

# NARRATIVE CHANCE

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POSTMODERN DISCOURSE  
ON NATIVE AMERICAN  
INDIAN LITERATURES

*Edited By*

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## A Postmodern Introduction

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### *Postmodern discourse*

Native American Indian histories and literatures, oral and written, are imagined from "wisps of narratives." These narrative wisps, wrote Jean-François Lyotard, are

stories that one tells, that one hears, that one acts out; the people does not exist as a subject but as a mass of millions of insignificant and serious little stories that sometimes let themselves be collected together to constitute big stories and sometimes disperse into digressive elements.<sup>1</sup>

The critical attention in this collection is postmodernism: new essays on narrative discourse, authors, readers, tricksters and comic world views rather than tragic themes, individualism and modernism.

Lyotard uses the word *postmodern* to describe "the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies" and to designate "the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts." His studies "place these transformations in the context of the crisis of narratives."<sup>2</sup>

The word *postmodernism* is a clever condition: an invitation to narrative chance in a new language game and an overture to amend the formal interpretations and transubstantiation of tribal literatures.

Ihab Hassan, for instance, wrote that postmodernism sounds awkward and uncouth. The word "evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself. The term thus contains its enemy within, as the terms romanticism and classicism, baroque and rococo, do not. . . . But if much of modernism appears hieratic, hypotactical, and formalist, postmodernism strikes us by contrast as playful, paratactical, and deconstructionist."<sup>1</sup>

Brian McHale, on the other hand, asserts,

Nobody likes the term, yet people continue to prefer it over the even less satisfactory alternatives. . . . Postmodernism is not post modern, whatever that might mean, but post modernism; it does not come *after the present* (a solecism), but after the *modernist movement*. . . . Postmodernism follows *from* modernism.

He wrote that a "superior construction of postmodernism would be one that produces new insights, new or richer connections, coherence of a different degree or kind, ultimately *more discourse*."<sup>2</sup>

Native American Indian literatures are tribal discourse, more discourse. The oral and written narratives are language games, comic discourse rather than mere responses to colonialist demands or social science theories.

Stephen Tyler, in his essay on postmodern anthropology, considers discourse as the "maker of the world, not its mirror. . . . The world is what we say it is, and what we speak of is the world." Tribal narratives are discourse and in this sense tribal literatures are the world rather than a representation. Tyler argues that one of the constant themes in the dominant culture has been the "search for apodictic and universal method. In our own times we see the triumph of formalism in all branches of thought. . . . Form, in other words, produces form; it is both process and structure." He points out that postmodern

writing focuses on the outer flow of speech, seeking not the thought that "underlies" speech, but the thought that is speech. . . . Modernists sought a form of writing more in keeping with "things," emphasizing, in imitation of modern science, the descriptive function of writing—writing as a "picture of reality."

## Postmodern writing overturns

modernist *mimesis* in favor of a writing that "evokes" or "calls to mind," not by completion and similarity but by suggestion and difference. The function of the text is not to depict or reveal within itself what it says. The text is "seen through" by what it cannot say. It shows what it cannot say and says what it cannot show.<sup>5</sup>

### *Pleasurable misreadings*

The world is a text, Vincent Leitch argues in *Deconstructive Criticism*, and nothing stands behind this world of tropes because a literal language does not exist, except in illusions. The literal translations and representations of tribal literatures are illusions, consolations in the dominant culture. There can never be "correct" or "objective" readings of the text or the tropes in tribal literatures, only more energetic, interesting and "pleasurable misreadings."<sup>6</sup>

Native American Indian literatures have been pressed into cultural categories, transmuted by reductionism, animadversions and the hyper-realities of neocolonial consumerism. The concept of "hyperrealities" is borrowed from *Travels in Hyperreality* by Umberto Eco. He wrote that Americans live in a "more to come" consumer culture.

This is the reason for this journey into hyperreality, in search of instances where the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake; where the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Tribal cultures, in this sense, have been invented as "absolute fakes" and consumed in social science monologues. The consumers demand more cultures and new literatures; at the same time, postmodern criticism would liberate tribal narratives in a most "pleasurable misreading."

Native American Indian literatures are unstudied landscapes, wild and comic rather than tragic and representational, storied with narrative wisps and tribal discourse. Social science theories constrain tribal landscapes to institutional values, representationalism and the politics of academic determination. The narrow teleologies deduced from social science monologues and the ideologies that arise from structuralism have reduced tribal literatures to an "objective" collec-

tion of consumable cultural artifacts. Postmodernism liberates imagination and widens the audiences for tribal literatures; this new criticism rouses a comic world view, narrative discourse and language games on the past.

"The return to the past, to the traces, fragments, and debris of memory and history is both necessary and inconclusive," reasoned David Carroll.

The acceptance of representation in its simple sense is a kind of bureaucratic solution to the conflicts of history, an acquiescence to the demands and false security of realism without the will or the force to maintain the potentially irresolvable contradiction of the struggle.<sup>8</sup>

Monologic realism and representation in tribal literatures, in this sense, is a "bureaucratic solution" to neocolonialism and the consumption of narratives and cultures.

In a recent essay on narrative and politics David Carroll wrote,

Any narrative that predetermines all responses or prohibits any counter-narratives puts an end to narrative itself by suppressing all possible alternative actions and responses, by making itself its own end and the end of all other narratives.<sup>9</sup>

### *Narrative dissidence*

Antonín Dvořák, the composer, and Oleg Cassini, the modern courier, have in common their unusual interests in tribal cultures; now a source of "little dissident narratives" and ironic literature.<sup>10</sup> Separated in time by a century, these two men shared certain hyperrealities about Native American Indian cultures.

"The Americans expect great things of me," wrote Dvořák. "And the main thing is . . . to create a national music. Now, if the small Czech nation can have such musicians, they say, why could not they, too, when their country and people are so immense?"<sup>11</sup>

Patricia Hampl, in her sensitive meditation on the Czech composer, wrote that he arrived in Spillville, Iowa, in 1893, with his wife, six children, housemaid, and secretary.

They stayed the whole summer, an unusually hot one, past Dvořák's fifty-second birthday, which fell on the feast of the Nativity of Mary,

September 8. He passed out cigars to the townspeople who gathered for a celebration in his honor. Two days later—quite suddenly it seemed to some people—he and his family packed up and were gone, back the long way they had come.<sup>12</sup>

Big Moon, the Kickapoo leader and healer, was in Spillville late that summer with other tribal people to sell medicinal herbs. Dvořák attended the tribal dances, listened to the music and even paid for a snake oil headache treatment; he consumed the hyperrealities that he believed were tribal, authentic, real and representational. A franchised composer at the turn of the last century, he was inspired and imagined a national music; meanwhile, most tribal cultures were enslaved on reservations. The tribal people he encountered were on the boundaries. Modern immigrants were surrounded by “native immigrants” that summer in a small town; their stories are narrative wisps in the national tenure on savagism and civilization.

“He believed the answer lay in the music of the slaves,” Hampl wrote,

Negro spirituals, and in American Indian music, especially its insistent, patient rhythms . . . Maybe he could not perceive the American hesitation. In the old country “the peasants” were himself, his family. His people. In America there was a boundary. Black and white, red and white. We call it racism. He stepped over the line easily, perhaps thinking Indian drum beats were as accessible to white American composers as Czech folk music was to him. He didn't hear the heavier hit of the drum on the ear, the black wail it is impossible to borrow.”<sup>13</sup>

Dvořák considered an opera based on *The Song of Hiawatha* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a romantic colonialist poem. “He had read the poem in translation,” Hampl wrote. “Naturally, its admiration for the indigenous culture appealed to Dvořák. So did Longfellow's lyrical, if rather didactic, restatement of landscape and the beauties of nature.” But the idea “fizzled.”<sup>14</sup>

Dvořák and his daughter Otilka, who was fifteen that summer, visited the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. Behind the mechanical Uncle Sam on the midway, the barkers and pitch men, Otilka must have witnessed the ethnic exhibits, tribal dances and ceremonies. In 1893 the exhibits included a “Bedouin camp, a Winnebago Indian village, a Lapland village, a Persian palace, a Chinese market,” and other cultural hyperrealities.<sup>15</sup>

Otilka returned to Spillville. Later that summer she was seen near

the tribal camp on the boundaries, near the river where her father walked and recorded the sounds of water, birds and tribal music. She was seen "roaming around the woods, Big Moon by her side. Keeping company. . . . It was Big Moon with her in the woods by the Turkey River, and what of it?"<sup>16</sup> Dvořák was told about his daughter and the tribal leader who had danced for the composer and treated his headache. "Like so much, it depends on your attitude, your place in the story," wrote Hampl. "That night the Dvořáks started packing. They were gone the next day."<sup>17</sup>

Dvořák pursued the hyperrealities of tribal cultures, the structured ceremonies at the tenable borders of civilization in a small town. He imagined tribal music as an instance of nationalism and worried that his daughter was too close to savagism. This, the wilderness in flesh and bone too close to home, is where hyperrealities and dioramas transmute the landscape and narrative discourse.

"I see the rest," wrote Hampl. "Girl on a pony, gold light in the blue morning sky, a glade where a good-looking man, native to the place, puts his hand surely between two clumps of fern to expose for her the white wood mallow, a plant she had never seen before."<sup>18</sup>

Oleg Cassini, the personal couturier and costume designer, considered "looks and styles" and historical periods in his fashion career; unabashed hyperrealities abound in his recent autobiography. "I realized that there was one area I'd never really exploited: my lifelong obsession with American Indians."<sup>19</sup>

Cassini satisfied his obsession in an agreement with Peter MacDonald, the elected chairman of the Navajo Nation. Cassini announced at the National Press Club that he would build, as a joint venture with the tribal government, a "world-class luxury resort" on the reservation. The architecture and furnishings of the tourist resort would "have their base in authentic Navajo designs." MacDonald said that the designer resort would "reflect the unique culture and tradition of our people." Moreover, the tribal leader announced, "We are creating a Navajo Board of Standards for all new tourist facilities on the Reservation to assure that the Navajo name means quality."<sup>20</sup> Designer hyperrealities are valuable properties in a consumer culture, even on reservations.

In one instance Cassini stated his clever attention to cultural selection and tribal standards. "A good many of my American Indian dresses required intricate beading of a sort that was not available in Italy," he wrote in his autobiography.

I'd been told Hong Kong was the place to find such material. . . . And then the show began. The line was modeled by girls with dark hair and the somatic characteristics of Indians; one wore beads and head-dresses. Sometimes the models were barefoot, but generally they wore moccasins.<sup>21</sup>

These stories are serious and comic, numerous narrative wisps that controvert hyperrealities. Tribal literatures are burdened with colonialism and tragic world views; however, there is a curious humanism in tribal narratives on minacious consumerism. Serious attention to cultural hyperrealities is an invitation to trickster discourse, an imaginative liberation in comic narratives; the trickster is postmodern.

Mikhail Bakhtin considered consciousness and character identification in aesthetic events. In trickster discourse the trickster is a comic trope, a chance separation in a narrative.

There are events that, in principle, cannot unfold on the plane of a single and unified consciousness, but presuppose two consciousnesses that do not fuse; they are events whose essential and constitutive element is the relation of a consciousness to *another* consciousness, precisely because it is *other*. Such are all events that are creatively productive, innovative, unique, and irreversible.<sup>22</sup>

Tribal narratives are creative productions rather than social science monologues; the trickster is a comic trope, chance in a narrative wisp, tribal discourse and an irreversible innovation in literature.

### *Comic signs and holotropes*

The trickster is a communal sign in a comic narrative; the comic *holotrope* (the whole figuration) is a consonance in tribal discourse. Silence and separation, not monologues in social science methodologies, are the antitheses of trickster discourse. The instrumental language of the social sciences are tragic or *hypotragic* modes that withhold communal discourse. Comic signs and tragic modes are cultural variations, the mood and humor in a language game; but they are not structural opposition.

Comic world views are communal; chance is more significant than "moral ruin." Tragic modes are inventions and impositions that attend the "discoverers" and translators of tribal narratives. The notion of the

"vanishing tribes" is a lonesome nuisance, to cite one *hypotragic* intrusion, that reveals racialism and the contradictions in humanism and historical determinism. More than a century ago, when politicians, missionaries and some intellectuals argued over monogenesis and the "separate creation of nonwhite races," the commissioner of Indian affairs "asserted that 'the fact stands out clear, well-defined, and indisputable, that Indians, not only as individuals but as tribes, are capable of civilization and christianization.'"<sup>23</sup>

These two capabilities, however, were not acceptable to most whites at the time; those who "saw cultures with primitive technologies, engaged in some limited agriculture yet dependent to a large extent upon hunting and gathering for food and apparel." It was common then

to refer to Indian communities as hunter societies as opposed to white societies engaged in agriculture and domestic industries. . . . They contrasted the preliterate Indian societies . . . with the accomplishments of their own society and judged the Indian languages generally worthless even though of scientific interest . . . and they saw their own rapidly multiplying population overwhelming the static or declining numbers of the Indian tribes.<sup>24</sup>

The paternal rhetoric of liberal politics, however, promised that peace, wealth and power would be shared; but there was no salvation in the domination, revision or transvaluation of tribal cultures. In the *hypotragic* end there are tricksters and comedies—chance, humor and at best a communal discourse in a tribal narrative. The colonists strained to tame the wild, the tribes and the environment. Now, high technologies overbear postcolonial promises and transvaluations; the tragic mode is in ruin.

Comic signs in tribal narratives, and then tragic modes in translations and imposed histories, are seldom mentioned in social science research and "discoveries." To understand these variations and the problems of interpretation we must turn to the theories of imaginative literature. Literary criticism, however, has not considered tribal narratives until the past two decades. Arnold Krupat comments that "there has been a sufficient amount of sophisticated writing about Native American literature in the last ten years or so to constitute a New Indian Criticism."<sup>25</sup>

Even now, serious critical attention to tribal narratives is minimal; a dubious virtue, given the instrumental possession of tribal experience

by romantic adventurers, missionaries and then social science. "Prior to the twentieth century," Michael Castro points out, "literary approaches to the Indian were dominated by two opposing and distancing stereotypes, the 'brutish savage' and the 'noble savage,' each serving underlying psychic needs of Western culture."<sup>26</sup> These stereotypes and several others, such as idiotism and "genetic code" alcoholism, are *hypotragic* impositions that deny a comic world view—the racist denial of tribal languages and ceremonies.

Historics read the past, or the past in the historical present; criticism reads the narrative; and the trickster reads neither. Here in trickster discourse the trickster unlics the *hypotragedies* imposed on tribal narratives—tribal narratives have been underread in criticism and overread in social science. The tragic mode is not in structural opposition to the comic sign. Rather, it is a racial burden, a postcolonial overcompensation at best; these burdens are a dubious triumph. "Without a sense of the tragic, comedy loses heart, it becomes brittle, it has animation but no life," asserts Richard Sewall. "Without a recognition of the truths of comedy, tragedy becomes bleak and intolerable."<sup>27</sup> Without a doubt social science theories are "bleak" reminders of the *hypotragic* intrusion and postcolonial domination of tribal cultures and literature.

More than fifty years ago Aldous Huxley "wondered whether tragedy as a form of art might not be doomed." He witnessed colonial duress, the intrusions of "moral ruin" and the duress of romantic and tragic modes in the translation of comic tribal literature, but his concern centered on the classics. Meanwhile, social science studies reproduced new theories and contributed not so much to the doom of tragedies, but to a new insolence in tribal literature, an outbreak of *hypotragedies*. Huxley argues in "Tragedy and the Whole Truth"<sup>28</sup> that tragedies are more than "mere verisimilitude" and empirical evidence, more than facts; tragedies are not the "whole truth." The trickster, a semiotic sign in a third-person narrative, is never tragic or *hypotragic*, never the whole truth or even part truth. Social science on the other hand is never comic, never a chance and never tragic in the end. Causal research strains to discover the "whole truth" or the invented truth in theories and models; these "whole truth" models imposed on tribal experiences are *hypotragedies*, abnormal tragedies in this instance. They have no comic imagination, no artistic intent, no communal signification of mythic verism.

"To make a tragedy," Huxley writes, "the artist must isolate a single

...ment out of the totality of human experience and use that exclusively as his material. Tragedy is something that is separated out from the Whole Truth. . . ." In *The Death of Tragedy*, George Steiner holds that tragedy is dead because of the promise of salvation, which is an argument similar to the "whole truth."

In his classical studies on tragedy and comedy Walter Kerr points out that "tragedy is the form that promises us a happy ending."<sup>29</sup> He argues that "comedy depends upon tragedy" and that there is hope in tragedy, while in comedy "there is no way out." He would not, it seems, agree with the notion of the "whole truth." Kerr writes, "In short, tragedy should report every conceivable experience man can have as he exercises his freedom totally in the hope of arriving at a new state of being."<sup>30</sup> Huxley declares, "For the fact is that tragedy and what I have called the Whole Truth are not compatible; where one is, the other is not."

Social science theories isolate certain elements in tribal narratives; the construction of human experience is modular. The trickster is a communal sign, never isolation; a concordance of narrative voices. The trickster is not tragic because the narrative does not promise a happy ending. The comic and tragic, the *hypotragic*, are cultural variations; the trickster is opposed by silence and isolation, not social science. The antithesis of the tragic in social science is chaos, rumors and wild conversations. The trickster livens chaos, but as Paul Watzlawick has argued, realities in social science rest "on the supposition that the world cannot be chaotic—not because we have any proof for this view, but because chaos would simply be intolerable." The comic trickster and social science, a tragic monologue, are contradictions but not antithetical; social science is a limited language game.<sup>31</sup>

"The comic rites are necessarily impious," muses Wylie Sypher, "for comedy is sacrilege as well as release. . . . We find ourselves reflected in the comedian, who satisfies our need for impieties."<sup>32</sup> Sypher maintains that the "high comic vision of life is humane, an achievement of man as a social being," which would include trickster narratives, comic *holotropes* and concordance in discourse. "So the comic spirit keeps us pure in mind by requiring that we regard ourselves skeptically. Indeed this spirit is an agent of that civilizing activity Matthew Arnold called 'criticism,' which is essential to 'culture.'"<sup>33</sup>

The trickster, then, is a comic and communal sign, a discourse in a narrative with no hope or tragic promises. The trickster is neither the "whole truth" nor an isolated *hypotragic* transvaluation of primitivism.

The trickster is as aggressive as those who imagine the narrative, but the trickster bears no evil or malice in narrative voices. Malice and evil would silence the comic *holotropes*; there would be no concordance in the discourse. Neither the narrator, the characters, nor the audience would share the narrative event.

Arthur Koestler observes in "The Act of Creation" that there are various "moods involved in different forms of humor, including mixed or contradictory feelings; but whatever the mixture, it must contain a basic ingredient which is indispensable: an impulse, however faint, of aggression or apprehension. . . ." He writes, "Replace aggression by sympathy," as liberal humanists and postcolonial interpreters have done with tribal cultures, "and the same situation will no longer be comic but pathetic, and evoke not laughter but pity."

Freedom is a sign, and the trickster is chance and freedom in a comic sign; comic freedom is a "doing," not an essence, not a museum being, not an aesthetic presence. The trickster as a semiotic sign is imagined in narrative voices, a communal rein to the unconscious, which is comic liberation; however, the trickster is outside comic structure, "making it" comic rather than inside comedy, "being it."<sup>5</sup> The trickster is agonistic imagination and aggressive liberation, a "doing" in narrative points of view and outside the imposed structures.

Jean-Paul Sartre reasoned that freedom, or comic liberation in this instance, is involvement, to be *engagé* [engager] in a free choice; "a freedom which would produce its own existence would lose its very meaning. . . ." Freedom determines "itself by its very upsurge as a 'doing'."<sup>6</sup> The trickster is a comic sign with no histories, no political or economic signification, and no being or presence in the narrative. The trickster is nothingness in a narrative voice, an encounter that centers imagination in comic *holotropes*, a communal being; nothingness in consciousness and comic discourse.

"Creativity occurs in an act of encounter," wrote Rollo May in *The Courage to Create*, "and is to be understood with this encounter as its center."<sup>7</sup> The trickster is an encounter in narrative voices, a communal sign and creative encounter in a discourse.

Tribal cultures, social science and the environment have at least three circumstances in common: science is a trope to power and rules memories; science measures humans and the earth in *hypotragic* isolation and monologues; the tribes and the wilderness vanish in tragic narratives. The wild environment and tricksters are comic and communal; science is a monologue with science not the environment, and

the antitheses are silence and chaos. "In literature or in ecology, comedy enlightens and enriches human experience without trying to transform either mankind or the world," wrote Joseph Mecker in *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*. "The comic mode of human behavior represented in literature is the closest art has come to describing man as an adaptive animal."<sup>18</sup> The trickster animates this human adaptation in a comic language game and social science overcomes chaos in a monologue; the environment bears the comedies and tragedies.

### Notes

The first epigraph on the dedication page is from *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko (New York: Viking, 1977), 126; the second is from *The Way to Rainy Mountain* by N. Scott Momaday (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969) 4; and the last epitaph is from "Representation: A Performative Act" by Wolfgang Iser, *The Aims of Representation* ed. Murray Krieger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) 227.

1. Jean-François Lyotard, *Instructions paimnes* quot. David Carroll, "Narrative, Heterogeneity, and the Question of the Political: Bakhtin and Lyotard," *The Aims of Representation*, ed. Murray Krieger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) 85.

2. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) xxiii.

3. Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), 87, 91.

4. Brian McHale, *Postmodern Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987) 3-5.

5. Stephen Tyler, "Post-Modern Anthropology," *Discourse and the Social Life of Meaning*, ed. Phyllis Pease Chock and June Wyman (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986) 37, 40, 45.

6. Vincent Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 59.

7. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986) 8. In *Simulations* Jean Baudrillard argues that the "hyperreal" is the product of a synthesis of "models in a hyperspace without atmosphere . . . never again will the real have to be produced. . . ." The hyperreal is "sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of differences." Indians are simulations in the social

- sciences, conceivable models of tribal cultures. "For ethnology to live, its object must die." The posthumous savages, he writes, have "become referential simulacra, and the science itself a pure simulation." (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983) 3, 4, 13, 15.
8. David Carroll, *The Subject in Question* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) 117.
9. Carroll, "Narrative," 77.
10. Carroll, "Narrative," 75. He wrote, "Hundreds, thousands of little dissident narratives of all sorts are produced in spite of all attempts to repress them, and they circulate inside and eventually, or even initially, outside the boundaries of the totalitarian state. The importance of these little narratives is not only that they challenge the dominant metanarrative and the state apparatus that would prohibit or discredit them, but that they also indicate the possibility of another kind of society, or another form of social relations. . . ."
11. Patricia Hampl, *Spillville* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1987) 82.
12. Hampl 9.
13. Hampl 82.
14. Hampl 90.
15. Burton Benedict, ed., *The Anthropology of World's Fairs* (London: Scolar Press; Berkeley: The Lowie Museum of Anthropology, 1983) 58.
16. Hampl 92.
17. Hampl 94.
18. Hampl 98-99.
19. Oleg Cassini, *In My Own Fashion: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) 359.
20. Wayne King, "Navajos Plan Luxury Resort for Tourists on Reservation," *New York Times*, October 28, 1987.
21. Cassini 360, 61, 62.
22. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* by Tzvetan Todorov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 99-100.
23. Francis Paul Prucha, *The Indians in American Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 7.
24. Prucha 8-9.
25. Arnold Krupat, *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 4.
26. Michael Castro, *Interpreting the Indian: Twentieth-Century Poets and the Native American* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983) xiv.
27. Richard Sewall, *The Vision of Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 1.
28. Aldous Huxley, "Tragedy and the Whole Truth," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, April 1931: 177-82.
29. Walter Kerr, *Tragedy and Comedy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968) 36.

30. Kerr 135.

31. Paul Watzlawick, ed., *The Invented Reality* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984) 63. John Berger provides an unusual distinction between opposition and separation. In *And Our Faces, My Heart Brief As Photos* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1894-89), he wrote, "The opposite of to love is not to hate but to separate. If love and hate have something in common it is because, in both cases, their energy is that of bringing and holding together—the lover with the loved, the one who hates with the hated. Both passions are tested by separation."

32. Wylie Sypher, "The Meaning of Comedy" *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956) 223-24.

33. Sypher, 252-53.

34. Arthur Koestler, "The Act of Creation" *Bricks to Babel* (New York: Random House, 1980) 330.

35. Kerr 15.

36. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1956) 461. "Adventures are stories, and one does not live a story," wrote Iris Murdoch in *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*. Stories are told later, "one can only see it from the outside. The meaning of an adventure comes from its conclusion. . . . But when one is inside an event, one is not thinking of it. One can live or tell; not both at once. When one is living, nothing happens." (New York: Viking, 1987) 39-40. Trickster discourse reveals narrative contradictions in representation, simulation, comic adventures, liberation, and nothingness.

37. Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975) 77.

38. Joseph Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972) 39, 192.

Trickster Discourse:  
Comic Holotropes and Language Games

GERALD VIZENOR

*The anthropos games*

Cultural *anthropologies* are monologues with science; moreover, social science subdues imagination and the wild trickster in comic narratives. These anthropologies are at last causal methodologies and expiries, not studies of anthropos, human beings or even natural phenomena; rather, anthropologies are remains, reductions of humans and imagination to models and comparable cultural patterns—social science is institutional power, a tragic monologue in isolation.

The tribal trickster is a liberator and healer in a narrative, a comic sign, communal signification and a discourse with imagination. These anthropologies and tribal tricksters are not structural binaries; social science is a trope to power, the trickster is a language game in a comic narrative.

*Comic holotropes*

Naanabozho, the woodland tribal trickster, is a *holotrope*, a comic holotrope, and a *sign* in a language game; a communal sign shared between listeners, readers and four points of view in third person narratives.

The trickster is androgenous, a comic healer and liberator in literature; the *whole figuration* that ties the unconscious to social experiences. The trickster sign is communal, an erotic shimmer in oral traditions; the narrative voices are holotropes in a discourse. The author, narrator, characters and audience are the signifiers and comic holotropes in trickster narratives. In this discourse the signified becomes a comic *chance* in oral presentations; however, in translated narratives the signified is rehearsed in hermeneutics and structural lectures, causal theories and comparative models in social science.

Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg construe that in addition to the three points of view, "as a narrative becomes more sophisticated, a fourth point of view is added by the development of a clear distinction between the narrator and author. Narrative irony is a function of disparity among these three or four viewpoints."<sup>1</sup>

The trickster is a semiotic sign; not cultural material or discovered elements that are recomposed to endorse invented models in social science. Paul Watzlawick argues that what is considered to be the real world, what is discovered, "is an invention whose inventor is unaware of his act of invention . . . the invention then becomes the basis of his world view and actions."<sup>2</sup> The most "accepted construction of reality," he writes, "rests on the supposition that the world cannot be chaotic—not because we have any proof for this view, but because chaos would simply be intolerable."<sup>3</sup>

Roy Wagner argues that "anthropology exists through the idea of culture," which is an invention, an intrusion and a tragic monologue with science.

The study of culture is culture. . . . The study of culture is in fact *our* [dominant material] culture; it operates through our forms, creates in our terms, borrows our words and concepts for its meanings, and re-creates us through our efforts. [The dominant culture] is a vast accumulation of material and spiritual achievements and resources stemming from the conquest of nature and necessary to the continuance of this effort.<sup>4</sup>

The trickster summons agonistic imagination in a narrative, a language game, and livens chaos more than bureaucracies, social science models or tragic terminal creeds; the comic holotrope is a consonance of narrative voices in discourse.

Warwick Wadlington argues that the trickster straddles oppositions

and "embodies two antithetical, nonrational experiences of man with the natural world, his society, and his own psyche: on the one hand," he explains that there is "a force of treacherous disorder that outrages and disrupts, and on the other hand, an unanticipated, usually unintentional benevolence in which trickery is at the expense of inimical forces and for the benefit of mankind."<sup>5</sup>

Structuralism, structural linguistics and various semantic theories reveal more about trickster narratives (the texture of the language and the structure of sentences) than do theories in social science, such as behaviorism, functionalism and new materialism that have dominated the academic interpretations of tribal cultures. The emphasis here, however, is semiotics, the reader, the listener or audience, and the consciousness of signs in literature (signs, myths, and metaphors) than on linear and causal theories or on ontological idealism; semiotics that locates *being* in discourse.

Stein Haugom Olsen writes that "the *signifier* and the *signified* are two aspects of the *sign* which can be abstracted for theoretical purposes but which in practice belong together like the recto and verso of a sheet of paper."<sup>6</sup> The trickster is a sign, a communal signification that cannot be separated or understood in isolation; the signifiers are acoustic images bound to four points of view, and the signified, or the concept the signifier locates in language and social experience, is a narrative event or a translation. The listeners and readers become the trickster, a sign, and semiotic being in discourse; the trickster is a comic holotrope in narrative voices, not a model or a tragic figuration in isolation.

Jacques Lacan, however, liberates the signifier; the comic holotrope in trickster narratives. Lacan warns not to "cling to the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever."<sup>7</sup>

The narrative voices or comic holotrope, the signifier in a trickster narrative, is signified in *chance*. The trickster is a semiotic sign, closer in connotation to an iconic sign than to the arbitrary symbolic signification or causal representation in semiotic theories. The trickster sign wanders between narrative voices and comic chance in oral presentations.

Geoffrey Strickland points out that signs are defined "by means of their differences from one another."<sup>8</sup> The trickster is never the same in oral and translated narratives; however, these differences are resolved in comic holotropes and discourse in modern literature. The trickster

has a real voice, a mythic and communal voice in imagination; but in translation the isolated voice or representation of the trickster is neither real nor mythic. Even so, "an image is what we make of it, and what we make of an acoustic image is determined by the concept for which it stands."<sup>9</sup> In another connection Marshall Blonsky argues that "images *do* things, operate for real interests although they are themselves, struck with unreality."<sup>10</sup> The trickster is real in those who imagine the narrative, in the narrative voices.

Tropes are figures of speech; here the trickster is a sign that becomes a comic holotrope, a consonance of sentences in various voices, ironies, variations in cultural myths and social metaphors. Comic holotropes comprise signifiers, the signified, and signs, which in new critical theories provide a discourse on the trickster in oral narratives, translations and modern imaginative literature. This *sui generis* discourse is named "mythic verism" in this discourse, which assumes that the theoretical arbitrariness of signs has been resolved in comic holotropes. Tzvetan Todorov explains that "discourse is not simply an adding together of sentences: it is, itself, one great sentence."<sup>11</sup> That great sentence in trickster narratives is communal, a comic holotrope. While there are similarities to theories in structuralism, the comic holotrope is more than the unexpected harmonies that survive even the worst translations; it is a discourse, not an isolated element in mythic structures or social science models.

Verisimilitude is the appearance of realities; mythic verism is discourse, a critical concordance of narrative voices, and a narrative realism that is more than mimesis or a measure of what is believed to be natural in the world. Stein Haugom Olsen explains that "naturalism and verisimilitude need not be measured against reality. It can simply be measured against what is natural with the world of the work. . . ."<sup>12</sup> The trickster is imagination, an agonistic sign in narrative voices; mythic verism is a concordance, the discourse we choose to hear and believe in literature. Paul Ricoeur writes, "For my part, I hold that to search for concordance is part of the unavoidable assumptions of discourse and communications."<sup>13</sup>

Emile Benveniste argues that the

semiotic sign exists in itself, and establishes the reality of the language, but it has no particular application; the sentence, an expression of the semiotic, can *only* be particular. With the sign, we come to the intrin-

sic reality of the language; with the sentence, one is in contact with what lies outside language. . . .<sup>14</sup>

The trickster is a sign, comic holotropes are narrative voices, and mythic verism is discourse and critical concordance. "We can conclude then that, with the sentence, we leave the domain of language as a system of signs and enter another world, that of language as an instrument of communication, whose expression is discourse."<sup>15</sup>

Roy Wagner, however, argues that a "trope can be elicited but not defined," while "a sign can be defined precisely, and can be assigned discrete functions in an exact science of semiotics."<sup>16</sup> These precise interpretations, these "discrete functions" would trammel comic holotropes and our imagination in trickster narratives. The trickster as a comic holotrope is a sign that "exists in itself . . . with no particular application."

In his studies of Mikhail Bakhtin, Todorov explains that "human utterance" is an interaction and the context "belongs to history." The utterance is similar to a sentence, both are discourses. "The most important feature of the utterance . . . is its *dialogism*" or the "inter-textual dimension," which means that "all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject. . . . There is no utterance without relation to other utterances, and that is essential."<sup>17</sup> The comic holotrope is a "dialogism" in these "translinguistic" theories of discourse. The trickster is a comic discourse, a collection of "utterances" in oral traditions; the opposite of a comic discourse is a monologue, an utterance in isolation, which comes closer to the tragic mode in literature and not a comic tribal world view.

Bakhtin explains in translation that "no utterance in general can be attributed to the speaker exclusively; it is the *product of the interaction of the interlocutors* . . . the whole complex social situation in which it has occurred."<sup>18</sup> The interlocutors in the trickster narratives are the author, narrator, characters and audience. These points of view, these utterances are *dialogism*, or the relation to other utterances. "Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object," which in this instance is the trickster; "if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse," as social science has done in the translations of oral narratives and the comic trickster, "all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life. *To study*

*the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed and by which it is determined.*"<sup>19</sup>

### *The language game*

The trickster is a chance, a comic holotrope in a postmodern language game that uncovers the distinctions and ironies between narrative voices; a semiotic sign for "social antagonism" and "aesthetic activism" in postmodern criticism and the avant-garde, but not "presence" or ideal cultural completion in narratives. Charles Russell argues that postmodern identities are "recast in terms of the essential workings of language, especially of the play of variance and difference, and the shifting grounds of all discourse." The conception of "being" as an ideal "ontological presence," he writes, is a radical change to semiotics which "denies presence and completion. Being, known through and as discourse, is experienced as the field of free play. . . ." One side of "postmodern creation is expressed in the acceptance, even glorification, of play, chance, indeterminacy, and self-conscious performance."<sup>20</sup>

The trickster and comic liberator craves chance in agonistic imagination to lessen the power of social science and bourgeois humanism; in postcolonial translations, where tokens are secured, the trickster is cornered in a lexical ruse, a cold recitation in semantic dioramas. This comic liberator is a healer in language games, chance and postmodern imagination; the trickster, as a semiotic sign, "denies presence and completion," that romantic "vital essence" in tribal representations, and the instrumental language of social science.

Naanabozho, the woodland trickster, is a social antagonist in a comic holotrope but not a ritual sign; not a ceremonial, a spectacle or a seasonal festival. The trickster is not a structural code or an invitation to the arcane. The trickster is a comic sign not a trope to power in social science. The myth of objectivism was established on tribal cultures; anthropologists, archaeologists and others, with state subsidies, have published thousands of articles and monographs. This predacious research became an imperative voice in public institutions; the doctrines and taxonomies on tribal encounters have been rewarded with doctorates and academic tenure, the tropes to power in social science.

Material cultures are possessed and continue to be manipulated in museums; tribal identities are revised with new theories and abstract "discoveries" that never heal and never lead to liberation. Tribute to the tribes has seldom been much more than postcolonial and racial over-compensation with smooth adjectives. On the other hand, there are innumerable sentimental scholars and culture hobbyists enchanted by abstruse emblems and assumed tribal values. The romantic "transvaluation of roles," as the sociologist Robert Bellah points out, "that turns the despised and oppressed into symbols of salvation and rebirth is nothing new in the history of human culture, but when it occurs, it is an indication of new cultural directions, perhaps of a deep cultural revolution."<sup>21</sup> The trickster summons agonistic imagination in a comic holotrope to a discourse on the revolution in semiotic signs.

Michel Foucault argues that there is a "battle for and around history going on at this very moment. . . . The intension is to programme, to stifle what I've called 'popular memory'; and also to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present."<sup>22</sup>

At the same time there are those inspired by the aesthetics and politics of modernism. The trickster in modernist literature was invented to be an individual, or at least the metaphor of individualism; this image supported the notion of the vanishing tribes. Certain individuals survived discoveries, lethal pathogens, studies and relocations (but not their cultures) and were assimilated as exceptional in modern aesthetic and political theories. The stoic "savage" survived in literature and emulsion; invented, painted and photographed by postcolonial adventurers; the modern individual was then interpreted as the structural opposition to bourgeois democracies. The "savages" were separated from their social experiences, reinvented as racial emblems and then isolated, abstracted, revised and used in literature as ideologies to oppose bourgeois materialism.

The trickster, however, is a communal sign, comic discourse, and does not represent aesthetic modernism in narratives or the glorification of isolated individualism. Fredric Jameson asserts that the "great modernisms were . . . predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as your own body. But this means that the modernist aesthetics is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to generate its own unique vision of the world. . . ."<sup>23</sup> This unique indi-

vidualism has been rendered to compare tribal cultures; the trickster was associated with cultural roles and other inventions that permeate social science research.

Charles Russell writes that the

glorification of "man" and the assumed sanctity of individual identity . . . now are attacked as untenable ideological strictures. Individual identity is shown to be a fiction, having no center, no clear boundaries. Instead, we are found to be constructs of discrete elements of social discourse. . . .

Society is perceived as a fictive framework of ideological codes which, like all semiotic systems, are grounded in nothing more than human desire and fear but which appear to have the authority of essential truth. As such, social values and systems of order are subject to critical demystification and deconstruction, through which the embattled individual may perceive his or her conceptual freedom.<sup>24</sup>

In trickster narratives the listeners and readers imagine their liberation; the trickster is a sign and the world is "deconstructed" in a discourse.

### *Science and narrative knowledge*

Roland Barthes compares science and literature. He writes, "For science, language is merely an instrument which it chooses to make as transparent, as neutral as possible. . . ." <sup>25</sup> The trickster is a comic sign not a paratragic instrument; language in science immures the trickster and incises comic holotropes with structural binaries. Barthes asserts that literature is

alone today in bearing the entire responsibility for language; for though science needs language, it is not, like literature, *within* language. . . .

Science speaks itself; literature writes itself; science is led by the voice, literature follows the hand; it is not the same body, and hence the same desire, which is behind the one and the other.

The trickster is "within language" and not a neutral instrument that reveals codes and structural harmonies in tribal cultures. The trickster is a sign and a patent language game in a narrative discourse; science is language closure, a monologue in theoretical contention.

Jean-François Lyotard is more precise on the language games in sci-

ence and the postmodern condition in the new human sciences. He writes:

Scientific knowledge requires that one language game, denotation, be retained and all others excluded. A statement's truth-value is the criterion determining its acceptability. . . . Scientific knowledge is in this way set apart from the language games that combine to form the social bond. Unlike narrative knowledge, it is no longer a direct and shared component of the bond. But it is indirectly a component of it, because it develops into a profession and gives rise to institutions, and in modern societies language games consolidate themselves in the form of institutions run by qualified partners.<sup>26</sup>

The trickster is a comic narrative in the same language game that accommodates science as a variation in discourse, but "the opposite is not true," as Lyotard points out, because the

scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best, attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilize, educate, develop. . . . We all know the symptoms. It is the entire history of cultural imperialism from the dawn of Western civilization.<sup>27</sup>

Lyotard concludes that it is important to recognize this special form of imperialism, the "demand for legitimation." However, he points out that the "problem of legitimation is no longer considered a failing of the language game of science."

Paul Feyerabend argues that when anthropologists "collected and systematized" tribal cultures, the scientific emphasis was on the "psychological meaning, the social functions, the existential temper of a culture," while the "ontological implications" were disregarded.<sup>28</sup> Feyerabend contends that, to the anthropologists who transformed tribal cultures, the "oracles, rain dances, the treatment of mind and body," and the trickster narratives in this instance

*express* the needs of the members of a society, they *function* as a social glue, they *reveal* basic structures of thought, they may even lead to an

increased awareness of the relations between man and man and man and nature but without an accompanying knowledge of distant events, rain, mind, body. Such interpretations were hardly ever the result of critical thought—most of the time they were simply a consequence of popular antimetaphysical tendencies combined with a firm belief in the excellence . . . of science.

Louis Sass suggests that “the facts of social science are not facts at all but interpretations of interpretations.”<sup>29</sup>

The power in social science research is intractable because it is located in institutions; that power is heard and endured but tribal resistance is reduced to new measures in academic language games. Translations of narratives and the comparative studies of tribal myths are not the least revisions of power and knowledge in social science. Alan Sheridan, in *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, construes that

power and knowledge are two sides of the same process. Knowledge cannot be neutral, pure. All knowledge is political not because it may have political consequences or be politically useful, but because knowledge has its conditions of possibility in power relations.<sup>30</sup>

The trickster is a comic liberator in a narrative and the sign with the most resistance to social science monologues: if not in narrative discourse the trickster is “released” as an “object” in translation. Victor Barnouw, for example, asserts that the trickster is a real person, but his assertion reveals power relations over the culture he has studied and invented in social science; his interpretations subdue the comic discourse and holotropes in trickster narratives.

The trickster is disembodied in a narrative; the language game transmutes birds and animals with no corporeal or material representations. The trickster is a communal sign, a comic holotrope and a discourse; not a real person or a tragic metaphor in an isolated monologue.

The trickster narrative situates the participant audience, the listeners and readers, in agonistic imagination: there, in comic discourse, the trickster is being, nothingness and liberation; a loose seam in consciousness; that wild space over and between sounds, words, sentences and narratives; and, at last, the trickster is comic shit.

*Naanabozho and coprophilia*

Victor Barnouw collected trickster narratives and published them in *Wisconsin Chippewa Myths & Tales*. He writes that from "these stories we can learn something about the belief systems of the people who told and listened to them." Barnouw asserts that the trickster "was a real person whom they respected although they also laughed at his antics."

The short narratives that follow were selected from several translated parts of the origin myth to review the theoretical interpretations and to continue the argument that the trickster is a fictional character, a semiotic sign, a comic holotrope and a discourse in a tribal language game.

The story that I'm going to tell you won't be about this earth. It will be about a different world. There were only two people living in this other world: an old lady and her daughter. . . .

The old lady's daughter used to go every day into the woods to find something that she could use for food. This was in the summer. She got those early berries in the spring. That was their food. She went into the woods to pick the berries all day long, picking here and there.

Then one day somebody saw her traveling all alone by herself in the woods. That person seemed to take a liking to her. He even wanted to marry her. He knew what to do. When she was out berrying one nice hot day, when there was no wind, at noon-time, she heard a noise like a gust of wind. She looked around in the direction of the noise and saw a wind coming. When the wind reached her, she couldn't pull her dress down for some time, until the gust of wind went by. She didn't think anything of it, because no one was there to see her. She started picking berries again. . . .

It wasn't long afterwards that the girl found out that something else was going to happen. She left that place where she and her mother had been living and went into the woods. There she gave birth to some children—three of them. The first looked just like a human baby boy. After it was born, she held him in her arms. Then she heard a voice from somewhere telling her to put her baby on the ground. She didn't do it. After the person whose voice she heard got tired of waiting for her to put her baby down, he spoke to her again, "You don't want to do what I told you to do—put your baby on the ground. If you had done that, your baby would have got up and walked. But since you don't want to do that, it will be a year from the time that he is born that he will be able to walk." That's the way that people of this earth would have done from the

time that they were born. They would have walked right away, just like animals. The Indian could have done that too.

Then the next baby was born. This one didn't have human features exactly, but he looked like a human baby to some extent. Just a little while later another one was born. This one didn't look like a human child. This one was a stone. . . . Sometimes when I go into the woods I see this stone. It's a very hard stone. I'm just telling you what I heard. It doesn't say that this woman took her babies home. . . ."

The trickster ran:

He heard a big noise coming behind him. He knew just what it was that was coming. It was the water that was coming. He looked around for a big high hill. He found one. He ran to the top of a hill where a big pine tree was standing. That's where Wenebojo [Naanobozho] stopped. In a short time the water got up to the top of the hill. When he saw the water coming that high, he climbed right up to the top of the tall pine tree. He said to the tree, "Brother, stretch yourself to twice the length you are now." The tree did that. Then he climbed some more. This tree stretched four times. That's how long it was. Then the tree told Wenebojo that he couldn't do any more for him. That was as high as he could go. But then the water stopped. Wenebojo was standing on the top of the tree. He had his head back, and the water was up to his mouth. Pretty soon Wenebojo felt that he wanted to defecate. He couldn't hold it. The shit floated up to the top of the water and floated around his mouth.

After a while Wenebojo noticed that there was an animal in the water. This animal was playing around. Wenebojo couldn't see the animal, but he knew that it was there. He tried to look around. Then he saw several animals—beaver, muskrat, and otter. Wenebojo spoke to the otter first, "Brother," he said, "could you go down and get some earth? If you do that, I will make an earth for you and me to live on. . . ."

Tom Badger told these stories through an interpreter, his wife, to Victor Barnouw forty-two years ago at Lac du Flambeau in Wisconsin. Barnouw delivered his interpretations in isolation, as an anthropologist; he rendered a tribal language game into power theories, linear social structures, and carried on an autistic monologue with science. There is no discourse with the narrative artist.

Barnouw is outrageous in his evaluations of the narrator, a nonparcél monologue with science:

Tom Badger was a reserved, intelligent, mild-mannered man in his seventies. . . . I gave him a Rorschach Test and collected two Draw-a-

Person drawings. . . . there was evidence of emotional dependency and also some confusion about sex. . . . The two interpretations suggest the existence of repression, which is also suggested by the origin myth, with its avoidance of women and sex and its recurrent oral and anal themes.<sup>32</sup>

There is a distinction between the author, a collective and agonistic imagination, and the narrative artist who quotes the trickster, the wind, a tree, and comments on the mythic verisim of the narrative: "I'm just telling you what I heard," the narrator told the translator and anthropologist. Here the narrator intrudes in discourse, a first person divergence in a third person narrative, an ironic intrusion. What is being told in the past tense is known to the sophisticated narrator.

Ann Jefferson writes that the "preterite" is the

tense which guarantees causality, the linking of the chain of events leading to a solution, and the promise of the revelation of truth. . . . The third person and the preterite have in common the ability (albeit a questionable one) to speak of the world without calling into question the nature of that speech.<sup>33</sup>

Social science theories abase the comic holotropes in trickster narratives. The narrator and trickster are separated in translation; the points of view in narrative discourse and that "clear distinction between narrator and author," are denied. The trickster is measured in causal roles and the narrative is compared to other translations. Barnouw for example declares, "Since myths may be, in part, cautionary tales, the appearance of certain motifs may indicate tabooed behavior." His suppositions burden the trickster sign, and comic discourse in a language game and demand legitimation.

Karl Kroeber, editor of *Traditional Literatures of the American Indian*, writes that "anthropologists and folklorists whose disciplines are not directed toward appreciation of superior artistry, usually play down, or ignore, the individual distinction of creative accomplishment in ethnographic material."<sup>34</sup>

Dennis Tedlock, an enlightened translator and interpreter of tribal narratives, points out that "storytellers can talk *about* stories, but their observations and speculations come from accumulated experience at hearing and telling stories, not from the recollection of a lesson plan."<sup>35</sup> Tedlock explains that the

teller is not merely repeating memorized words, nor is he or she merely giving a dramatic "oral interpretation" or "concert reading" of a fixed

script. We are in the presence of a *performing art*, all right, but we are getting the *criticism* at the same time and from the same person. The interpreter does not merely play the parts, but is the narrator and commentator as well.<sup>36</sup>

Barnouw, in the introduction to the narratives, writes that the "best way to highlight the distinctive features in the folklore of a society is to compare it with the folklore of another society which has contrasting features in social structure or family type." This method is an artistic monologue with social science. Naanabozho, he wrote, "was a real person whom they respected." Later however he noted that the trickster "seems to be neither a human being nor a god, but something of both."<sup>37</sup> Barnouw listened and recorded what he heard, but there is no evidence that the anthropologist responded or participated in a narrative discourse on the trickster. His monologue on the narratives, at best, is a "lesson plan."

The Anishinaabe [Chippewa] "origin myth seems to make the point that it is difficult to live with others; then one becomes tied down to people who are slower than oneself. . . . There is an implicit regret that children take so long to mature and reach independence, whereas animals can walk shortly after birth." Barnouw contends that the trickster "seems to be happiest when he is completely alone."<sup>38</sup> Here, interpretation is linear, a causal distortion and outside the narrative concordance. The trickster is a comic holotope in a language game and a discourse that narrative artists mind and social scientists manipulate and pretend to understand. The trickster is a tribal sign, communal in various narrative voices, mythic verism is a narrative and artistic event but there is no concordance in the instrumental language of science. The tribal sign is inherited and liberated in literature but not in social science models that deduce "real" and "functional" worlds.

"And yet a real world exists," writes Geoffrey Strickland. "The study of language is not a denial of reality but one of the means to a more realistic view of the world."<sup>39</sup> The studies of language are the studies of the trickster in spoken and written narratives.

Walter Ong, in *Orality and Literacy*, argues that "oral speech" is "natural to human beings" and rises "out of the unconscious" as does the comic sign in trickster narratives. "The process of putting spoken language into writing is governed by consciously contrived, articulable rules. . . . Thought is nested in speech, not in texts," is a notion that

would invite deconstruction criticism. "The spoken word is always an event, a movement in time, completely lacking in the thing-like purpose of the written or printed word. . . ." He concludes that "writing and print isolate."<sup>40</sup> The trickster is a communal sign, a comic holo-trope in a narrative discourse, oral or written in translation. Social science as an instrumental language game becomes "articulable rules" in translation and interpretations; the isolation of "writing and print" is intentional in the monologue with science.

Jacques Derrida is critical of structural linguistics and the "logocentric tradition" that confers privileged status to the spoken word and phonological theories. The origin of language is writing, not the spoken word. Derrida announces that "there is no linguistic sign before writing."<sup>41</sup> Naanabozho is a sign in translated narratives, and at the same time the trickster is a comic deconstructionist in social science. The trickster was created with bears and crows, imagined in narrative voices, and has survived taxonomies with the crow, translations, structural models, transvaluations with the bear, in a language game that is spoken and written; comic discourse shimmers with the crows and bears over dead metaphors and isolated monologues, the tragic monologue with science.

Roland Barthes, however, observes that

writing is in no way an instrument for communication, it is not an open route through which there passes only the intention to speak. . . . writing is a hardened language which is self-contained and is in no way meant to deliver to its own duration a mobile series of approximations. It is on the contrary meant to impose, thanks to the shadow cast by its system of signs, the image of a speech which had a structure even before it came into existence.<sup>42</sup>

Barnouw points out that there "seems to be more emphasis on the anal zone in the folklore" of the Anishinaabe than in other tribal cultures.

Freudians find an explanation for the "anal character" in severe early toilet training, but one would not expect to find strict toilet training in a "nomadic" tribal culture.

On the other hand, perhaps we should not see the presence of anal motifs as something surprising or pathological. After all, an interest in feces is natural and understandable. . . .

Barnouw reminds the reader that in "modern flush toilets, feces are quickly spirited away and disappear, but a hunter who defecates on the

earth is literally closer to his feces, and they have more permanence for him."<sup>43</sup> Barnouw imposes structural binaries in his interpretations; the hunter and the modern flush toilet are dubious undertows. Savagism and civilization, a common structural theme, has inspired more lucid racialism.

Barthes blurs the structural models, a "liberation from 'the binary prison.' To anyone who does not get into the binary categories of ordinary social reference," and the trickster does not, "the Neutral is the only nonimprisoning hope." Barthes stands "for many-sided meanings, for the oscillation of value, for metamorphosis,"<sup>44</sup> and he must stand for the comic trickster, the deconstruction reader. The death of the author is the birth of the reader, and the death of social science is the birth of the trickster in modern literature.

Through the Text the reader becomes a writer, producing meaning; the reader produces writing of his own only as a response to a previous experience of a Text. Critics are perhaps to be defined, Barthes suggests, in the same way as other writers—as "those who read *in order to write*."<sup>45</sup>

The trickster author becomes the narrator, and narrative voices, the comic holotrope in a discourse; the trickster author never died but a mock death in a monologue with science.

Elizabeth Bruss, in "Theory of Literature Becomes Theory as Literature," notes that the

*author* turns out to be a misnomer: not a divine creator, not even a divine creation, but a secular invention and an economic convenience. . . . By replacing the relationship between text and source with an infinite intertextual circuit, literary theory has, in effect, enormously expanded the powers and responsibilities of the reader.<sup>46</sup>

Alan Dundas on an analogous theme advanced coprophilia to record levels; he declared:

Despite the lack of a great number of actual excremental myths, the existence of any at all would appear to lend support to the hypothesis that men do think of creativity in anal terms, and further that this conception is projected into mythical cosmogonic terms.

Dundas rests his hypothesis on two assumptions: "The existence of a cloacal theory of birth, and the existence of pregnancy envy on the part

of males."<sup>4</sup> Dundas does, however, explain in part the "failure of anthropology" to make "notable advances in myth studies." There is a "rigid adherence to two fundamental principles," he writes:

A literal reading of myth and a study of myth in monocultural context. The insistence of most anthropologists upon the literal as opposed to the symbolic interpretation, in terms of cultural relativism as opposed to transcultural universalism, is in part a continuation of the reaction against nineteenth-century thought, in which universal symbolism in myth was often argued, and in part a direct result of the influence of two dominant figures in the history of anthropology, Boas and Malinowski. Both these pioneers favored studying one culture at a time in depth, and both contended that myth was essentially nonsymbolic.<sup>48</sup>

Here again anthropologists secure an uncertain monologue with science and other anthropologists, but not a discourse with the tribal cultures that were reduced to theories in their studies.

Naanabozho is shit in a comic holotope and so is Martin Luther; this is a real connection between trickster narratives, dubious theologies and hagiographies, which provides a more interesting discussion on shit than the rather prudish monologues by anthropologists. "It's as I've often said," Luther told his wife, "I'm like a ripe *freck* [shit] and the world's like a gigantic *arschloch* [asshole]." But if Luther thought he didn't belong in the world's asshole," Martin Pops writes in "The Metamorphosis of Shit,"<sup>49</sup> "he [Luther] thought the Devil belonged in his. For the Devil is not just the materialized lord of the world and the flesh, but, as Norman O. Brown has argued, the hallucinated displacement of Luther's own anality. Like a quixotic knight of faith, Luther met him in theological combat, daily and strenuous. Doctrine failing to convince, Luther repulsed him with a fart, a turd, or the sight of his naked backside." The trickster does no less in literature to heal and balance the world; Barnouw, Dundas and other theorists burdened with coprophilia would have done much better to construe shit as a universal comic sign than to bind the literal malodor in social science monologues.

Naanabozho could not escape his own shit; the earth was not *his* shit because he invited several animals to dive down and return with some earth. "If you do that," said the trickster with shit as high as his mouth, "I will make an earth for you and me to live on." In several other narratives, however, the trickster created humans from shit. William Jones collected a narrative about a beautiful tribal woman

who spurned the men in her tribe. Several wanton suitors constructed a handsome man with shit, dressed him in fine clothes and directed him to the woman. She was smitten with love at the sight of him, an outsider; she followed him to the end of the trail where he melted down to a heap of shit.<sup>50</sup> Modern variations on this narrative turn anthropologists into cloacal tropes to power, shit mounds at the end of the trail in social science.

Norman Mailer seems to understand the trickster and shit as a comic sign in literature. In "The Metaphysics of the Belly" he recommends a bowel inspection "because feces are the material evidence of the processes of communication within us." Comic shit is a smooth sign and shit floats in trickster narratives, but when the "communication within us" is blocked, when the comic holotope is ruined with literal shit, "the odors and shapes are tortured, corrupt, rich, fascinating . . . even tragic."<sup>51</sup>

### *The trickster as healer*

In *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* Paul Radin reviews the trickster as the "presence of a figure" and as a "theme or themes" which are told in various cultures. Radin seems to present the trickster as an "aesthetic presence" in narratives; this is modernism, and in a sense a celebration of individualism. On the other hand, Barnouw declared that the trickster was a "real person" and "neither human being nor a god, but something of both." The trickster is not a presence or a real person but a semiotic sign in a language game, in a comic narrative that denies presence. The sign is communal and the narrative is a discourse; individualism is isolation, a tragic mode, in the instrumental language of social science.

The trickster is

at the same time creator and destroyer," [Radin declares] giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites [and yet,] through his actions all values come into being. . . .

Laughter, humour and irony permeate everything Trickster does. The reaction of the audience in aboriginal societies to both him and his

exploits is prevailingly one of laughter tempered by awe. . . . Yet it is difficult to say whether the audience is laughing at him, at the tricks he plays on others, or at the implications his behaviour and activities have for them.<sup>52</sup>

In his essay on the psychology of the trickster Carl Gustav Jung construes:

Since all mythical figures correspond to inner psychic experiences and originally sprang from them, it is not surprising to find certain phenomena in the field of parapsychology which remind us of the trickster. . . .

In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels, in sacred and magical rites, in man's religious fears and exaltations, this phantom of the trickster haunts the mythology of all ages, sometimes in quite unmistakable form, sometimes in strangely modulated guise.<sup>53</sup>

Jung names the trickster an "archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity." Enriched with psychic structures and narrative stemmata, the tribal trickster shimmers and crosses the limina into universal consciousness. The comic sign is not denied in instrumental languages.

Jung, however, asserts that the trickster as a "collective figure gradually breaks up under the impact of civilization, leaving traces in folklore which are difficult to recognize."<sup>54</sup> He must assume an inert trickster, an erroneous assertion because the narrator imagines the trickster and the characters are active in a narrative discourse. The trickster is a sign, a healer and comic liberator in narratives, not an artifact or a real victim in historical summaries; rather than a trace element, suppose the tribal trickster is atavistic, a revenant holotrope in new and recurrent narratives. Moreover, the trickster is a communal sign in imagination, a comic holotrope and a discourse that endures in modern literature.

Jung observes that the

trickster is a primitive "cosmic" being of *divine-animal* nature, on the one hand superior to man because of his superhuman qualities, and on the other hand inferior to him because of his unreason and unconsciousness. He is no match for the animals either, because of his extraordinary clumsiness and lack of instinct. These defects are the marks of his *human* nature. . . .<sup>55</sup>

The trickster is a collective shadow figure, an epitome of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out of it continually. . . . In the history of the collective

as in the history of the individual, everything depends on the development of consciousness. This gradually brings liberation from imprisonment in . . . consciousness, and is therefore a bringer of light as well as healing.<sup>56</sup>

### *Trickster Metaphors and Models*

In the context of literary theory models extend into uncertain situations constructed over measured words, signs and sentences; the models lean uneven with too much intension. Elizabeth Bruss points out that models and metaphors initiate "a process of trial and error, which leads to a reorientation of our own approach and a reorganization in how we see a given subject matter."<sup>57</sup> Trickster narratives are tested models in social science; instrumental interpretations are used to compare cultures. The trickster is dead in models and mock tragedies in the same manner that a comic sign or metaphor is dead when overused, overrun and insulated in a monologue with science.

In his anthropological studies on humor and laughter, which include a chapter on the trickster, Mahadev Apte establishes his model with two axioms. Humor, he writes, "is by and large culture based," and with unabashed arrogance he asserts that "humor can be a major conceptual and methodological tool for gaining insights into cultural systems."<sup>58</sup> The trickster is a semiotic sign in written narratives, a comic sign that "wanders" in universal signification. Humor, however, or at least the humor that heals, is closer to the oral tradition and bound to a specific culture. The second axiom is an isolated monologue with science, the paratragic model that compares narratives as material.

Apte argues that his research on the trickster is definitional and concerned with how to separate the trickster from "other related concepts." He describes and compares invented cultures and models but asserts that he does not choose one definition of the trickster over another. Here are three model definitions:

E. W. Voegelin describes the tricksters in "prose narratives as animal-human beings who are typically 'greedy, erotic, imitative, stupid, pretentious, deceitful' and whose thievery and deceitfulness benefit people. . . ."

M. L. Ricketts agrees and "adds that the trickster is a restless wan-

derer and does not distinguish between friend and foe in carrying out his pranks."

R. Abrahams believes that "the trickster is the most paradoxical of all characters in traditional narratives and his outstanding characteristic is his lack of morals. . . . The concepts of jesters, fools, clowns, and morons all basically derive from the broad, general notion of trickster."<sup>59</sup>

Apte and others who have compared definitions of tribal tricksters seem to assume a literal "presence" of the trickster and measure imagination and narrative behavior in human terms—causal and with literal motivations. In his summaries Apte names traits—the trickster is cruel, stupid, does not resist temptation, lacks control, mocks and ridicules and "his inability to recognize things as they are or to identify his surroundings frequently leads him into trouble, as do other actions." Apte imposes structuralist theories when he writes that the "overall personality that emerges from the trickster tales incorporates opposites of all kinds."<sup>60</sup> "Once more, the trickster is not a structural opposite or an element in a tragic model; the trickster is a comic sign, neither a real person nor a character with "aesthetic presence."

Apte seems to ascertain that "rarely are individuals with such opposing traits to be found in human societies." However, he returns to the notion of a real person. He writes that tricksters

appear to be disorderly, chaotic personalities. They also manifest extremely inappropriate and socially deviant behavior and actions. Their acts are aberrant by any cultural standards, making the tricksters misfits in human societies because of their refusal to abide by the established sociocultural norms. . . . The incongruities associated with tricksters, in other words, are biological, psychological, and sociocultural.<sup>61</sup>

Apte holds his descriptions close to social science models, too close to imagine tricksters as comic signs in narratives; he asserts that in "American Indian prose narratives, little attention has been given in the past to context, function, and performance of verbal art, while texts are overemphasized in folklore research."<sup>62</sup>

In his article on the forms of prose narratives William Bascom points out that classifications are not "particularly interesting," at the same time he contributes his own interpretations of tribal narratives, his own monologue with social science because folklore "needs clarification" and because the field "has so long been plagued by inconsis-

tent and contradictory definitions." To that end he contributes definitions of three forms of prose narratives:

Folktales are prose narratives which are regarded as fiction. . . .  
 Myths are prose narratives which, in the society which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. . . .

Legends are prose narratives which, like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today.<sup>61</sup>

Bascom concedes that myth, legend and folktale are not the "only major categories of prose narratives" and are not proposed as "universally recognized categories." He asserts that these are "analytical concepts" which can be applied "cross-culturally even when other systems of 'native categories' are locally recognized."<sup>64</sup> His categories are tropes to power; monologues with social science. Moreover, he declares that the Anishinaabe are the "only society reported to lack fictional prose narratives," and "apparently have no folktales."<sup>65</sup> Bascom bases his assertion on the published observations of other anthropologists; he did not hear the aural stories of tribal people.

In his studies of bourgeois perceptions, Donald Lowe points out that written languages "preserved knowledge after the act of speech and beyond the lapse of memory." He argues that in oral cultures "hearing surpasses seeing as the most important" of the senses; the assimilation of knowledge in an aural performance without the "mediation of the eye." Once in print, however, there is an emphasis on content; what is known from what is heard in an oral culture is "detached from the knower."<sup>66</sup> Even those anthropologists who *hear* stories rather than *read* cultures must overturn the aural performance in their translations and publications—the separation of the knower from a tribal discourse.

Naanabozho is overheard as a comic holotrope; heard but not seen in an aural performance the trickster fashions an anthropologist with shit to show that the tribe has "fictional prose narratives" and the comic mind to transform the obvious.

### Notes

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3. Watzlawick 63.
4. Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture* (The University of Chicago Press, 1981) 16.
5. Warwick Wadlington, *The Confidence Game in American Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1975) 15.
6. Stein Haugom Olsen, *The Structure of Literary Understanding* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) 17, 18.
7. Vincent Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 11. Jacques Lacan in "Sign, Symbol, Imagery," defines the sign as an obstacle "to the grasp of the signifier. . . . The sign presupposes the someone to whom one makes a sign or something. The shadow of this someone obscured the entry into linguistics. . . . The sign makes language the basis of abstracts and the means of discussion." In *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 201-09.
8. Geoffrey Strickland, *Structuralism or Criticism?* (Cambridge University Press, 1981) 13.
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10. Marshall Blonsky, *On Signs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) XLVI.
11. Tzvetan Todorov, "Language and Literature" *The Structural Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970) 130. Quot. Stein Haugom Olsen, *The Structure of Literary Understanding* 17.
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28. Paul Feyerabend, *Science in a Free Society* (London: Verso Editions, 1978) 77.
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30. Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980) 220.
31. Victor Barnouw, *Wisconsin Chippewa Myths & Tales* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977) 13-15, 38. The spelling of *Naanabozho* and other *Anishinaabe* words conforms to entries in *Ojibwe-Ikidowinan: An Ojibwe Word Resource Book*, ed. John Nichols and Earl Nyholm (Saint Paul: Minnesota Archaeological Society, 1979). *Manabozho*, *Nanabush* and *Winnebuzho*, are other transcriptions for the name of the woodland tribal trickster.
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