s/he can never claim absolute ownership or authority independent of her/his community, although her/his interpretive and storytelling skill may be valued greatly. So long as stories are told in circles, the ever-present danger of narrator self-deception, leading to inappropriate pridefulness, is at least metaphorically mediated. Rita Cox comments that “what is important is not the storyteller...but the story,” (Lawley, 1997: 25) and this admonition, to avert the kind of pridefulness that can emerge when deific or heroic power is concentrated within one individual, may also be directed towards the central character of the trickster narrative, the trickster her/himself. The trickster is a highly ambiguous figure, and is certainly unheroic, even superficial on occasion, as will be developed in detail below. With regards to the present discussion, the superior position of the story in relation to the storyteller or central character is particularly salient. In the telling/creating of an oral narrative, a powerful relation is established between storyteller and audience, one grounded in a self-conscious awareness of the artifice of language, thus the constructed nature of all communication and historicizing. The tale then, as relation, demands interpretation and interrogation, itself acting as a trickster of sorts, luring the unselfconscious and literal listener into the trap afforded those who take themselves and the world too seriously, yet not seriously (nor critically) enough. This relation cannot be fixed or essentialized, not normalized or naturalized (or easily transcribed, hence contained): the relation of the narrative must be entered into and investigated with a full awareness of the specific
historical and social location of the participants. As Wiget notes, the trickster story "derives its power from its pointed applicability to the situation motivating its telling." (Wiget, 1985: p.16) This awareness, and valuing, of personal subjectivity and specific historical-social-temporal location, as mentioned above, is highly challenging to static hegemonic discourses which seek to universalize and decontextualize. This narrative relation embraces a perspective, a world view and a commitment to individual dignity and value: in this sense, it can be related to anti-racist perspectives which function in the same way, operating from a similar agenda and ground. Race and ethnicity, understood in this context as relations rather than fixed entities, may be seen as similarly fluid and difficult to pin down independent of its social context and situatedness. The invisibilization of the subject-positions of racialized persons has proven as effective a strategy for domination in the social arena as has the marginalization of subjectivity within non-dominant narrative forms.

It is my contention not only that trickster narratives and anti-racist dialogues share an identical structure and agenda but also that, because of this, the trickster narrative may be embraced as a model for the anti-racist educator in the context of racialized relations of dominance.

Indicating the universal quality, method and function of the trickster tales among indigenous peoples, storyteller Van Laan notes the similarity between trickster tales of the Southeast American aboriginal nations and those stories found in Africa or Asia. (Van Laan, 1995: p.6) The function of these indigenous narratives seems originally to have been to address intracultural imbalances, specifically targeting the dangers of pridefulness. At the moment of contact, however, these stories transformed to slyly address the encroaching 'insanity' of colonial cultures, serving to warn indigenous peoples against the pride and megalomania of the
newcomers and their cultural imperatives. The need to situate oneself in ‘right relation’ to all living things is not just a spiritual but also a survivalistic imperative for indigenous peoples. African-American storyteller Virginia Hamilton notes, with respect to enslaved indigenous African peoples, that:

These tales were created out of sorrow. But the hearts and minds of the black people who formed them, expanded them, and passed them on to us were full of love and hope. We must look on the tales as a celebration of the human spirit. (Hamilton, 1985: xii)

Indigenous trickster narratives, such as the African-American Bruh Rabbit tales of the American south, are born of resistance, initially addressing the pridefulness of all humans, but, post-colonization, transformed (in the true spirit of the trickster-transformer, to be discussed below) to address European megalomania in the context of the oppression of African and First Nations peoples. Yet, although these tales contain that “memory [which] sustains a spirit of resistance,” (hooks, 1995: 191) and as such embody a powerful full-frontal attack on narrow objectivist thinking, they also contain a message of hope and joyfulness, even playfulness, which employs familiar symbols, characters and metaphors of indigenous experience. Hamilton asserts that, “...these folk tales were once a creative way for an oppressed people to express their fears and hopes to one another.” (Hamilton, 1985: xii) In the context of oppression, the trickster tale reminds indigenous peoples of all that cannot be colonized, and as such constitutes a powerful dialectic of spiritual resistance, embodying both joyful affirmation and damning critique. Contemporary ‘multicultural’ interpretations and employments of trickster tales have tended to bury the critical

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30 bell hooks, in Black Looks, asserts a powerful connection, both spiritually and socially/personally, between African-American and First Nations peoples, emerging from the moment of contact in a relationship valuing similar human experiences and agendas, and developing in mixed-race communities throughout the Americas.
elements of these narratives, in favour of a more palatable containment. I would assert, however, that the trickster - whether Bruh Rabbit, Anansi or Nana'b'oozhoo - is no-one to take lightly: the trickster narrative is as determinably irreverent and anti-racist in spirit and method as anything to be found in the sociopolitical literature of resistance.

African-Canadian storyteller Rita Cox asserts, “storytelling was not a performing art, it was a way of communicating.” (Lawley, 1997: 25) Of the multiple subjects to be communicated through indigenous narrative, the ethics of resistance to domination emerge as central, particularly through the trickster stories. This resistance is locally situated and contextualized through the use of local languages, those languages replete with community commitments, values and knowledges. Molefi Kete Asante, in response to questions about the authenticity of transplanted languages, asks rhetorically, “What is your language? It is the language with which you first got your consciousness.” (Asante, 1996: 4) If this is true then Cree stories, for example, will contain a significance for a Cree hearer and teller that remains relatively incommunicable to a non-Cree. This may be simply understood as divisive and exclusionary; but perhaps it may instead encourage an appropriate acknowledgement of the localized quality of subjectivities and knowledges, and the concomitant difficulties inherent in translation and transplantation. Clearly the subversive potential of such languages in the context of domination is enormous, and was likely recognized soon after contact by colonizing peoples. When stories carry the seeds of resistance, if for no other reason than that they carry the seeds of cultural dignity and survival, it becomes necessary from the dominant perspective to

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31 It is significant that Bruh Rabbit, as Brer Rabbit, has become sanitized into the happy-go-lucky character found in Anglo-American children's folklore. Not insignificantly, he often embodies stereotypical qualities attributed to peoples of African heritage by dominant European society.
limit their power to empower.

It is time then to look critically at these powerful stories, with a view to investigating their value both to the traditional indigenous cultures that spawned them, and to that Western culture situated within the academy that has historically sought to marginalize them.

V. The Trickster

...we have from the mists of unremembered time a character in our traditional oral narratives who speaks to us about how we may travel the path into knowing the unknown...The Old Ones, above all, knew the character of the trickster and his capacity to assist with self-actualization. (Ermine in Battiste, 1996:105)

**Bruh Rabbit**

While my central concern remains with North American indigenous narratives, the oral traditions of African-American peoples illuminate some salient themes common to all indigenous trickster narratives, and may prove useful in introducing Nanabush and Coyote in the full range of their incarnations across cultures.

One of the central figures in African-American trickster tales is Bruh Rabbit (or 'Brer Rabbit'.) Storyteller Virginia Hamilton introduces this slippery, enigmatic 'hero':

Rabbit was small and apparently helpless compared to the powerful bear, the wily fox, and the ferocious wolf. But the slave teller made the rabbit smart, tricky, and clever, and winner over larger and stronger animals. (Hamilton, p.x)

The theme of the weaker character prevailing over the stronger, often against impossible odds, is central to trickster narratives. When Bruh Rabbit skips onstage, the listener knows that the prideful and dominant, seemingly omnipotent figure in the story will receive her/his 'comeuppance.' Bruh Rabbit's weapon, strategy and
strength is his ability to manipulate appearances. Hamilton’s passage above ascribes a concrete political agenda to the storyteller, manifested through her/his consciously subversive construction of the narrative, this consistent with traditional indigenous understandings of the pedagogical role of the narrator in history and storytelling. Another passage from Hamilton illuminates a third central point:

Still, Bruh Rabbit sometimes got into trouble, just as the slaves did, which made him seem all the more human. To the slaves, the rabbit came to be identified with themselves, which makes these tales highly unusual in the animal folklore genre. (Hamilton, p.x)

The trickster is extremely human - not only fallible, but often downright thoughtless and foolish, attributes seldom ascribed to Western ‘heroes.’ Characteristically and ironically, Bruh Rabbit’s lack of distance on his own process and fallibility make him a prime candidate for precisely such a ‘comeuppance’ himself. His actions frequently fall randomly on the continuum between foolishness and wisdom, calling both into question and positing a paradoxical relationship between the two for the reader/listener. Bruh Rabbit is no saint, nor is he inspiringly brave nor intelligent: his heroism resides in his shrewdness which, in the context of relations of dominance, denotes a self-conscious apprehension of those relations, their agenda and their operation. Sometimes Brer Rabbit is in possession of this critical apprehension, and sometimes the narrator alone has distance on the events unfolding. Rabbit uses this knowledge to restore ‘right relations’ in the community; that is, he humiliates those who require humility, and submits himself to frequent humiliation himself when he falls prey to pride and self-conceit. Importantly, indigenous peoples, embracing the virtue of humility in the face of an interrelated yet mysterious universe, may identify as strongly with this mythical figure’s foibles as with his virtues. Brer Rabbit is less laughed at than laughed with, concomitant with the understanding
that human knowledge is irredeemably partial and subject to fallibility. In this sense, the trickster is absolutely 'real' and substantial to indigenous peoples, insofar as s/he represents the human condition in all its fullness. Brer Rabbit is a 'hero' only insomuch as anyone can be a hero: while his actions may prove heroic, Rabbit himself is absolutely and frequently prone to pridefulness, greed and temptation.

Bruh Rabbit insists on dealing with his quarry on his own turf, playing on the dull-witted dominant figure's vulnerability to being fooled into seeing things the trickster's way (as the trickster coaxes the dupe into a non-dominant space where 'different' rules operate.) Bruh Rabbit can never be tricked or enslaved on his own turf, that is, when accompanied by the full range of his shrewd faculties and indigenous cultural knowledge: his troubles begin when he neglects his capacity to reframe apparently unsophisticated situations as potentially problematic; or perhaps he just 'acts as if he has no relatives.' Just as all of the above attributes may equally be ascribed to North American Aboriginal tricksters, a powerful historical memory grounds these African-American metaphoric tales, just as it grounds the tales of dispossessed Aboriginal nations. Enslaved African peoples were removed from their 'turf,' and, for centuries, systematically denied a new turf upon which to restore proper relations. One form of resistance that reemerged from this context of dominance is the African trickster narrative as African peoples resisted physical, intellectual and spiritual enslavement through oral history. The establishment of an intellectual and spiritual, if not physical, turf in a dominant space, with the manifest purpose of resisting cultural genocide, lives on as one of the most inspiring and courageous events in the history of the Americas, events echoed in the struggle and resistance of Native American peoples. The Bruh Rabbit narrative contains not only the message of the possibility and potential of resistance, but also the joyful majesty
of overcoming. Brer Rabbit, as indigenous 'hero,' is one born of resistance and struggle, powerfully and successfully making the transition from addressing intra-group dynamics to confronting inter-group relations in the context of dominance.

Some general tricksteristics

Probably more stories have been told about Coyote than any other animal. The ultimate trickster hero, Coyote can do just about anything that he puts his mind to. The Crow say that Coyote created the world. The Apache say that Coyote released all the buffalo to roam free over the Great Plains. (Van Laan, p.65)

Folklorist Van Laan introduces the Brer Rabbit of the Americas, Coyote, the trickster known by many names: Manabush (Menominee), Manabozho (Algonkian), Nana'b'oozho or Nanabush (Anishenabe), Glooscap (Micmac/Malecite), Weesageechak or Wesakchak (Cree), Nihansan (Arapaho); Coyote (Blackfoot); Wadjunkaga (Winnebago), Esacawata (Crow), Tsistu (Cherokee), Iktomi (Lakota Sioux), and Raven (Haida, Tlingit). These names, and the particular animal manifestations of the tricksters, often cross tribal/national boundaries, perhaps cross-fertilized as a consequence of the vast continental indigenous trade network thriving prior to contact. Tomson Highway, in his preface to Geoffrey York's The Dispossessed, notes that Nanabush is essentially genderless: Thomas King refers to his Coyote character as 'she', while Basil Johnston uses the masculine form to refer to Nanabush. Rupert Ross, in Returning to the Teachings (1996), comments on the genderless structure of Northern Ontario Anishenabe speech, this concomitant with the general omission of both pronouns and nouns; this may also help to explain why the gender of the trickster is seldom agreed upon across, or even within, tribal/national groups.

32 I have chosen to use the form 's/he' in this paper.
The tricksters of North American Aboriginal oral tradition conduct their trickery in the forests, mountains, icy tundra, coastal areas and on the great plains. Their particular theatre of action is central to the meaning and power of the tales, insofar as these stories always play out the breakdown of relationships among the peoples, creatures, weather, landforms and manitous/spirits of local sites. Thus, while the narrative's central features may remain consistent from group to group and storyteller to storyteller, each narrator takes pains to reflect local environments in her/his telling, situating the tales powerfully in specific historical-social-temporal locations.

The Native trickster emerges appropriately from what Andrew Wiget describes as the second of three foundational stages in Aboriginal history, the ‘transformation period,’ as a shape-changing, creative intermediary between the Great Spirit/Manitou and the universe. The trickster is often conceptualized as a transformative figure. The Canadian Encyclopedia (1999) states that

the Trickster myths...frequently but not always represent the Transformer as a comical character who steals light, fire, water, food, animals or even mankind and loses them or sets them loose to create the world as it is now...and the Culture Hero myths, in which the Transformer appears as a human being of supernatural powers who brings the world into its present form by heroic feats... (Trickster in Marsh, 1999)

This represents a powerful marriage of form and function as the trickster transforms her/himself in order to transform the world. The trickster employs her/his ability to exchange shape in the service of transforming attitudes as well as land forms: her/his tricks often involve disguises operating to entrap the smug in their own self-assuredness (reminding them of the artifice of all appearances, including their own dominant facade.) Weesageechak is constructed by the storyteller as “the image of

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33 The three periods, representing the birth of the universe, list as follows: sky/underworld of the origin period (eg. the earth diver); mythic protoworld of the transformation period (eg. coyote); and the modern world/historico-legendary period. (Wiget, 1985: 4)
man continually creating himself" in order to keep us humble "unfinished animals."

(Wiget, 1985: 21) Thomson Highway notes that:

[Nanabush] can assume any guise he chooses. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and meaning of existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of [the human] and that of God, the Great Spirit. (1989: 12)

While this may seem a tall order for a clown, particularly when we envision the stereotype of the relatively impotent Western clown or "fool," the trickster narrative succeeds by illustrating, often humorously but not without sober intent, the folly of unselfcritical certainty. The plains First Nations’ Coyote represents a characteristic combination of wiliness and outrageous (apparent) amorality. Coyote, as all tricksters, pushes the envelope of social convention to its extreme, the narrator challenging her/his audience to both laugh at and reflect on the frequently artificial and arbitrary nature of the social order.

Consequently, the trickster is envisioned as, paradoxically, both culture hero and bumbling social misfit. The trickster’s relation to his people is characteristically both (and neither) heroic and comic-tragic. Originally granted enormous power over people and animals by the Creator, s/he almost immediately demonstrates a propensity to abuse it, and thus is stripped of all but "the power to flatter and deceive." (Anderson, 1979:11) One of her/his first tasks, to prevent the animals and peoples of the world from quarreling, was ostensibly a miserable failure: yet we might see a glimpse of method in "Wisakedjak's" madness if we presume that calling all certainty into question may be the central mandate of her/his narrative, even the glorious-seeming facade of non-conflictual human relations. Anthologist Astrov relates that

[Coyote] at times...merely imitates in a ridiculous way the works of the Maker or the culture hero. And yet, with all this, he not seldom is shown as the culture hero himself, as the powerful magician who not only destroys but brings about
order in this chaotic world. With all his mean selfishness he displays at times an astonishing amount of cleverness and sound judgment. (Astrov, 1962: 119)

While this presents no interpretive conundrum from an Aboriginal perspective, a tradition steeped in a dialectical relation of critique, it has proven incomprehensible to Western readers intent on polarizing these attributes. Simply stated, the trickster, as all humans, is both and neither. German philosopher Nietzsche, himself something of a trickster in academic circles, comments, “but how can one constantly admire without constantly feeling contempt?” (Nietzsche, 1974: 209) The ‘right relation’ that the trickster seeks to establish is a dialectical relation of critique. Within this relation, persons are both heroic and not heroic, foolish and sophisticated, insofar as all persons are both prone to self-deception, and capable of rising above self-absorption. This relation flies in the face of notions of absolute, essentialized narratives: yet the trickster knows that everything and everyone is vulnerable to self-deception, even her/himself. According to Pelton’s writings, Hillman notes, “it is as symbol of [this ‘sacred paradox’] that the trickster functions, endlessly producing meaning and order by endlessly challenging them.” (Hillman, 1992:10) This process of constant critique is the method and lesson of the trickster story. It is futile to attempt to make a Western-style hero of the trickster. The real hero is the narrative itself, operating as it does to mercilessly cast the trickster in the worst possible light such that a lesson in humility might be gained in the telling. In another tale, that same Nanabush or Coyote might manipulate the shifting sand of another creature’s confident stance.

Sometimes described as half human, half spirit/manitou (reminiscent of the Christian Jesus figure in this aspect at least), the Native trickster fumbles along her/his way, both blessed and cursed with manitou-like power, and similarly blessed
and cursed with human sensibilities and foibles. In Dene stories, s/he is able to “communicate with all creation,” a power granted to her/him by the Great Spirit. (Wolfe, 1989: xiii) Significantly, the trickster is often considered antecedent to, or at least contemporary with, the dawn of human history. S/he is alternately known as “Imitator, First Born, Old Man, First Creator, Transformer and Changing Person in the white man’s translations—all names derived from his powers, his habits and his acts.” (Lopez, 1977: xvii) Yet s/he is a transformer first and foremost: a transformer of relations, shrewdly employing a bag of tricks to effect this change.

Problematically, Coyote ‘exists,’ as part manitou/spirit, not only in the relation between the Great Spirit and the creatures, but also in the relation between narrator and listener. Coyote cannot be quantified, measured or objectified insofar as her very substance is inseparable from the subjective experience of both storyteller and listener. And yet Coyote and her influence are substantial and operative on the ‘real’ finite plane. Tricksters themselves are particularly well-suited to addressing this question of their own existence, this offhand dismissal of the mysterious, by operating from the assumption that most everything is mysterious, particularly those relations that appear most tangible and certain. The trickster narrative embodies the ethic that a healthy respect for the mysteriousness, the uncontainability, of all relations is a cornerstone of humility. The trickster employs the ‘certain’ one’s certainty against her/him as a key strategy of subversion, ultimately designed both to educate and to restore a ‘right relation’ to creation, one of humility.

The trickster dances at the margins of both personal consciousness, the floodlit, accessible world of the individual psyche, and social consciousness, the given, immediate surface of social constructions. Not surprisingly then Nanabush
narratives share many characteristics with the ghost story of Western folklore. Each figure inhabits the realm of the supernatural, a maddeningly non-objective arena, slipping in and out of human consciousness. They represent the theme of unfinished business in the form of carrying a message from the graves of the oppressed (in Nanabush's case, the message comes from the ancestors.) Their return from exile constitutes a rebirth of s/he whose story was never adequately told, rectifying a breach of justice; the result is a liberation, a transformation caused by the rupturing of the stagnant hegemonic placidity and order, the illusion of objective control and certainty, the floodlit pseudo-world of the dominant. Each is mischievous, a prankster who uses humour, surprise and, where necessary, shock tactics to expose the truth. Consequently, each makes life uncomfortable for her/his host by disrupting the normal and expected order of things: s/he introduces the fantastic, the unexpected, and through this reestablishes at least a newly-ruptured, 'humiliated' consciousness, at best a new relation.

Nana'b'oozhoo

It may prove helpful at this point to give a detailed accounting of the characteristics of a pair of closely related North American Aboriginal tricksters. In The Manitous (1995), Anishenabe writer Basil Johnston tells the traditional story of Nana'b'oozhoo.

Nana'b'oozhoo is orphaned at birth, his human mother Winona dying soon after childbirth, and father, Epingishmook, the distant manitou of the west, rarely visiting him. This disconnection from immediate relation is only mediated by the

34 I have developed the relation between ghosts and racism in detail in my paper "The Spirit of Resistance," OISE, 1996.
influence of his grandmother. He is an unusual child, but more human than
manitou/spirit in most aspects. Amazingly, he is able to speak from birth,
pronouncing `I am Nana’b’oozhoo’ from his crib. He is a timid and moody child, one
moment blithe and sunny, the next malevolent and petty. As he grows, he rejects
many aspects of his culture, inattentive to nature and disrespectful of his elders and
spiritual matters. He is impatient, vengeful and bitter. While Nana’b’oozhoo likes the
idea of heroism, he is consistently mortified by the reality of its possible
consequences. He is uncommitted and forgetful, irreverent and bitter. He is quick to
take offense, and short on forgiveness. Significantly, he cannot bear to be deceived,
yet uses deception liberally towards his own ends. Nana’b’oozhoo will lie
voraciously to avoid responsibility or to gain advantage without earning it.

His primary motivation, that which gets him into the most trouble, is the pursuit
of sensual fulfillment, particularly the acquisition of food and sex. A secondary
motivation is the acquisition of acclaim from his peers: Nana’b’oozhoo frequently
broadcasts irreverent and highly exaggerated accounts of his (fictitious) exploits in
order to gain attention. Feeling constantly underappreciated, he blames
Epingishmook’s neglect for his inability to love anyone and he feels cheated by the
manitous, scapegoating them for his unhappiness, and vowing revenge (considered
by his community a ridiculous goal for even a half-manitou.) His insecurity drives him
to take on monumental and `heroic’ challenges, although he is usually absolutely
unprepared for them. But although he has little training for battle, he is a master of
manipulating appearances, and this becomes his weapon.

Through a series of misadventures, Nana’b’oozhoo becomes something of a
local champion and, puffed up by his own conceit, he establishes himself as
mercenary for neighboring nations, battling giants and monsters.
often send for him as a last resort, usually not convinced of his actual abilities but occasionally manipulated by Nana'b'oozhoo's own press. Only their own self-consumedness prevents them from seeing beneath Nanabush's manipulation of appearances. In this mock hero phase of his life, Nana'b'oozhoo experiences a series of successes against monstrous foes, always winning by a combination of luck, the fortunate results of mistakes and misdirected efforts: his enemies effectively defeat themselves, and he follows up the rear to collect the accolades.

Johnston is quick to point out that there is another side to Nana'b'oozhoo however, as there is to all human beings. Despite his significant shortcomings, he is considered to have a genuinely good heart, this a strongly-held Anishenabe belief applying to all persons. His intentions are often noble, if a little supercelestial; he just falls prey to his own vices and spiritual/cultural ungroundedness. Nana'b'oozhoo is not a monster, although he can do monstrous things - he is too pathetic to be a monster, too human, to easily related to by the Anishenabe community. Although generally considered to be a caring, sympathetic person,"he was encumbered with all human shortcomings." (Johnston, 1995: 78) Often described as of average height and slight build, much as the great orator and pan-Indian nationalist Tecumseh is described, Nana'b'oozhoo emerges from most stories as an everyman figure, certainly holding no candle to Hercules or his Western heroic peers.

When Nana'b'oozhoo eventually leaves the village with his grandmother, dejected by his people's rejection of him (and, arguable, many traditional values and stories), no-one is there to bid him farewell. His departure may be understood to mark the demise of the Anishenabe nation and culture in the face of contact: Johnston notes that there are no more Nana'b'oozhoo stories told after the adoption
of Western ways. However, Nana'b'oozhoo promises to return with the return of the old ways. Many contemporary Native writers and leaders are pointing to precisely such a renaissance of Aboriginal culture and ways in evidence at this time. The return of Nana'b'oozhoo seems to be at hand.

Weesakayjak

Cree chief Thomas Fiddler, in Legends from the Forest (1991), describes the Boreal Cree trickster Weesakayjak, Nana'b'oozhoo's cultural cousin, along similar lines. James R. Stevens introduces Fiddler's stories with some general observations about Weesakayjak. He notes that "legends of Weesakayjak, the spirit being of humanity, reach back to early stone-age times," (Fiddler, 1991: 12,16) significantly predating contact. Stevens suggests that:

...the inherent teachings in these [Weesakayjak] foundation stories deal with the polarities of life...Weesakayjak exhibits all of these traits. Unlike the Jesus figure in Judeo-Christian mythology, Weesakayjak is hardly divine in his actions. He is not a puritan and he warns: 'Human beings will act and behave the way I have done.' (Fiddler, 1991:17)

While Stevens' assessment of Jesus as a puritan is contentious, particularly given the company he self-consciously chooses to keep in the New Testament, the comparison between Jesus and Weesakayjak is an important one. Jesus is presented as intimately in communication with God, ever conscious of his heritage and his role, 'heroic' in the consistency of his principled (if misunderstood) actions and choices. Weesakayjak is much more Nana'b'oozhooian in this respect. Yet his value to Cree society is not diminished by his gracelessness. Weesakayjak's warning is echoed by the Tlingit elder quoted by Eber Hampton when he proposes that "Raven makes mistakes so we don't have to." (Battiste & Barman, 1995:8)
Raven and Weesakayjak are not to be emulated, but rather to be related to. These stories encourage, even demand, the participation of the listener in establishing a critical distance on their own choices; yet they are seldom pedantic, more often comic.

Fiddler notes that “Weesakayjak lived in the boreal forest until the white man came to the North American continent then disappeared,” (Fiddler, 1991:17) this echoing Nana’b’oozhoo’s self-imposed exile in the face of eroded traditions. Weesakayjak predates humans, but cannot survive the colonial conquest. Fiddler, like Johnston, establishes a link between the coming of European influence, and the Cree’s/Anishenabe’s loss of confidence in Weesakayjak’s/Nana’b’oozhoo’s value to their communities. As stated above, the restoration of confidence in the old ways and knowledges might well usher in the rebirth of the trickster’s value.

**Championing humility**

Nana’b’oozhoo, Weesakayjak and Coyote narratives share a common objective, this perhaps the single greatest task for Aboriginal teachings insofar as it concerns a foundational ethic of indigenous epistemology. This objective is the reinforcement and valuation of humility.

Thomas King, in his contemporary trickster story *The one about Coyote going west*, asserts through his narrator that “The first thing that Coyote makes...is a mistake.” (King, 1990: 97) It is hard to imagine any of the great texts of Western religion beginning this way, but King’s interpretation of Coyote is consistent with the indigenous valuation of humility. Vested with the power to create, Coyote, puffed up by her own grandiosity, immediately begins to “fix up the world” in his own image. (King, 1990: 97) In this tale, Coyote becomes obsessed with the idea of making
things as she travels west, perhaps imitating the path of the sun. Her original 'mistake' begins to take on a manifest form of its own, creating a wide range of modern Western consumer items (microwave ovens, etc.) King seems to point to the fact that perhaps the world didn’t need ‘fixing up’ at all, but rather that individual pride and conceit has created a ravaging, monstrous “mistake” that continues to create messes to this day. The indigenous reverence of the interwoven fabric of existence has been violated by the spirit of short-sighted ambition and pridefulness. Coyote’s original “mistake” may remind us of the above mentioned elder’s admonition to heed Coyote’s mistakes so that we don’t follow in her paw prints. This kind of reflection requires humility.

In a more traditional Coyote story, Arniawenrate/Peter Blue Cloud’s “Weaver Spider’s Web,” Coyote again squanders his significant spiritual talents:

Coyote was starving and freezing, and here it was only mid-winter. He’d forgotten to gather firewood and food. He’d planned on singing a very powerful song to make the winter a mild one, easy to live with, but he’d forgotten to sing the song. (Arniawenrate in King, 1990: 46)

Coyote forgets his role and responsibility in the relational cycle of survival. Counting on his powers as part-manitou to bail him out of a very terrestrial dilemma, and this because of procrastination and inattention to the necessary work of daily living, Coyote compounds his problems by forgetting to enact his back-up plan. Coyote is consumed by immediacy as he watches a spider weave its web; rather than ‘seeing’ the spider web as perhaps a metaphor to remind him of the web of interrelations, he simply stares transfixed, completely in the moment, forgetting his relations. Once again, Coyote suffers at his own hands, a lack of humility manifested in his selfish pursuits.

American Indian Movement activist Russell Means credits the Lakota trickster,
Iktomi, with his recognition of his true "medicine," that spirit guide which assists people in Lakota tradition. Fearing at first that his "medicine" guide would be that fly that perpetually pesters him during his fast, he comes to believe that the fly is simply Iktomi in disguise, daring him to look beyond the immediate and testing his resolve after four days without food. Upon receiving a meaning-rich vision, Means reflects that, "I knew the Iktomi has tried to trick and shame me... In my prayers, I thanked the Great Mystery for... helping me to recognize the Iktomi. " (Means, 1995: 406) Means' story, taken at face value or not, indicates a powerful respect for the role of tricksters like Iktomi in contemporary Aboriginal life. Iktomi is revered not simply as a comic character from childhood memories, but rather as an important epistemological figure, acting to restore and maintain a balanced perspective, to restore and maintain humility in the context of a modern world which values the individual (and self-promotion) over and against her/his relations.

The above stories illustrate the dual scenarios played out in trickster narratives, trickster as the humiliated (like Coyote) and the humiliator (like Iktomi.) In all indigenous trickster traditions, the trickster meets both fates, occasionally within the same narrative, with the ethic of humility woven through the story as an understated but pervasive value. If the true hero of the trickster narrative is the narrative itself, then the identifiably heroic virtue is humility.

A common theme serving to illustrate this ethic is the inversion of power relations, this certainly a mainstay of Bruh Rabbit storylines. Van Laan relates an Aleut story of Fox, a particularly gullible victim of trickster Rabbit's "cruel humiliations" (Van Laan, 1995: 11), where Fox becomes a trickster himself, triumphing over the much more powerful Eagle. Predator-prey relationships, understood naturalistically as relatively fixed, are frequently inverted in trickster narratives, as the stronger,
usually predatory animal's pride and gullibility (thus vulnerability) is manipulated, demonstrating that all creatures may be either victim or humiliator in specific historical, sociopolitical, relational and spatial circumstances. In all cases, the creatures pridefulness constitutes her/his weakness.

The indigenous trickster consistently demonstrates that s/he cannot rise above her/his own vulnerability to self-deception and greed. In this sense, Nanabush is everyperson, and every person is as susceptible to pride as Nanabush. In one example narrated by Basil Johnston (1981,) Nanabush attempts to avoid the most uncomfortable aspects of the discipline of authentic healing by assuming the mere shadow of ritual:

To comfort himself, Nanabush took out his drum and began to chant very softly. Almost immediately he began to feel better. Perhaps if he sang, Kitche Manitou would take pity on him. He closed his eyes and chanted a little louder. Then, much more cheerful, Nanabush stood up and began to dance. Perhaps a dance would bring a change in his fortunes. (Johnston, 1995: 48)

At this point in the story, a group of ducks take advantage of his vulnerable state, but only after Nanabush has established the context for this through his self-indulgent irreverence. Bound up in this narrative are lessons about the consequences of unauthentic appeals to the Creator, the dangers of being self-enclosed in ones own folly, and, the ever-present sub text, that even the mighty (and tricky) Nanabush is subject to the pitfalls of pridefulness. In this story, the ducks provide a valuable service to the listener by humiliating Nanabush, this an example of humiliation designed more to teach than to injure. Despite the often unprincipled behaviour of its 'hero,' the trickster narrative itself is unremittingly principled, valuing humility as a uncompromising social ethic.
Johnston's notes that Nanabush's brother Pukawiss\textsuperscript{35} also intended to provoke—especially those who took life and themselves too seriously and who could not take a joke. Among these people was his brother Nana'b'oozhoo... Nana'b'oozhoo reacts to these pranks, however, with outrage, childish tantrums, and vows for revenge.” (Johnston, 1995: 33) A sense of humour, and the self-perspective required to be able to take a joke, are understood as both strategy and manifestation of humility. Johnston claims that the Anishenabe people have inherited from Pukawiss “...their disposition for practical joking and dramatizing life.” (Johnston, 1995: 35) Pukawiss frequently launches attacks on Nanabush's self-consumed 'seriousness,' that same lack of distance and perspective that plagues each of us, including Pukawiss, and which enables Nanabush to enact a fitting revenge on his brother in a later tale. In Anishenabe narrative, both Pukawiss and Nanabush fulfill their “duty to tantalize and provoke the pretentious,” (Johnston, 1995: 34) often involving a perpetual chase of one after another following a humiliating episode.

Andrew Wiget (1985) notes that:

Most of these tales...provide a telling commentary on the great lengths to which men will go to satisfy an enormous desire to which they surrender themselves and yet over which they pretend to maintain absolute control. (Wiget, 1985: 17)

This recalls a critique of dominant society proposed by literature critic Jonathan Goldberg (incorporating Jacques Derrida’s formulations):

Dominant discourses allow their own subversion precisely because hegemonic control is an impossible dream, a self-defeating fantasy. (Hillman 1992:2)

\textsuperscript{35} According to Johnston, Pukawiss is credited with the invention of the Hoop Dance among other Anishenabe dances. He is the original patron of the arts and a staunch defender of its virtues and powers, including, no doubt, the ability of the arts to 'provoke and tantalize' in the name of the establishment/revelation of truth.
The pretentious, prideful goal of control, closely mirroring and informed, I contend, by the desire for absolute objectivity, is one requiring constant interrogation and subversion. This "impossible dream" has been and continues to be noted and commented on by Aboriginal narrators, in a multitude of contexts. Dene elder Percy Bullchild critiques the Western obsession with permanence and fixidity even as it influences dominant religious structures:

It seems to us that the white man is trying to outdo each other by building their churches so expensive and so fancy when truthfully, this Creator's Tabernacle was to be just a plain, temporary place of worship, just for that particular year, and the Creator takes it back after its use for that year. We leave them intact as we build them for Creator Sun, and he takes them back through the years that follow. They slowly deteriorate in his own elements of weather and eventually turn back into dust, back to Mother Earth's body here it came from in the first place. (Bullchild, 1985: 388)

The Dene's practical embodiment of belief in the truth of cyclic process is contrasted to a Western compulsion to fix things permanently, almost in an effort to reroute or control the dynamism of natural cycles of degeneration and regeneration. If nothing else, a singular lack of humility in the face of uncontrollable natural processes is evident here. Perhaps a series of reworked Cartesian formulations may serve to illustrate the profound value of humility. It might be claimed, despite fears of 'essentializing,' that, the only thing about which one need not be humble is the demand for humility, this related to the statement that the only thing about which one need not be critical is the demand to critical. I contend that both may be summarized by the following claim: the only thing concrete is the need to critically (dialectically) interrogate concreteness. That is, in the search for the concrete, a profound humility in the face of uncertainty is a vital informing ethic, lest the search devolve into

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36 Here I refer to Rene Descartes famous formulation, addressing the question of 'essentializing' almost a century before the post-moderns, 'the only thing which I cannot doubt is that I doubt,' itself a profound expression of humility.
narcissistic, even strategic projection. Humility may be understood as a powerful expression of this incessant demand for critique, a demand consistently embodied and valued within indigenous tradition, and conspicuously absent from dominant Western texts.

"Psychological terrorism"

One of the greatest weapons in the trickster’s arsenal is the consistency with which, as James Driscoll puts it, “the self-deceived know nothing about their suppressed shadow; it emerges unexpectedly in confused, yet sometimes ruling, motives.” (Hillman 1992:9) The trickster may be understood as the ‘shadow’ conscience of the dominant actor. Weesageechak’s subversive effectiveness emerges precisely from the certain one’s conviction that all is safe and sound, brightly-lit and knowable (even known.) It is at this moment that the dominant is primed for a fall from the pedestal of uncritical confidence. In light of this, Wiget warns that “from the perspective, then, of all those who have a great deal invested in the established social order...Trickster tales can be viewed as dangerous, corrupting.” (1985:21) Perhaps this is why Nanabush and Coyote have been consigned to the sterilized pages of folklore collections and children’s stories, stripped of their political potency and full expression of human experience (including their frequently candid sexual content.)

Ward Churchill (1994), writing about Cherokee artist Jimmy Durham, succinctly outlines the “method” of the trickster-figure in the dominant context:

[Durham’s] method has been described as amounting to “a conscious and deliberate, but merciful and constructive, exercise in psychological terrorism”
designed to “produce a positive disordering of the existing social consensus.”

(103)

Durham’s “terrorism” is the trickster’s humiliation, designed and effected to create a state of disorientation with relation to that previously thought to be stable and certain.

Churchill continues:

[Durham] ...has sought to strip away the intellectual veil obscuring the mechanics of the structure of social knowledge itself, compelling those with whom he interacted through his work to confront the inconsistency of even their most axiomatic “understandings” of social reality...What is intended is to induce a certain cognitive dissonance among participants with regard to sets of comfortably familiar assumptions about the meaning of things, societally speaking. Such dissonance generates a marked mental discomfort and compels participants, in order for psychic reconciliation to be attained, to engage in some degree of critical rethinking of their core values and beliefs. (1994: 102-3)

The trickster narrative (and perhaps Durham’s praxis serves as a powerful, practical model of revolutionary indigenous knowledges in action) challenges the dominant structures of thought and self-perception, issuing in a temporarily complete psychic dislocation, this the ground for potential transformation (the ground of Western assumptions being at least partially dislodged.)

In his book The Strength to Love, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. develops a justification for ridicule which echoes the informing ethic of Durham’s “terrorism”:

And let us also remember that, more often than not, fear involves the misuse of the imagination. When we get our fears into the open, we may laugh at some of them, and this is good. One psychiatrist said, “Ridicule is the master cure for fear and anxiety.” (King in Washington, 1991:512)

In this context, King equates fear with dominant racist 'knowledge', that unshakeable belief that identified Others possess objectively verifiable characteristics as a group; this might be described as the ‘certainty of the racist.’ King suggests that exposing this certainty in the light of critical consciousness may serve to illuminate the fragility
of dominant racist ideology. The vehicle for such exposition is ridicule, but a ridicule grounded, like its tricky partner humiliation, in the understanding that all knowledge is partial rather than in any delusion of omniscience. This ridicule will not stand idly by while certainty delivers a monologue of pride. "Fear" is to be laughed at, brought low, forcibly minimized in the face of its own grandiose self-apprehension. Coincidentally, the ability to laugh at oneself becomes profoundly important in the establishment of an illuminating distance from oneself, and in the establishment of a right relation to creation, one grounded in humility. The tricky terrorist employs both ridicule and humiliation to reestablish a profound order.

**Legitimate suffering**

Below in this paper, I propose a strong criticism of Carl Jung with regard to the primitivizing foundations of his 'trickster theory'; however, other Jungian writings in the context of psychoanalysis are particularly salient and useful for this discussion. Family systems theorist John Bradshaw champions Jung's formulation that all neurotic misery, including forms of depression and guilt, constitutes a psychic attempt to protect the conscious self, the ego, from legitimate suffering. He states that we will endure all manner of personal ailments as the cost for avoiding the humiliation involved in the denigration of the ego state and its beliefs about the self. Neurosis is thus framed as an imperfectly effective, sometimes suffocating, protective mask which enables individuals to rationalize personally or socially unacceptable choices, and endure extremely difficult experiences. However, the actual process of healing, becoming free from the shackles of ones unexamined (but unremittingly operative) history, requires one to shed this mask; one must embrace
this humiliation, entering the monomythic\textsuperscript{37}, disorienting wilderness of uncertainty where s/he must embrace authentic, legitimate suffering. This suffering then becomes a vehicle for healing, as profound humiliation was its catalyst. However, suffering ones history has a price: the individual may be required to sacrifice, even reject, privileges casually enjoyed in the former context of a less critical consciousness. Neurosis acts as a security guard, jealously guarding the privilege of the uncritical dominant body and mind. In its passive manifestation, neuroses may be embraced more readily, bolstering rationalizations while allowing the individual to avoid the direct conflict encouraged by blustery pride and arrogance.

Humiliation is rejected, suffering is encountered only in its passive, impotent outward form (the experience of guilt, for example), and status quo conditions, and thus dominant privileges, are maintained and protected. Understood in a Jungian framework, neurosis constitutes permission to repress untold stories, permission to live the unexamined life, arrogantly committed to maintaining inequitable relationships by framing oneself as powerless victim or repentant yet equally powerless cad.

Delaware writer Daniel David Moses develops this theme in the context of indigenous art:

[Native artists] are looking for the meaning of life to explain the injustices of reality. To me it sounds as if this guilt is the opposite thing: it seems that you don't want to heal, you want to keep the wound. In romanticism you're dancing around a wound. You have these great desires, these great idealistic possibilities, and then they're cut down and things end in death and it's very sad and beautiful. I've seen the attraction of it, because I've grown up partly in the mainstream culture, but it strikes me as really sick. I think maybe the reason for keeping the wound open is that alienation from yourself that the mainstream mind set creates. Up in your head you're separate from your

\textsuperscript{37} I make reference here to Joseph Campbell's 'monomyth' narrative archetype, in which an individual leaves the world of the known, entering the supernatural wilderness of uncertainty, later emerging either intact and profoundly changed or insane.
animal self. Even if you're creating art that isn't healing, at least you can feel something...feeling guilty is a fuzzy state of mind. You're aware of the problem but not really focusing on it. (Moses in Moses & Goldie, 1998: xxiv-xxv)

It is, in fact, imperative that the dominant "keep the wound" insofar as the wound reflects the gaping gash of racism and its inherent inequities. Should the wound "heal" then dominant privilege would be lost: this wound represents dualistic segregation together with all of its effects and consequences, a socio-politico-philosophico-segregation which informs dominant practice. No, the wound must not be healed, but rather be perpetually bemoaned, even as it festers and infects the body. Moses proposes that Aboriginal cultures employ shame in the service of healing:

Maybe to feel ashamed, which is an active, public way of feeling guilty. One of the differences between Native cultures and the mainstream one is the use by Native cultures of shame as a social control. If you're ashamed of your behaviour you might face up to it. To conquer your demons you have to face them. (Moses in Moses & Goldie, 1998: xxv)

The Western world, weighted with the historical burden of slavery and genocide, contents itself with the rationalization of "how much guilt must we put on ourselves, and for how long?" rationalizing that some finite limit to ones repentance is the answer. Yet the nature of the question is flawed: no guilt is sufficient, insofar as it represents evasion rather than any real accounting for injustice and tragedy. No amount of depression will suffice; individuals cannot hide from suffering behind the trees of depression. The west must, and will not, embrace authentic suffering or authentic shame, choosing rather to attempt to replace the dualistic (thus inauthentic) unhappiness with dualistic (thus unfulfilling) happiness and good feeling. Dominant feelings, perhaps quite deeply seated, of guilt act to smother the roots of injustice while demanding no real or meaningful change in the conditions.
that have produced injustice.

bell hooks develops a relate theme in *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. She ponders aloud

...whether black folks and white folks can ever be subjects together if white people remain unable to hear black rage, if it is the sound of that rage which must always remain repressed, contained, trapped in the realm of the unspeakable. (hooks, 1995: 12)

The question might be reframed as ‘when will dominant hearers actually *suffer* the rage of the oppressed?’ When will they/we become vulnerable enough to experience the actual pain that runs coincident with true repentance? Might this shared experience of oppression and injustice establish a marriage of subjects, a level playing field of experience among peer subjects? And if this might be so, could the hierarchy of dominance, informed foundationally by the belief that the subjectivities of the dominant and the oppressed are fundamentally incomparable, survive? hooks continues:

In [Toni] Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, her narrator says of the dehumanized colonized little black girl Pecola that there would be hope for her if only she could express her rage, telling readers “anger is better, there is a presence in anger.” Perhaps then it is that “presence,” the assertion of subjectivity colonizers do not want to see, that surfaces when the colonized express rage. (hooks, 1995: 12)

Part of our task then as transformative educators in a dominant context might be to authentically acknowledge the “presence” of formerly silenced peoples, rather than simply to ruminate narcissistically on our own experience of regret.

Nanabush’s role with regard to the unauthentically repentant dominant sufferer is no different from her/his role in the humiliation of the prideful dominant ‘expert’: Nanabush establishes the conditions for humiliation, within which context the dominant individual may encounter her/his own fallibility authentically. Within this
context, the individual must *move through* personal humiliation - neither evading it nor allowing her/himself to be falsely comforted by it - to suffer the loss of part of ones ego, moving towards an experience of actual suffering and shame for ones unjust actions, a suffering that is neither defensive nor rationalized. Nanabush, and often others acting in her/his best interests, takes an active role in ushering the dominant individual into this wilderness, one which s/he would never choose to enter willingly, but which is essential for her/his spiritual and human growth.

**Nanabush's return**

Glooscap and Weesakchak and Nanabush *must*, and *will* according to traditional narratives, return. Indigenous trickster narratives must be understood as part of a dynamic process of 'traditional' education, not simply as artifacts or interesting but antiquated curiosities. The trickster narrative constitutes both a dynamic process and a strategy for all times. Glooscap the manitou must actually *return from the North*; it will not be enough that her/his history will be retold, although clearly her/his spirit must be invited in this way as a beginning.

Weesageechak's departure upon the coming of the white man, chronicled by Fiddler and others, marks and symbolizes the departure of valued indigenous subjectivity in the face of the dualistic Western myth of absolute objectivity. Her/his return must equally mark the reintegration of indigenous values in the 'body' of society. The stories, and the manitou within them, must return in order that a right relation to creation be reestablished.

Below I comment on several points of coincidence where indigenous

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38 Significantly, among the Anishenabe and other Canadian Aboriginal nations, the North direction is associated with both the spirit world and death, and with the wisdom of the elders. Secularly in the west, the north is often associated with wilderness and cold, uninhabited spaces.
traditions meet biblical theology (ostensibly the cornerstone of non-secular Western epistemology). The theme of the return of the manitou-person constitutes one such intersection. The biblical Christ’s resurrection must mean more than a simple remembrance of a life/story, as it must mean more than a literal raising from physical death; it must mean the reintegration of Christ into the body of the church - Christ must live (in some meaningful way) again in the world. Just as Jesus the man’s death demands a resurrection of the principles of his faith (in the absence of the temporal, heroic messenger), and new embodiments among his followers, his return can be no simple reappearance at a defined point on the linear continuum of progressive history: this return must mark the establishment of a qualitatively altered social universe. A whole new circle indigenously conceived, related to the past yet inexpressibly new, must begin. There is an additional layer of complexity that perhaps also strengthens traditional understandings of the resurrection: Nanabush’ return would mean the return of a profound acknowledgement of the fallibility (thus uncontrollability) of all creation. Nanabush’s mission is to keep that thought fixed in our minds such that we remain humble in the face of creation and all of our relations, even those we are most certain about. When Nanabush is no longer here to remind us of that, we run the danger of becoming pretentious, self-absorbed; that is, we run the risk of becoming Nanabush ourselves in all of his foolishness and conceit. Arguably, the prescribed death of the Jesus of New Testament theology constitutes a similar argument against the temporal limits of the human as it argues for humility (and hope) in the presence of a greater supernatural power. While Western Christian theology has held Christ as the model of virtue and sinlessness - as God incarnate - which as such presents a stark contrast to the often pathetic Nanabush - the essential warning about the limits and dangers of deification is consistently
reinforced. Even if Jesus is son of Yahweh, even if Nanabush is son of Epingishmook, our desire to fix and temporalize - to objectify - their divine qualities is a fatal error. Jesus suffers crucifixion such that his people might discover their capacity to live on Christianly without Christ; the Nanabush narrative recalls that the trickster must suffer banishment until the day when her/his people rediscover the value of the old ways. To make a two-dimensional Greco-Roman hero of either is to both overstate and understate their worth and abilities. It is critical to remember their origins, born both to human (natural) mothers and manitou (supernatural) fathers.

**Winona's heritage**

Perhaps the most profound strategy that the trickster narrative employs is the willingness to expose the trickster her/himself in all of her/his humanness (whether in personified animal form or otherwise.) George Ryga's play *Indian*, presents an "attempt to understand the puzzling character of the Indian by drawing the audience into his experience and thought processes." (Parker in Ryga, 1971: xi) In this play, the main character's immediately outrageousness and stereotypic qualities must be either dismissed outright as racist simplification, or contextualized, personalized, addressed as part of the human condition. Often, the trickster similarly pushes us away, demanding that we decide to return, transformed. The indigenous narrator is in no hurry to attempt to transform us, particularly as s/he knows that s/he cannot. We may hear the story hundreds of times, and we may, someday, be transformed by it (but maybe not). The trickster narrative issues a challenge rather than simple answers.

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39 The concept of Aboriginal narrative time may be revived at this point to frame this narrator's patience, which is, in fact, a simple acknowledgement of the difficulty of change, and of the cyclic nature of a person's opportunities to 'get it.'
Paulo Freire writes that “revolutionary leadership cannot denounce reality without knowing reality.” (Freire, 1970: 43) The first step in this process of liberatory transformation is the sharing of subjective experiences, such that the realities of human relations may reveal themselves. This passage from bell hooks provides a fitting conclusion to the body of this discussion:

Willingness to share openly one’s personal experience ensures that one will not be made into a deified icon. When black females learn about my life, they also learn about the mistakes I make, the contradictions. They come to know my limitations as well as my strengths. They cannot dehumanize me by placing me on a pedestal. Sharing the contradictions of our lives, we help each other learn how to grapple with contradictions as part of the process of becoming a critical thinker, a radical subject. (hooks, 1992: 56)

This of course is precisely the function of the trickster narrative as it relates the experience of Weesageechak.

**Dialectical Recreativity and Critical Affirmation: building by destroying**

bell hooks writes that “opposition is not enough. In that vacant space after one has resisted there is still the necessity to become - to make oneself anew.” (1992: 51) If the trickster narrative succeeds only in ‘humiliating’, if its ‘terrorism’ serves simply to expose injustice but does not educate and propose change, then its mission may be dismissed as a dualistic reactionary politics. If no intersections are drawn out, no bridges built, then these narrative cannot be considered revolutionary in any profound way. Ungrounded “opposition”, when ahistorical and uncontextualized, may begin and end with broken windows and angry words. “To make oneself anew” requires a grounded theory and politics of both resistance and existence.

The trickster narrative aims to reestablish a revolutionary, reordered social and
personal universe, informed by, and pursuing the goal of, a profound embodiment of humility. It seeks to reframe binary oppositions in dialectical relations, where notions of the objective and subjective meet in their strongest formulations to establish a broader canvas for the expression of human reality. While the demand for critique is front and center in the trickster narrative, the intended end result for the listener/reader is that of a reaffirmed conviction to a humble relation to all creation.

Algonquin Sakej Henderson contends that "Indigenous people view reality as eternal, but in a continuous state of transformation." (Ross, 1996:115) This transformation is an absolutely healthy event, a necessary one - but one largely absent from the dominant epistemologies of the west for multiple reasons. The trickster role as 'transformer' takes on a special meaning in the context of social and personal change: Nanabush narratives 'lead us out' of the prison of our dualistic assumptions of certainty, as a truly educational vehicle (fulfilling the educare mandate), and leads us towards a liberated acknowledgement of transformation as a profound human mission.

The particular transformative function of the trickster may be understood as the affirmative process of rebuilding and reconstituting meaning after deconstructing superficial, dualistic dominant identities. hooks notes that:

Critical affirmation is a concept that embraces both the need to affirm one another and to have a space for critique. Significantly, that critique is not rooted in negative desire to compete, to wound, to trash. (hooks, 1992: 58)

However, many Western readers are immediately confronted with, and alienated by, the trickster's outrageous and often offensive actions. This attribute of the trickster's persona represents the critical half of her/his arsenal of strategies: s/he aims not only to 'humiliate' and ridicule, as developed above, but also to shock. bell hooks
defends the often harsh character of subversive narrative:

That is the idea - to provoke and engage...When I face [Moneta Sleet’s portrait of Billy Holiday,] something in me is shattered. I have to pick up the bits and pieces of myself and start all over again - transformed by the image. (hooks, 1992: 7)

The trickster narrative often portrays destruction as the companion of creation, just as Aboriginal tricksters themselves cohabit the persona of hero and fool. Janet Hale reflects on the process of writing in an authentic Aboriginal voice:

I was afraid of writing something that would offend people...I was torn between writing a novel that was true to my own vision and one that presented a positive image of Indian people. My mother...told me, “Maybe I’m just ignorant, but I thought it was a writer’s business to tell the truth as she sees it. Isn’t it?” Hale, 1993: xxii)

The toughness of the trickster narrative, the telling of the hard truth as the narrator "sees it", has a leveling function, expressed insightfully by Western writer Rupert Ross in his discussion of healing circles:

...the victim and victimizer must be brought level with each another. That, in turn, means working with the “offender” to strip him of all the lies he has been hiding behind, all the justifications...excuses...victim blaming...and minimizations...and so forth. (Ross, 1996: 181)

Here the victimizer as colonizer must be exposed ruthlessly, yet a ruthlessness informed by a humble appreciation of one’s own fallibility and susceptibility to self-deception. The exposcer must always be prepared to be exposed, or this ‘leveling’ simply becomes a vengeful act of dualistic counter-domination.

Weesageechak, or Wesakchak, plays apparently contradictory roles in Cree trickster narratives, often identified reverently as the the “wise man” and the first man on earth (Bemister, 1973: 132, 140,141), but also reviled as as a puffed-up flatterer. Weesageechak gets himself into trouble regularly, in one episode losing all of her/his creative power and left only with "the power to flatter and to deceive."
Of course, these 'leftover' powers may be understood as central to her/his ability to coax unwitting victims into self-revelatory traps, and thus as central to her/his true power and value. In another interesting narrative, the Creator tells Weesageechak not to let the animals or people quarrel with one another, but Weesageechak refuses. (Anderson et al, 1979: 11) Weesageechak cannot abide peace because he knows that complacency encourages the stasis of relations and a lazy, uncritical assumption of sureness. Therefore, he disrupts the hegemonic peace, a peace desired by the well-meaning Creator, with his trickery, understanding on some level (as surely the narrator understands) that a lazy assumption of static peace is tantamount to spiritual death. Even Weesageechak's troubles are inspired by, and reflect, a profound reverence for relation. Cree Playwright Tomson Highway draws on this reverence, identifying Weesageechak as "the being who inhabits that area of our dream world," our subconscious, where we connect with the Great Spirit, with God." (York, 1990: viii) To remove the trickster from her/his home in the subjective experience of the Aboriginal listener is to extinguish her/him and her/his power; to enable the illusion of dominant peace to prevail, the trickster has become dislocated and reframed, and Aboriginal subjectivity marginalized. To the West, Nanabush and Bruh Rabbit just can't leave well enough alone, 'proving' their foolishness and childishness (and serving to entrench the narratives safely in the canon of juvenile tales).

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40 Wesakchak often experiences truth through dreams (Bemister, 1973: 143), this again a referral to the spirit state, the subjective state that is the medium of the trickster.
Western interpretations of the trickster: visions and oversights

I'd like to turn briefly to a pair of Western constructions of the trickster, certainly not for the purposes of legitimizing the trickster as resident in the Western canon: rather to suggest that the West has long been aware of the trickster, encountering her/him with some regularity, but consistently misapprehending this dancing enigma.

I propose that Judeo-Christian writings, greatly influenced by pre-Biblical traditions, validate both the indigenous trickster and her/his mission, albeit in classic trickster (that is, paradoxical) style. Editors of a recent Revised Standard Version edition Bible claim that the Old Testament is a composite of “myth, legend, and history” whose “development is shrouded in the mists of history and tradition” (May, 1977: xxv-xxvi). The earliest Jewish scriptures, “the book of the law” found in the Jerusalem temple in 621BC, are contemporary with the development of several major religious systems, Buddhism and Confucianism, among others. These developments are coincident with the growth of tribal cultures across Europe, Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas, tribal cultures that constitute the epistemological heritage of the ‘new’ major world religions. The early writings of Judaism were situated historically proximal both to major world civilizations (Greece, Egypt, etc.) and to local prehistoric societies, and likely drew upon indigenous traditions and narratives to inform their spiritual practices.

I have pointed above to the primary valuation of humility entrenched within indigenous epistemology, and certainly this valued ethic permeates Judeo-Christian traditions. Drawing on the New Testament (the spiritual heir of the Old Testament,)

41 For example, the newly-migrated Celts of Britain and, across the ocean, the “middle woodland” period ancestors of Ontario’s Anishenabe and Algonkian peoples.
numerous examples may be found to support the divinely-inspired Old Testament author of Jeremiah who advised, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." (Jeremiah 9:23) Paul, writing to the early Corinthian Christian church, develops this theme extensively throughout his letters, warning that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men," (1 Corinthians, 1:25) and reminding that, "not many of you were wise according to worldly standards...but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise." (1 Corinthians, 1:26-7) Paul is unequivocal in his promotion of humility as a divine virtue (and lack of humility as a sin):

Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." So let no one boast of men. (1 Corinthians, 3:18-23)

This establishment of a paradoxical relationship between wisdom and foolishness, and the elevation of the worldly 'fool,' will be absolutely familiar to readers of transcribed Aboriginal elders' stories, and as such might point to a common origin in ancient (perhaps global) indigenous teachings. The Pauline indictment of unqualified sureness in the worldly realm points to the demand for an ever-present and dialectical critique of all things, ideas and relationships. Paul notes that, "For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Corinthians, 2:10); that is, even the very idea of the divine, pollutable as it is by human subjectivity, is not exempt from the demand for critique.

The Judeo-Christian tradition clearly values the ethic of humility, and this constitutes a link to ancient indigenous traditions. On further examination however one notices that that slippery Nanabush has also danced out of the well of indigenous tradition into the Biblical narrative in her/his characteristic role as
defender/victim of the demand for humility. And, true to her/his original function, s/he establishes a powerful and confounding paradox through her/his presence in the Biblical origin story (no less), the Book of Genesis.

The literally and figuratively slippery Biblical serpent, that "subtle" creature who tricks Eve into eating of the tree by establishing a false relation of trust with her, closely resembles Coyote and Nanabush in his modus operandi. He ushers Eve, and later Adam, into the world of human consciousness through an act of willed, undetermined choice. It is doubtful that the archetypical humans would ever have escaped, or even envisioned the need for an escape of, their uncritically-apprehended paradise without the trickery of the serpent. In this turn of events, human beings enter the world of complicity, a world of powerful creativity no doubt but also a world of selfishness and greed.

For his implication in this act, in the West, the serpent is often understood as a primary cohort of Satan, that fallen angel at war with God. Yet this interpretation of the events of Genesis belie a particularly rigid, almost childish adherence to the above-stated belief in the absolute virtue of an untainted world, a world where human life is devoid of complicity and responsibility. However, if we may concede that the Book of Genesis has its origin in indigenous narrative, in traditions where the trickster has a central and vital role (as he certainly does here), then simply framing the serpent-trickster as a vehicle of evil is to fall into the trap of the trickster narrative itself. In Genesis, as elsewhere, the trickster teaches by her/his deception, indeed s/he ushers the ‘victim’ into a new state of heightened self-consciousness, newly awakened to the possibility of self-deception. Coyote reestablishes, through his tricks, a right relation to creation, thus a right relation to God. The serpent seems to

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42 In this sense, the Bible agrees with several traditional Aboriginal sources that the trickster actually creates humans in their humanness.
play such a role in Genesis. Yet the Greek-inspired west, bound up by its simplistic (I contend unBiblical) theological dualisms of right and wrong, good and evil, and yearning for the purity of a complicity-free existence, can only frame Coyote/serpent according to its own dualistic epistemological framework.

As "...the eyes of both were opened," (Gen.3:7) the serpent must be given some credit for the rescue of Adam and Eve from a sort of blindness, a state without the capacity for human vision beyond the confines of the automatic, the given, the uncontested. Yet the serpent merely suggests, perhaps provides a rationale for the actions of Eve; he promises something that seems self-explanatory - to be like God - offering up a consequence that might be apprehended uncritically, and which is. It seems particularly salient that this event constitutes the first human decision, and also the first opportunity to be humiliated by a lack of critical apprehension. The Book of Genesis is quick to point out that there will be unnegotiable consequences for such uncritical apprehension, represented by such mortal scourges as pain (in childbirth) for Eve, incessant toil and mortality for Adam, and, significantly, the establishment of a constant state of war and enmity between serpents (/tricksters?) and humans. Interestingly, this initial incident also marks the first example of rationalization in human history, the primal attempt to avoid complicity, as Eve attempts to lay the blame squarely on the tricky serpent. (Gen. 3:13b) These actions illuminate Eve as something of a trickster herself as she scrambles in true Nanabush fashion to avoid personal blame, in the face of an all-seeing God no less.

I read this section of the Book of Genesis as a thematically consistent trickster narrative, one which might, insofar as it strives to provide an instructive narrative for future generations, structure the foundation of Western thought, that self-proclaimedly Christian (largely) institution. Yet the serpent-as-devil interpretation has won the day
in the popular mind of the West. Of course this interpretation is absolutely consistent with the dualistic epistemology that informs the West; it is entirely predictable that Genesis has been interpreted as it has. The contemporary coalition of the far right and fundamentalist Christian groups is similarly predictable, and such narrow interpretations of scripture form the theological rationale for an ongoing culture of pride and arrogance.

It seems to me that the Western world fundamentally desires to recreate the Garden of Eden, that place that is absolutely controllable, knowable, transparent, predictable, and absent of malicious ‘intent,’ thus absent of all human responsibility. In a classic indigenous cyclical revisiting of human creation stories, Nanabush will likely have to get Adam and Eve kicked out of the garden again if a right relation to creation is to be cultivated.

**Jung’s primitivizing discourse**

If the Biblical serpent has not been properly cast as a trickster, the West has long been fascinated by the function and personality of other more familiar tricksters in international folklore (in particular the folk tales of colonized spaces.) However, the trickster has characteristically been relegated, as stated above, to the limiting category of children’s literature. One particularly potent manifestation of the dislocation of indigenous trickster narratives from legitimate (or `serious’) discourses has come, perhaps unintentionally, from the pen of psychoanalyst Carl Jung.43

Rightly (by my estimation) investigating the trickster as metaphor, Jung

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43 I must again state that several of Jung’s theories may prove valuable valuable in the context of this discussion; however, his theory of the trickster seems to me irredeemably limiting and eurocentrically-bound.
permits his own Eurocentric and colonial foundations to primitivize the narrative, effectively disqualifying it from serious academic/philosophic consideration. Jung states imperialistically that

[The trickster] is obviously a "psychologem," an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity. In his clearest manifestations he is a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level. (Jung, 1973: 140)

Jung's reference to both antiquity and animal levels exposes a naturalizing discourse which identifies human origins with intellectual immaturity (by Western standards.) He continues on to racialize the narrative, further marginalizing it, stating that the trickster figure

...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. (Jung, 1973: 142-3)

Several salient points are raised by this statement. Again, a hierarchy of consciousness, established according to a linear historical scale, is proposed. Secondly, Jung significantly places "the Indian" within this preconscious context. Thirdly, the "Indian" is characterized in infantile, perhaps animalistic terms, "groping" rather than comprehending, stumbling about with an immature intellect, even blinded by the "darkness" of her/his ignorance. The "Indian" is an intellectual blind man in comparison to Jung and his contemporaries, and the trickster is simply the incoherent machination of a pre-rational mind. As developed above, this manner of framing of indigenous peoples, their intellectual histories and their narratives is both strategic and functional in the cause of colonial domination, even while often operating (ironically) largely unconsciously.

Believing that the ability to establish distance on ones immediate reality is a contemporary Western possession and birthright, and also that the trickster (and
her/his creator, the “Indian”) is simply an “unconscious” cardboard primitive, Jung asserts:

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 obviously 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. (Jung, 1973: 143)

Jung restates this naturalizing hierarchy in which he situates himself as “higher,” thus more sophisticated and capable of detachment from immediate contexts (a common distinction between the human as one who has this ability, and the natural world, which, ostensibly, does not). Jung further primitivizes the trickster claiming that s/he acts, “from sheer unconsciousness and unrelatedness...no match for the animals either, because of his extraordinary clumsiness and lack of instinct.” (Jung, p.144) This indictment is a fascinating example of a critique which fruitlessly deconstructs its own foundations. Jung, as he confidently represents himself here, is precisely the kind of patronizing figure who is fodder for the trickster’s manipulations. Jung’s polarized and surface reading of the trickster metaphor claims the legitimacy of psychoanalytic theory, yet exhibits a lack of the kind of reflectiveness and sensitivity to human relations and histories which ostensibly marks off the value of psychoanalysis. This student of the hidden truths of subjective experience cannot escape his own Eurocentric analytic shackles, and thus executes a (perhaps unintentionally) bitter attack on Aboriginal subjectivity. More significantly for this discussion, Jung also exposes himself to analytic disaster via his assumptions of the “unconsciousness and unrelatedness” of the trickster’s actions; for while the trickster may be ‘unconsciously’ pursuing his own downfall or revenge on another, the trickster narrative, and thus the “Indian” narrator, is never
unconscious. If Nanabush is "no match for the animals" by virtue of his lack of critical consciousness, then surely Jung is no match for the indigenous narrator, ancient or contemporary.

Concluding thoughts on the trickster

Shakespearean scholar Hillman, reflecting on the Renaissance Western trickster, asserts, "I take it that the trickster is above all - or beneath all - amorally subversive." (Hillman, 1992: 6) This universal contention (or condemnation perhaps) is expanded upon in Robert Pelton's (1990) discussion of West African trickster figures:

Loutish, lustful, puffed up with boasts and lies, ravenous for foolery and food, yet always managing to draw order from ordure...Seemingly trivial and altogether lawless, he arouses affection and even esteem wherever his stories are told as he defies mythic seriousness and social logic. Just as skillfully, he has slipped out of our contemporary interpretative nets to thumb his nose at both scholarly and popular understanding of so-called primitive peoples. Yet these peoples too know their tricksters as the very embodiment of elusiveness. (Pelton, 1990: 1)

In an appropriate (though not actual) rebuttal to Jung, Pelton makes a case for those same qualities which Jung denounces as unselfconscious: his defiance of given structures and order, of linear logic, of the trappings of civility - all of these things may be understood, as Hillman notes, as the weapons of subversion. The trickster narrative's central lesson is clear: given that human power and knowledge in the world is limited, (Wiget, 1985: 5) humility is the proper aspect to embrace. Conceit is foolishness, even madness in the face of a dynamic and mysterious universe. Building upon this understanding, the trickster demonstrates that the power of brute force, that is, the power of the colonizer, while immediately powerful, is ultimately
ephemeral, finite, passing, and easily subverted (at least intellectually). Wiget notes that "some Trickster stories, especially those focusing on bodily functions, [even] undermine man's belief in his own ability to govern himself." (Wiget, 1985: 16) The trickster exposes the concept of control so desired by the west as fallacious and self-aggrandising, instead positing the goal of a self-critical apprehension of shifting realities.

But the trickster narrative moves beyond a critique of personal delusions of grandeur to address entire social orders. Although the trickster's antics offer what Wiget calls "an undisguised attack on the dangers of institutional power in a social setting," (p.17) Weesageechak seems to be intimately aware of the stakes in this subversive activity, and employs, more often than not, laughter to both soften the assault and, paradoxically, to heighten the discomfort of the humiliated. Tricksters have found their way into the very definition of comedy, as defined by the Grolier Encyclopedia:

Comedy, later critics have said, may involve laughter at a character who is a fool...or laughter with the rogue or trickster who upsets the normal social order for a time. (Comedy in The New Grolier)

Hillman notes that "this is certainly where the trickster operates - 'at the boundaries of order.'" (1992: 15) The trickster does not confine her/his subversive activity to dominant European social orders, as implied above, but rather seeks to disrupt all institutions with self-important notions, even Aboriginal ones. In so doing, the trickster may be understood as, in Andrew Wiget's powerful words, a "useful, institutionalized principle of disorder" (1985: 20), one which indigenous societies have historically embraced, and which the West must come to embrace.
VI. Education for transformation

Throughout this discussion, I have proposed that Western dominance over and against identified others has been strategically shrouded by the cloak of objectivity. This cloak has permitted the dominant to avoid the question of complicity in the subjugation and marginalization of others. Such avoidance has disqualified the possibility of authentically suffering the consequences of injustice. For some, no doubt, this constitutes an essential aspect of maintaining and promoting privilege.

It is imperative for the dominant to recognize their own complicity in the construction of the world, not simply to encourage an accounting of sins, but also to reveal the liberatory potential for transformation. No-one profits in any profound way from becoming paralyzed with guilt. Rather it must be pointed out that, having made choices in the past and present, new choices may be made by dominant individuals - that there is nothing natural or beyond human choice about racism or colonial disempowerment, and that because of this, change can occur by the force of human desire to overcome entrenched and previously invisible, unexamined thought patterns and behaviours. Education, to be transformative, must then be seen as central to the process of social transformation and liberation, just as it has been central historically to the maintenance of unjust relations and practices. Educational institutions clearly have a major role to play in leading the dominant out of the darkness. Nanabush must be on the faculty of these institutions, in spirit if not embodiment.

The onset of institutional cooperation and initiative in the cause of social justice of course presupposes that no person or institution would willingly choose that others be oppressed. It seems to me that this has rarely been the case,
particularly given that the sacrifice of personal membership privilege is involved. To assume that, once whites are able to ‘humanize Indians’, all will be well, is naive, given that the process of dehumanization has constituted a systematic strategy enabling power imbalances to be maintained and strengthened. To be ‘Indian’, to live according to traditional indigenous values, is (and since contact has always been) a rejection of and a threat to white industrial culture and privilege. So, the process of transforming the academy into one dedicated to the liberation of all peoples through education will inevitably be long, nasty and replete with contentious issues. However, it is critical to recognize that the belief in just power imbalances, and the exclusive valuation of industrial dominance, is something that is taught: dominant behaviours, thoughts and feelings are not, I contend, genetically transmitted. Dominance is learned by carefully observing and interacting with one’s environment, noting power disrelationships and acting out one’s expected role within them. Dominance is taught by individuals and institutions who have a vested stake in the status quo system, who have privilege invested in such disrelationships. This issue of transforming Western social relations then, and the coincident issue of Aboriginal revitalization, are inherently education issues. If human experience may be framed dualistically, then it may also be framed through the filter of a dialectical, critical epistemology.

An ongoing and critical resistance must be established to combat greed, pridefulness and strategic blindness. Educational institutions may operate to assist, even nurture, this established resistance, or serve to crush and undermine it. If the choice is made to support a pedagogy and curriculum of critique, then Indigenous knowledges, grounded in dialectical critical praxis, provide both a theoretical foundation, a canon of alternative texts, and a range of strategies which may serve to
profoundly educate, transforming the academy and its often unexamined ethics.

In this discussion, I have examined one such body of texts - the trickster narratives - which operate within a larger tradition of indigenous literature, teaching by example, embodying a dialectical critique, and suggesting/modeling useful strategies to combat hegemonic anti-education. A key strategy, developed above, involves the deliberate undermining of dualistic, mythic objectivity via some culturally sanctioned agency, informed by a dialectical politics of justice.

The urgency for transformation: counter-framing the other

A central function of dominant Other-framing has historically been to allow the dominant individual to frame her/himself as socio-genetically superior and thus worthy of privilege over and against identified others. Transformative education must address this theory of dominant identity politics, offering a powerful critique of its colonialist foundations, and positing an alternative counter-frame to apply to all human beings. This alternative is hardly new or original, rather finding its source in traditional indigenous knowledges: the indigenous counter-frame must dance its way into the academy if transformation is to begin.

Creek elder Speckled Snake, speaking in 1829, reflects

[Our 'great father'] said, “Get a little further, lest I tread on thee...” Brothers I have listened to a great many talks from our great father. But they always began and ended in this - “Get a little further; you are too near me.” (McLuhan, 1971: 73)

The rationalized concept of establishing and maintaining physical, social, psychological, philosophical, and personal distance between dominant and indigenous societies undoubtedly has its roots in the origins of human domination, certainly in the origins of contact in the Americas. If the marginalized are “too near”,

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then flattened objects become too subjectively apprehendable, too human – too much ‘like us.’ At a distance, the Other may be exoticized, naturalized, identified as outside of the dominant, civilized realm. The Other may be defined and fixed as a laboratory object only if her/his subjectivity is denied: this is most easily accomplished at a significant distance.

In the American West, the concept of the ‘frontier’ has served these ends well. The function of the frontier concept is to define the inexorably expanding limits of Western settlement, power and influence. It is acknowledged that the frontier will disappear inevitably, as the wilderness is pushed back, cleared and inhabited by civilized Westerners. The frontier signifies the limit of advancement - and as such it remains tremendously exciting to the adventurous colonizer - but it only represents a temporary limit, a line destined to be redrawn in more distant sands. Central to this concept is the notion that mysterious, uninhabited land exists just beyond the frontier, empty land, unclaimed land, as the Biblical void, formless and vast, waiting for the creative hand of God (and by proxy Her/His earthly cohorts) to define, frame and ultimately farm it.

To allow for a frontier is to encourage the identification of those nether-dwellers beyond the frontier as other-than-human - at the very least, unlike the West in significant ways, insofar as the frontier represents the limit of civilization, thus humanity. The frontier becomes the very limit of dignity, the point-of-no-return humanly speaking, akin to the wilderness in which Jesus is tempted and the void untouched by the Western God. If such a land can be defined as that vast empty expanse on the other side of Western experience, then it can be considered fit for the conquering/civilizing by European colonizers. Frontier settlements in Otherized spaces have always adopted the mythos of heathen exotism: those inhabitants of
the wilderness are no more than beasts to be subdued, along with the rest of nature, this the Romantic fantasy of Western civilized 'men' taming the wild (animals, people and land). For the colonial cowboy, living the frontier life is a perpetual, ennobling safari.

In predictable fashion, the marginalized of Europe, straggling forth in their poverty from Ireland, the Ukraine, Norway, Holland, and countless other points of continental departure, saw the frontier as a window of opportunity. Those immigration agents and government officials that have sold the dream over the centuries have also identified the frontier as the appropriate place for them to establish themselves. These frontier communities, as the First Nations reserves that they made necessary, were to be as distant from mainstream centers as their inhabitants originally were from London and Paris. Yet, these largely poor immigrant whites clearly envisioned the frontier themselves as a site of possibility. Toni Morrison notes that

In the New World there was the vision of a limitless future, made more gleaming by the constraint, dissatisfaction, and turmoil left behind...Whatever the reasons, the attraction was of the “clean slate” variety, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not only to be born again but to be born again in new clothes, as it were. (Morrison, 1993:34)

In her analysis, Morrison also concludes that, “One could be released from a useless, binding, repulsive past into a kind of history-lessness, a blank page waiting to be inscribed.” (Morrison, 1993:35) This comment is particularly salient in the context of the present discussion. The “blank page” of the Americas was still, despite the ravages of European disease, often imminent starvation and wanton slaughter, inhabited and governed by hundreds of sovereign aboriginal nations. Clearly, the page had to be first wiped clean. It may be profitable at this point to
establish the relationship between ‘history-lessness’ and the desire to objectify. Subjects cannot be ‘history-less’; this state can only be assigned, in the most narrow dualistic way, to objects. It seems clear then that the future settlers of the Americas had many reasons, both practical and philosophical, to reduce the indigenous peoples before them to fixed objects, this the effect of their New World “inscription”.

Morrison notes another factor which impacted profoundly on the relations of contact. She intuits that

Power - control of one’s own destiny - would replace the powerlessness felt before the gates of class, caste, and cunning persecution. One could move from punishment to disciplining and punishing; from social ostracism to social rank. (Morrison, 1993:35)

In summary, these settlers brought with them a faith in the hierarchy of dominance, one which they had no presumption to overthrow, seeking rather to install themselves more advantageously within it. Whatever pretentions to democracy were advanced in later years, the opportunity for advancement depended upon the existence of the frontier, and the possibility of its subjugation and colonization. The objectification of the indigenous residents of this frontier universe provided the theoretical ground for further action to dominate them in the name of God and country. Framing has been central to the colonial pursuit in this the history of contact on our continent.

James Baldwin, writing about the marginalization of African-American peoples in his essay “Princes and Powers”, identifies another agenda that has powerfully, if unconsciously, informed the Western framing of identified others:

It may have been the popular impulse to keep us at the bottom of the perpetually shifting and bewildered populace; but we were, on the other hand, almost personally indispensable to each of them, simply because, without us, they could never have been certain, in such a confusion, where the bottom was... (Baldwin, 1993: 20)
He continues in the paper “In Search of a Majority”:

In a way, the Negro tells us where the bottom is: Because he is there, and where he is, beneath us, we know where the limits are and how far we must not fall. We must not fall beneath him. We must never allow ourselves to fall that low, and I am not trying to be cynical or sardonic. I think if one examines the myths which have proliferated in this country concerning the Negro, one discovers beneath these myths a kind of sleeping terror of some condition which we refuse to imagine. In a way, if the Negro were not here, we might be forced to deal with ourselves and our own personalities, with all those vices, all those conundrums, and all those mysteries with which we have invested the Negro race. (Baldwin, 1993: 133-4)

The precise identification of the other assures the dominant of her/his own relative position in the hierarchy that s/he has enforced on the west. The other cannot be released from the confines of this social dungeon, just as her/his own subjectivity must not see the light of the dominant day. The consequence of such an exposure is nothing short of a direct and damning challenge to the dominant’s social position, and her/his justification for maintaining it over and against others. The authentic cry for justice, the authentic pain, must never be felt, must forever be distant, objectified beyond any accessible relatedness to dominant subjectivity. For with an acknowledgement of other-pain must come the accountability of complicity: the dominant must never allow this if hegemonic social relations are to be maintained. The “conundrums” and “mysteries” which the dominant west seeks to fix as characteristic of African-American peoples must become, rhetorically, an objective fact of their very being.

However, as mentioned above, dualistic apprehension and objectification, as repression, are ever incomplete. The darkness projected onto the other haunts the dominant mind as a ghastly shadow, this shadow the irrepresible manifestation of untold, tragic tales of injustice. Toni Morrison picks up this theme in her essay
“Romancing the Shadow” (1993):

...the shadow that is companion to this whiteness - a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing. This haunting, a darkness from which our early literature seemed unable to extricate itself, suggests the complex and contradictory situation in which American writers found themselves during the formative years of the nation’s literature. (Morrison, 1993:33)

Morrison suggests that this unconsciousness heritage of injustice has woven itself into the very fabric of American discourse. I maintain that this represents a window of opportunity for the transformative educator. Transformative education offers the possibility of authentic and lasting healing through its demand for critically reexamining the foundations of the dominant frame. The haunting may cease, opening up new opportunities for powerful bridges across cultures and histories: but the haunting will only cease once the ghost has told her/his tale. The cellar door of the dominant mansion must be pried open, despite the consequences for the master’s self-identification. My contention throughout this discussion, one I believe to be echoed in indigenous narrative, has been that the opening of the door, the listening to the cry, the acknowledgement of complicity in oppression, and the concomitant anguish and identity crisis that this necessitates, all play a profound role in the healing of the dominant world’s relationship to both itself and those it has oppressed. From such healing may emerge a framing grounded in dialectical relations, a framing which does not seek to fix objectively but rather operates to acknowledge and critically investigate multiple, shifting realities, epistemologies and values. The Other can no longer be held at arm’s length from the academy, a mere object of study but never a teacher. This distance itself must be reframed dialectically: the distant must become familiar, the familiar strange, and this tension must be celebrated and entrenched within the academy. There is no room for
dualistic objectivity, nor prideful and uncritical ‘fixing’, in this healing process. Nanabush the transformer has a lesson to teach, and may profitably become both the most ridiculed and revered pedagogue in the academy (indeed, must become so.)

The ground of transformation: traditional values

If the academy is to be transformed, then canonical hierarchies of ‘legitimate’ knowledge must be deconstructed and new relationships established in the spirit of a dialectical valuation of both subject and object, and subjectivity and objectivity. Notions such as ‘objective detachment’ must be critiqued and exposed as both limited and valuable when informed by an appropriate humility in the context of human apprehension and interpretation. I’d like to briefly revisit some of the values more traditionally associated with indigenous knowledges and epistemologies, and propose the necessity of their inclusion in academic contexts.

As developed above, dominant science has deliberately detached itself from issues of spirituality, mystery and the supernatural, embracing a narrowness induced by finite, atomistic theory, in the name of ‘objective science.’ Conversely, Indigenous knowledges have never devalued the mysterious. Perhaps because of this, as Vine Deloria, Jr. notes, “the Indian explanation is always cast aside as a superstition,” (1995:19) this in reference to indigenous origin stories and recounts of antiquity. The unquantifiable historical explanation, even when corroborated in great detail by generations of elders, becomes relegated to the chasm of superstitious, highly subjective (a favourite expletive among scientists) ‘myth.’ It is consistent with the tenets of progressive history that new knowledges supersede and improve upon previous knowledge forms, adopting the best of the old and reframing it in the light of
new discoveries and theories. Again, this conception of history willfully ignores the agendas operative throughout history, agendas which have sought to justify colonizing dominant groups by naturalizing, primitivizing, and infantilizing - and thus disqualifying - the indigenous knowledges. and histories of conquered lands. And just as ancient traditional histories are omitted from the canon, the academy has come to suspiciously view anything remotely associated with the supernatural. In the light of recent centuries’ supervaluation of reason and ‘the objective’, “the Supernatural has been forgotten” , to borrow fringe-theorist and novelist C.S. Lewis’ phrase. (Lewis, 1984: 45) This might more appropriately be rephrased as, ‘the Supernatural has been strategically buried.’ I contend that this is largely due to the difficult, often impenetrable relationship between ‘the Supernatural’ and human subjective experience. Both resist fixing and quantifying, and both, I contend, contain the seeds of subversion insofar as they resist objectification, and thus control by the dominant group. Both contain a valuation of humility as central to understanding, even a rejection of human pride, given the uncontainable essence of both realms. Ron Geyshick captures some of this when he counsels, “Don’t ask nonsense questions: be sincere when you ask. Have a feeling for what you know and what you will never know.” (Geyshick, 1989: 32) Humility in the face of what we “will never know” must inform any transformative praxis: this ethic rejects the goal of ‘absolute’ knowledge as the unstated end of academic pursuit. Insofar as this ethic marks a clear distinction between partial human and omniscient divine knowledge, it represents a powerful valuation of the supernatural, the non-objective - that which we may never know - and an equally powerful valuation of human subjective experience - those traditional knowledges. “that we know.” Cree writer Willie Ermine supports this stance towards education, claiming that, “Only through subjectivity may we continue
to gain authentic insights into truth,” (Battiste, 1996:110) a statement which seemingly flies in the face of contemporary dominant educational practice and theory, and yet which sets the stage for a transformative education grounded in humility.

This value is not unique to Indigenous societies, although it is consistently proposed by Indigenous writers like Ermine and Geyshick. Brazilian 'Critical Pedagogy' founder Paulo Freire develops educational theory which is grounded in a similar attack on prideful objectivism and dualistic atomizing. Discussing reading education, Freire proposes a decidedly dialectical theory:

Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world. Language and reality are dynamically interconnected. The understanding attained by critical reading of a text implies perceiving the relationship between text and context. (Freire & Macedo, 1987:29)

This might be rephrased as such: knowledge does not consist merely of the observation of an object; rather it is preceded by and intertwined with subjective understanding. The object and subjectivity are dynamically interconnected. The understanding gained by critical, dialectical apprehension of an 'object' implies perceiving the 'right' relationship between object and subject. So, the pursuit of knowledge must involve not merely a valuation of the subjective, but also a valuation of the dialectical relationship between subject and object.44 To do this is to fundamentally reject the dualistic pursuit of pure, 'objective truth'.

Another fundamental Indigenous value which must be incorporated into a transformative education is the value of the 'local.' This value rejects, in agreement with many postmoderns, that overgeneralized assumptions and theories are too often simplistic, stereotypic and shallow in their comprehension of particular

44 I contend, although I do not have the space to develop it here, that this relationship constitutes the realm of the supernatural, the spiritual, the religious.
knowledges. This value calls for respect for specific subjectivities and spaces.

Molefi Kete Asante reflects on this demand:

He or she studies every thought, action, behaviour, and value, and if it cannot be found in our culture or in our history, it is dispensed with quickly. This is not done because we have something against someone else's culture; it is just not ours...[Afrocentricity] supersedes any other ideology because it is the proper sanctification of your own history. (Asante, 1996: 5,7)

Transformative education must involve a ‘sanctification’ of personal histories, this a further argument for the valuation of subjective personal experience, if education is to be inclusive in any meaningful way. The devaluation of local knowledges. will inevitably lead to a fractured understanding of socio-historical events and contexts.

Geyshick relates an example of decision-making based on ‘objective’ data, to the exclusion of traditional, local knowledges.:

My Dad was like that when we went trapping. At the end of one day, we came to a good spot, sheltered from the wind, with plenty of drywood. But my Dad wouldn't camp there or even cook anything. It was sacred land, he said, so we moved along. The Department of Indian Affairs must have decided to put the reserve here, because before, no one would stay. (Geyshick, 1989: 88)

The DIA's process must have seemed absolutely reasonable to the bureaucrats who created the reserve, opposed only by irrational and superstitious local concerns. And yet, this was clearly an exclusionary decision, based on the agenda and ethics of the DIA alone, while rationalized by logical generalizations concerning land use.

Education may similarly address only those knowledges. based on Western modes of knowing, disqualifying, even ridiculing, locally-valued concerns. A transformative education must address the exclusionary practices of generations of Western scholars.

Conversely, Deloria states, most Native cultures have tended towards inclusiveness and have valued diversity. (Hampton, Battiste & Barman, 1995:10)
This is consistent with the expectation of differences between persons and perspectives discussed above. Bradely notes that, "Indian parents and educators want Indian children to learn everything that education has to offer, as well as, their own cultures." (Hampton, Battiste & Barman, 1995:10) Aboriginal educational institutions and practices may serve as a model of inclusiveness insofar as they seek to entrench a range of knowledges within the curriculum. This is not considered a watering-down of the existing curriculum, but rather constitutes an opportunity for critical reflection on, and exposure to, histories and knowledges both familiar and alien. This inclusive spirit must be accompanied by a spirit of critique, and a desire to expose injustice and colonial attitudes. Transformation, by definition, must not become simply a replacement of one curriculum with another: a qualitatively altered spirit and commitment must pervade the academy, one profoundly informed by the values proposed throughout this discussion. The trickster-spirit must become entrenched.

The mode of transformation: two approaches to resistance

In this last reflection on transformation, I'd like to consider two opposing modes of resistance to domination. The first mode represents what I'll call dualistic resistance, which employs the strategy of polarizing. Activist and all-round social agitator Saul Alinsky describes, in Rules for Radicals, the nature of this strategy:

Before men can act an issue must be polarized. Men will act when they are convinced that their cause is 100 per cent on the side of the angels and that the opposition are 100 per cent on the side of the devil. (1989: 78)

This conviction presupposes a willingness to enter a trance-like state of willful blindness and conceit, a state consciously separate from and antagonistic to an
identified Other. The Other is represented as fixedly evil and determined in their goals. Alinsky's analysis of this condition does not, however, rest with a simple acknowledgement of the strategy of polarizing, but rather suggests that radical organizers adopt a "political schizoid" (78) personality. For the purposes of utility, Alinsky posits polarizing/dualizing is simply one effective strategy which may be profitably used to mobilize people. Alinsky advocates a highly problematic relation to be established in this form of radicalism, one in which the leadership of a group, consciously aware of the fallacy of their constituents' changeability, manipulates the group using this knowledge. Knowing that the mood of the masses will change when simply convinced of a polarized 'truth', the leadership abandons her/his own political convictions for the sake of advancing the movement. Alinsky considers the 'means-ends' nature of much argument about strategy redundant: ultimately the ends do justify the means, and any consideration to the contrary is impotent idealism.

I contend that a related resistance mode, that of simply lashing out impulsively and instinctively against the identified enemy, employing the same methods of domination that have been used against one, are equally as ultimately ineffective, and certainly unprincipled. In both cases, Other persons are fixed and identified, their subjectivities 'objectified' and flattened, such that their words and actions may be employed as fodder for antagonistic rhetoric. Also in both cases, a hierarchy of praxis is established, where the role of the leadership is to propagate the 'truths' that will enable one group to win over another, relying upon the assumption that the average person is politically malleable, and content simply with achieving her/his own agenda (at whatever cost.) While Alinsky's observations may be accurate, his conclusions cannot constitute the spirit of transformative political action, grounded as
they are in lack of respect, manipulation and brutal utilitarianism. Within such a spirit, the 'ends' of political resistance become simply the whims of unprincipled leadership, equally as corrupt as the dominant group themselves.

It seems to me that Alinsky begins in error by interpreting an observed, admittedly very prevalent response as valid and worthy of utility in the pursuit of justice. There is a terminal standstill encountered when one embraces a dualism: the other is infinitely far away, unreachable, eminently distant and remote, this in apparent opposition to another pole, in which there exists a suffocating, blindly narcissistic assumption of 'sameness'. In the blink of an eye, one pole flips into its opposite when convenient; hegemonic, and all authoritarian thought-systems, flip from immediate relation (all self), even conflation, to absolute distance (all other). This constitutes the dynamic of the master-slave anti-relation, the cycle of contradiction.\textsuperscript{45} Some, responding to the fatalism of infinite duality, halfheartedly embrace fragile 'local' "truths", unwilling to assert them as universal - for fear of their own inherent self-centered power interests - yet unable to let them go as purely arbitrary - knowing, on some level, the truth value, or perhaps, obsessively clinging to favored hierarchies and ideologies. There can be no real challenge to dualistic subjectivism within this mind set: all truth claims become merely thoughtless acquiescence or diabolical self-agrandizement. Subjectivity and objectivity, as polar oppositions, are irreconcilable, thus never to be "critiqued" and exposed, never to be understood or challenged (thus powerfully supporting the status quo hegemony).

Neither effective self-critique nor principled political action can ever emerge from a dualistic ground. Powerful self-critique embraces the paradox of subjectivity and objectivity, asking 'how is my subjectivity objective?' but also 'how is my

\textsuperscript{45} These terms are borrowed from the oral teachings of history of ideas professor Brayton Polka, York University, Canada.
objectivity subjective? Or, `am I simply acting from self-interest?' and `am I simply acquiescing to other-interest?' Without a commitment to the possibility of relationship between self and other, we are left with the answer `it is never possible to assess the pervasiveness of my own self-interest or other-acquiescence,' thus we fall into mistrustful regional and sectionalism, effectively depoliticizing us and dissuading us from the task of finding common ground between the oppressions. We are fatally mistrustful of both ourselves and others, spotting (often insightfully) the conspiracy of hegemony, but catatonic in its presence (again, exactly the preferred response as far as the hegemony goes).

Relationship-building, like deconstruction, presupposes one's selfish blindness of others' interests (otherizing), as well as projecting one's own interests onto another (`selfing', perhaps?); yet, in recognition of this human propensity (which is not limited to the hegemony), the project of resistance to both self- and other-power mongering begins with the process of examining critically the stances of both self and other, with equal rigor and generosity (no mean feat). To begin this project with the presupposition of a possible understanding, a new relation, between persons is infinitely removed from the position where one begins in a fatalistic catatonia of disillusionment, satisfied (unconvincingly) with `critiquing' everything as `other', including one's own chronic and dualistic subjectivity. The latter is a ghost of resistance, a thinly-veiled extension of the hegemonic agenda of depoliticization and power-hoarding.

I do not for a moment believe that many social activists begin from a position of fatalism, where simply exposing the lie is enough; yet I rarely hear the stance of possible relationship, a universal “truth” if ever there was one, asserted as the ground of their activism and the beginning of any inquiry into injustice (just try to
define injustice without reference to the possibility of relationship). To assert the
possibility of relationship is to reject the notion that all positions and perspectives are
valid and equal, given particular historical-social-economic circumstances: anti-
relationship stances can be consistently revealed as the ground of hegemonic
power, and are always to be critically evaluated and often rejected outright. The
diversity of opinion is simply that: diversity, valueless and non-hierarchical. To what
do we, self-critically, assign value? If nothing, then we cannot begin a project of
resistance. If something, then we are asserting a position of value of truth, one which
we must rigorously and constantly interrogate, but not necessarily abandon. Truth
claims are not inherently the dualistic agent of the hegemony, although they certainly
have been and can be. My question remains, without a truth claim, without an
assignment of value to certain stances, where do we begin a project of resistance
which is not simply a reactionary replication of our oppression (in its flip-flop skin)?

It seems to me that, while the doors of history and narrative may be flung wide
open, exposing the “true” stories to diverse peoples, we will be left gazing at the
scene, impotent and infinitely distant, unless we reject the dualism of self versus
other as the ground of our resistance or inquiry. Dualisms are those very shadows of
‘truth’ which deserve our full attention, the shadows which inform the capture and
hoarding of power, the assignment of hierarchies, the subjugation and legitimation of
terror: yet while these exist both theoretically and manifestly, they do not (and never
will) extinguish the possibility of relation, which is the only truly subversive agent
available to us in the fight against the anti-relationship stance of the hegemony
(which embraces, as master, the master-slave dynamic as human truth). Yes, we
must reject hegemonic master-slave perspectives and limitations on humanness;
and yes, we must also abandon our own doomed reactionary resistance guided by
the assumptions of this same system, a system which is so carefully designed to
derail resistance.

Indigenous novelist and poet Thomas King contends that North American
Aboriginal writers should be concerned with the native community alone, and forget
about the white community, resisting the opportunity to slam them. He counsels
these writers not to get involved with the 'whose culture is better' fight. (Lutz,
1991:111) His words, I believe, do not stem from any narrow regionalist or racial
sentiment, but rather encourage resistance to be conducted on a more productive
and principled plane. In the context of this discussion, it would be fruitless to
propose a wholesale replacement of Western values with indigenous one, even
were it possible to do so. The concept of transformation implies the building of
bridges, and a marriage between 'different' (indigenously rather than Westernly
conceived) epistemologies and paradigms. Transformative education demands that
hierarchies of knowledge are deconstructed, in favour of a dialectical relation which
encourages difference even as it challenges dualistic polarization.

Asante contends that the end of transformative action, in this case serving
Afrocentric principles, must be “rooted in the historical imperative of a people.”
(Asante, 1996 :8) If this appears self-evident in the context of one “people,” how may
this statement be universalized: or can it made universal, while still clinging to its
own local and “historical imperatives?” I believe that one agenda that transformative
education must relentlessly pursue is the building of cultural bridges between
apparent dualities. This process can only emerge from a dialectical resistance
which supports as rigorously as it challenges, seeking greater truths rather than
promoting one pole at any cost. Dialectical resistance will involve sacrifice: the
sacrifice of one's own sureness, perhaps even one's own convictions. To return
once more to the prevailing metaphor of this discussion, it is not accidental that Bruh Rabbit and Glooscap, Coyote and Iktomi, find their own conceit continually undermined. Similarly, the heroes of transformative education must continually place their own heroism under scrutiny, or risk becoming more the fool than their opponent.

The double-movement of transformative action is illustrated succinctly within the issue of multiculturalism. In the context of Native and non-Native (and perhaps in the context of all indigenous and non-indigenous peoples) we must first understand that difference is not simply the absence of sameness between two worlds, but rather that difference constitutes a relation of profound opposition. This must be the educational starting point, rather than simply teaching about ostensibly apolitical differences: educators must begin by showing how difference is framed to establish a relation of opposition, one which translates, in the context of colonialism, into unequal power distribution. This must be addressed. In the second part of the critical movement, differences are ushered into a mutual relation through a dialectical appeal to both the valuation of specific subjectivities and the acknowledgement of common, relatable attitudes, knowledges, and values. Multicultural education provides a window of opportunity, but any movement through that window must be accompanied by an anti-racist, critical caution. Transformative multiculturalism, informed by an anti-racist agenda, will profoundly celebrate as it challenges and exposes political foundations.

I will conclude with a final quote from Asante regarding Afrocentricity:

Afrocentricity takes a simulsense form once it is a fact in one’s life; it is not linear, cannot be analyzed in a single line, and is inherently circular. I speak of it as a transforming agent in which all things that were old become new and a transformation of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour results. It becomes everywhere sensed, and is everywhere present. A new reality is invoked; a new vision is introduced...it will emerge in the form of a collective
consciousness capable of developing an international will and manifestation. (Asante, 1996: 1-2, 5)

The emergence of this "new reality" may well coincide with Nanabush's return, and will certainly be grounded in the same foundational ethics and values.

**Conclusion**

Literalism, or the 'neutral and objective' frame as developed above, always has an agenda. I contend that the manic quest for objective truth, 'absolute objectivity,' reflects a repressive desire for a superficial apprehension of reality, a desire driven by a very conscious agenda to protect privilege. If the world as-it-is is reality itself, then implication and responsibility are irrelevant, and education may be associated simply with unselfcritical observation. The effect is the truth, causes and motives simple conjecture created by self-interested parties. If what you see is what you get, then racism is paranoia, an avoidance of one's personal failure in a meritocratic land of opportunity: the dominant social scientist says, 'Just observe how people live if you want to see something of the nature, and thus worth of the person.'

The trickster-fool shatters the glassy confidence of the dominant's literality, and the master never experiences it. Nanabush knows that direct indictments of injustice will be met with direct force, and suppressed easily. More importantly, the trickster narrator also knows that directness without humility/self-critique is folly: so the trickster's method becomes indirectness, subterranean indictments spoken in languages inaccessible (immediately) to the dominant. The trickster plays directly to the literal-mindedness of the master, making a literal fool of him, revealing his shallow apprehension of the world, even revealing his implication in the making of
the world - and yet the master, oblivious to these levels of meaning, hears a simple song, a simple tale. He hears this because he wishes, even desperately needs, to hear only this. If the master should ever hear more, his dominance would crumble, would indeed already have been superseded by an understanding of self-implication in dominance: he would have become, not like a literal fool, but rather a 'dialectical fool,' and thus, entering the world of relation, have been summarily cast out of the Eden of hegemonic stability. If to err is human, then to become fully human one must acknowledge oneself a fool. That is the contention of this paper. The trickster of Canadian Aboriginal and African-American/Canadian oral history seeks to make fools of all of us. I contend that the transformative educator must also, through dialectical humiliation, inspire profound foolishness; her/his tactics must function much as the tricksters' antics, ushering in both an inclusive academy and a dignified human relation.

I also contend that the profoundly transformational meaning and value of the trickster narrative, only one of many living examples of indigenous knowledge, must be incorporated into the Western story, even though/as it challenges dominant discourses of control and essentialized objectivity. Lopez (1977) comments that "in a healthy social order, the irreverence of both clown and Coyote only serve, by contrast, to reinforce the existent moral structure." (xix) In a dysfunctional and patriarchal social order, however, one smothered by rigid role boundaries and committed to invulnerability and order, irreverence is a dangerous bull gone mad in the town square. It may be that even upon the event of the cautious entrance of various indigenous knowledges and their critique into the academy, the dominant scholar and student, like Napi, will place her/himself in a position where s/he “never uses the advice [s/he] hears, again the consequences of [her/his] foolishness.” (Bullchild,
1985: 158) Perhaps, in this sense, the dominant is already, and has always been, like Nanabush, Napi and Weesageechak, floundering under the weight of their own conceit in the story of an Aboriginal elder. Following this, the transformational moment can then only be initiated by the dominant’s self-identification with the vain, congenitally subjective anti-hero of indigenous trickster tales. With regard to the transformative educator’s role in ushering in this new self-relation, Thomas King’s words about indigenous resistance authorship might be considered:

The point is, if you’re going to enshrine ['preaching' about oppression] in a poem, do it in such a way that it has an impact. It has very little impact if you just throw it out there...After a while it has no impact at all. People just turn their ears off. For me that’s not a poem, that’s not creative writing, that is simply preaching. I think you have to get beyond [preaching] and figure out clever ways to say that. Poetry is, in part, economy of language, and, at its best, it is a very skilled thing. (King in Lutz, 1991: 112)

The ‘poetry’ of transformative resistance must be dialectical, healing, constructive in its destructiveness, and tricky in its strategy.

Ever so little by little, we are picking the Trickster, that ancient clown, up from under that legendary beer table on Main Street in Winnipeg or Hastings Street in Vancouver, and will soon have her standing firmly up on his own two feet so she can make us laugh and dance again. (Tomson Highway in York, p.ix)

It has been my contention throughout this discussion that the trickster's resurrection should be equally celebrated in the context of transformative dialogues. S/he maintains activists and self-critical academics in an appropriate relation to others, reminding us of our capacity to echo the self-deceits of the dominant with our own dogmas. S/he reminds us that effective and transformative critique must be dialectical in its embracing of both the affirmative and the challenging. S/he gives us lessons on how to effect commando-style intellectual raids on dominant discourses, by focusing on the inherently self-destructive (because contradictory) dualistic nature
of hegemonic rhetoric and practice. S/he reminds us that critical insight does not emerge exclusively from the academy. S/he makes fools of us, and we are better for it.

For the classroom teacher, Nanabush reminds us to critically examine all texts - spoken, written, in cyberspace, in the staff room and in the playground - mindful of our (Western educators') propensity to absolutize, naturalize, and value apparently solid objects and knowledge icons above seemingly subjective and personal ones. For the teacher, Coyote yelps out a warning not to disqualify student knowledges simply because they are held by students, coincidentally not to supervalue ones' own perspectives simply based on pedagogical status. S/he is reminded to introduce a polyphonous wealth of resources into the classroom, promoting a healthy diversity of knowledges and priorities, and to do this across multiple curricular contexts. Weesageechak's presence might encourage a reexamination of canonized practices and theories, and the inclusion of traditionally marginalized concepts and texts into the pedagogical mix. Above all, the uncritically and canonically valued must be torn asunder, cast adrift to the four directions, and recollected amidst newly-valued alternate texts in the spirit of profound reconciliation. For the Western educator, transformative education must constitute the unremitting transformation of an entrenched, canonized self-identification. S/he must both be taught by Nanabush and become Nanabush as teacher.

...the spirits said a period of chaos and confusion was coming and the Iktomi - a being personified by the spider, who imparts wisdom through trickery - would soon return. Every indigenous people in the world has such a teacher to show them that life is tricky. (Means, 1995: 405)

It is my hope that the Western academy of the twenty-first century may also be
blessed and cursed with such an “institutionalized principle of disorder.” It is my hope that Nanabush’s canoe paddles towards us as I write.
References


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