

**A TRICKSTER PARADIGM IN FIRST NATIONS VISUAL ART: A
CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

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Dedication

To my all my relations, especially my Grandmothers, Nora L. Ritchie and the late F. Marie Boyle, Grandfathers the late James D. Waucaush and Robert F. Boyle, to my parents Carol A. Boyle and Richard A. Boyle and also to my husband William J. Warn and to my daughter Lillian M. Warn.

Abstract

In the past few decades, Indian art has been available to the mainstream under the supervision of Western science and art history. For the sake of cultural survival and identity, countless Native artists, curators, critics, and writers have objected to these often wrongful and discriminating art histories and scientific classifications. Indian artists are re-writing their history from Native perspective, and as a result, the misrepresentation of Indian art has begun to be recognized by those working in contemporary art galleries and museums. Today many contemporary spaces support and give control of exhibitions to those who share in the Native perspective. However, these changes did not take place overnight; this was an exhausting battle for many contemporary First Nations artists and curators. Native reality is best understood through the trickster, who has always been known to First Nations people through oral traditions, and who is best described as a creator that is constantly transforming and shape-shifting. In using trickster strategies, Native artists are able to deconstruct and reconstruct ideas about Native people and their culture. According to many Native artists, this new discourse, called the “trickster shift,” has been around since the beginning, seeded in oral traditions, and it requires the Native perspective to decode these trickster undertakings properly.

Epigraph

Coyote

I

Some say the Coyote first appeared on a raft
That Coyote created the world
That Coyote is very old the first one
That Coyote put the stars in the universe
That Coyote fucked up the planets
That Coyote is the giver and taker of life
That Coyote stole fire for the people
That Coyote can change the seasons

II

Some say that Coyote dances in a feathered cape trimmed with
flickers quills
That Coyote plays a flute and is the best dancer around
That Coyote has more clamshell and magnetite beads than you
can imagine
That Coyote can make redbud burst into bloom by staring at it
That Coyote wanted to be falling leaf and tried it
That Coyote was looking for a figs and followed a male
That Coyote is a poet
That Coyote is a fool

III

Some say that Coyote is on the streets and in the alleys
That Coyote lives in L.A. and San Francisco and eats out of
garbage cans
That Coyote talks to his asshole and usually takes its advice
That Coyote howls at the moon because it never stays the same
That Coyote doesn't like change
That Coyote is change

IV

Some say Coyote wears a black leather jacket and hightop
tennis shoes
That Coyote thinks Rose is a good singer
That Coyote eats frybread peanut butter and jelly
That Coyote will use you if you don't watch out
That Coyote will teach you if you let him
That Coyote is very young the new one

That Coyote is a survivor

Some say Coyote is a myth
Some say Coyote is real

I say Coyote is
I say Coyote
I say Coyote

By Harry Fonseca in the book *Indi'n Humor* by Kenneth Lincoln, 1993

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Introduction

Researcher or Trickster?

Researcher

*A person skilled in the use of questioning
Observing
Analyzing
To create a story, unspoken.*

*Searching for answers
Empowering the people
Giving voice...
Reporting reality?*

Trickster

*A person skilled in the use of tricks
And illusion.
To create a false reality, trick.*

*Creating and destroying myth.
Transforming reality
Hero-Savior...
Telling the truth? ¹*

This research is the result of my recognition of the trickster paradigm within my independent visual art studio practice. The trickster and his elements were revealed to me through a series of paintings, which enabled me to view my work from an enlightened traditional/collective experience, one that I was not privileged to experience in my formative years, due to forced assimilation of First Nations people. On some level, my art has always been about identity and for me this topic can become serious, quickly because I am frequently defending Native lifestyles and cultures to many non-Native people. Because of my position, I began to make large bold visual statements in my artwork about the inarguable mistreatment that my people have received. This was done out of

¹ By Barbara Dray "Trickster or Researcher?" *Qualitative Studies in Education* 5-16 Sept.-Oct. 2003: 725.

much hurt and anger from the racism I received and abuse I have seen my people endure. Because of this, my work became cutting or toxic in the political messages I was making. However, I was producing these messages in hopes of re-educating my audience about First Nations culture as I saw it. However successful my technique, it was not therapeutic for my mindset, and out of necessity, I employed Native humour, which I was familiar with as a healing technique from my interaction with other First Nations people. Native humour is considered by Native people to be healing; it is the humour that helps many First Nations people confronts the realities of the cultural genocide that have affected our communities in so many ways. However, our humour may be considered insensitive or harsh to an outsider because of the honest and direct approach of our humour, which may not be familiar with Western humour. Our humour, however straightforward, I know now to be the result of the oral traditions including the trickster, assists people to gain balance and helps First Nations people cope with pain that sometimes seems unbearable at the best of times. As a First Nations Anishnabec woman, I have made it my responsibility to return to these traditional teachings, including those of the trickster, who has guided "my people" throughout our history.

When I began to notice how unconsciously the trickster had been advising my work, I became aware of his presence upon my life and work. I began looking for the trickster presence in the work of acclaimed, and influential, contemporary Native artists, leading me to examine the trickster discourse as reflected in various disciplines concerning creation and creativity. The trickster altered the perspective of my own individual creative process, and opened me up to shift my own thoughts to using the collective experience that oral traditions express.

As this research illustrates, the traditional oral trickster figure is still evident in the contemporary visual arts created by First Nations artists, through the trickster's function as a transformer. In order to understand his function, the trickster must first be defined, and then his source can be determined. However, this is problematic when the Native perspective is employed. For many First Nations people, animate beings such as the trickster are not defined by their physical make-up, but rather by their spiritual being. This is the case for the Native American trickster, thus making the trickster definition "tricky" in itself and the trickster non-definable, understanding the First Nations trickster character is not a simple task. Western scholars have attempted to define the trickster, engaging in numerous debates surrounding his role. Nevertheless, it is critical to comprehend the trickster from the Native perspective in order to locate the trickster as a shifter of boundaries and an embodiment of Native science. Often oral traditions belonging to First Nations people apply the trickster as a model of how to live and survive. At the same time, these oral traditions often depict the trickster as making humorous errors that entertain and educate; this duality is central to the trickster character and his function. More recently, many contemporary writings on the trickster have compared elements of the traditional trickster to theories of postmodernism, this comparisons concerns Native artists for the sake of cultural politics and preservation of a traditional believe system.

Methodologies

To analyze the trickster in contemporary Native art from a Native perspective, I will study the experience of First Nations artists and explore their statements. I have also inserted trickster stories, and analyzed them to support Native tricksters found in Native

visual art. For the sake of space, I have chosen to discuss only contemporary visual art created by artists of First Nations ancestry, excluding Inuit people.

Chapters Two through Four are deliberately modeled after Dr. Susan Lundquist's educational triangular model that illustrates the equal relationship of each pivotal point. Lundquist uses the triangle model to describe the equal relationship of the teacher, the subject matter, and the student. I substitute her model to illustrate the equal relationship between the art, the artists, and the viewer. Lundquist describes the trickster figure as a two-dimensional, abstract, transformative archetype, whereas I explore the trickster as an educator within the Native perspective of holistic thinking. However, before this triangular relationship can be demonstrated properly, the trickster character must be understood. Chapters One and Five overview the trickster character in various disciplines to illustrate multiple interpretations from other disciplines that have often confused his role. Chapter Five continues to contrast the Native interpretation of trickster discourse with postmodern theory, which many contemporary Native artists are concerned with keeping First Nations art critiqued within its own perspective. Many Native artists who wish to use the Native perspective to analyze its own art, are also the current leaders in the mainstream art scene, such as Ojibwa artist Rebecca Bellmore who represented Canada at this past year's Venice Biennale, the world's oldest and most prestigious art venue for contemporary art.

This thesis employs a First Nations' interpretation of the trickster figure to demonstrate the existence of the "trickster shift" within contemporary Native visual art, and demonstrates the artistic languages that are being created because of the "shift". The final section is a synthesis, also based on a Native perspective that postulates like the trickster a continuous flux and non-conclusiveness, whose teachings are nonlinear and

support ongoing cyclical thinking. This holistic methodology is applied throughout, and by doing so, honours the trickster character. To support this holistic movement of the trickster, aboriginal myth, storytelling, interviews of personal experience, artist statements, and research analysis of the trickster are provided. Through the oral stories, artist statements, and visual examples, I make available an authentic experience of the trickster figure as known in Native philosophy. This perspective conflicts with the anthropological perspective, which may be too descriptive and absolute for the traditional trickster paradigm to operate.

Problems

In my research on the trickster, I encountered certain problems of methodology. This is the very nature of the trickster, evident by his character of deceit and trickery. Western academics, like Paul Radin and Carl Jung, have attempted to solve the riddle of the trickster's roles, classifying the trickster as an archetype. The general debate surrounding the trickster seems to be around whether or not we can obtain universal knowledge from of the trickster. The trickster figure exists in various cultures around the world; for the purpose of this thesis, I will focus namely on the trickster that appears in North American Indian culture and not the universal trickster. However, my applied Native perspective conflicts with the more acclaimed Western academic perspectives on the trickster that is usually hierarchical and linear, whereas the Native perspective is more general and non-specific. These conflicting definitions on the trickster have led me to explore the many efforts to recover and maintain the traditional Native American portrayal of the trickster figure as evidenced in First Nations contemporary visual art.

Traditional oral teachings of the trickster might seem to render this thesis counterproductive to the “trickster way” of thinking, due to the limitations imposed by the linear structure of academic language and thinking. However, according to Native artist Harry Fonseca, the trickster in the visual arts transcends these boundaries and therefore reaches a truer sense of “tricksterism,” much like traditional oral stories. Native artists have always made use of unique combinations of oral stories (that includes the trickster’s method of education and communication) and visual language, as a means of cultural transmission. This art movement or “trickster shift” conflicts with the fixed or archetypal trickster of anthropology and psychology, disciplines that have attempted to depict the trickster character as a figure in support of an evolutionary paradigm. The same scientific model that once equated Native people to “primitive” man has kept the “trickster,” cemented in the minds of Western thinker as a static entity compared to his normally more discursive role as found in Native philosophy.

Limitations

This study is also a non-descriptive analysis of the trickster figure from a Native perspective and not a comparison of Western and Native descriptions of the trickster; however, contrasts are occasionally made to better understand and locate the trickster.

This study is also committed to the methodology of First Nations artists, First Nations curators, First Nations art historians and my own studio practice. Only three direct sources, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (1990) by Lucy Lippard, *The Trickster Shift* (1999) by Allan Ryan and “Aboriginal Media Art and the postmodern conundrum: A Coyote Perspective” (Claxton et al. 2004) by Steven Loft has been located that studies trickster theory within First Nations contemporary visual arts perspective. This lack of reference may be due to the trickster’s status as a symbol of

anti-structure. However, this research includes stories and pedagogy from artists from various tribal cultures that make use of the trickster, but is not specific to one tribal region or one trickster character.

Abbreviations & Definitions

This thesis makes use of the following terms and definitions. The following list is how these terms will be used here and how I intend them to be understood, and abbreviations are also included:

Art:	Expression of creativity or imagination, or both.
Audience:	Individuals who attempt to read the conscious and unconscious “text” from art and are influenced by their own social and cultural constructs of race, class, gender, age, nationality, politics and religion.
Collective Agreement:	Members of a society who share prescriptions of acceptance.
Constant Flux Paradigm:	Comparable to the chaos theory; the continuous movement of all events and life.
Experiential Knowledge:	Native knowledge based on the experience of individuals and of their people, since creation.
Fine Arts:	Art studied within a Western institution.
Holistic:	Native philosophy that focuses on the benefit of the collective whole rather than the individual or part.
Indian Art:	Art created by a person of North American Indigenous ancestry and interchangeable with the terms Native or Aboriginal art, and the meanings remain the same.
MoMA:	Museum of Modern Art
Native:	A person of North American indigenous ancestry, also interchangeable with the term Indian, First Nations and Aboriginal.
NGC	National Gallery of Canada

Other:	A person or group of people who are marginalized.
Primitive Art:	A classification forced onto Native art typically meaning without Western influence.
SCANA:	Society for Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry
Storytelling:	The oral teachings that uphold culture and history.
Trickster Paradigm:	Trickster patterns found in Native reality and Native art.
Trickster Shift:	The contemporary awareness of the trickster influences and evidence of trickster and his strategies to deconstruct ways of thinking.
Trickster:	A discursive figure depicted in North American First Nations oral traditions.
Trickster Discourse:	Information surrounding the trickster figure and role.
Worldview:	An individual's perception of their customs, philosophies, and values.
Western Thought:	Common thought among North Americans, shown by example.

Literature Review & Chapter Summary

I have reviewed many books, journals, articles, lectures, symposiums, and studies from various disciplines; the material selected was in accordance with traditional trickster strategies that can be located in First Nations contemporary art, which is a tool to maintain a cultural perspective. In addition, interviews, recorded myths, and discussions with Native storytellers and elders were collected to achieve a further understanding and balance of the topic.

This introduction presents the hypothesis that the traditional trickster is evident in contemporary First Nations visual art, and constructing new strategies that are rewriting the colonial history.

Chapter One – An Overview of the Trickster Character presents leading research from various academic disciplines that have attempted to define his character and have led to our perplexity in understanding his character. It has been suggested, “more has probably been written about ‘trickster’ than about any other single category of character that appears in the myth and folktales of the world” (Scholer 1984:105). To assist in the clarification of this chapter’s overview, the book *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Context, and Criticism* (1993) edited by William Doty and William Hynes is cited here heavily, for their in-depth insight into specific deliberations of the trickster character. However, Paul Radin’s (1956) research has been the most heavily sourced worldwide on the topic of the trickster and cited for his examination of the trickster. Radin’s work was greatly influenced by the research of Carl Jung and Karl Kerenyi included in his text, both psychologists who claim the archetypal role of the trickster serves human evolution, which has shaped the trickster cycle in relation to the human condition.

The Jungian psychology examined within this chapter is made clear by Ronald Messer’s (1981) graduate research, and Karl Kroeber’s (1998) research for his comprehensive examination into the ethnology of the trickster. Scientific studies like these by anthropologists, psychologists and ethnologists continue to define the trickster in support of the Boasian theory of a developmental trickster that evolved from a more “primitive” self-centered character to a cultural hero who is altruistic. This material has also supported the absurd notions that Indigenous people and their culture are living examples of human evolution. However, in 1966 Mac Ricketts makes a counterargument

against this developmental trickster, and points to two types of tricksters. The first figure he points out possesses a sneakier thieving character and the second trickster is a hero, evolved from the earlier trickster. Ricketts coins the term “trickster-transformer-cultural hero” to make better sense of these theoretical debates surrounding the trickster.

In closing this chapter, the Native perspective on the trickster is examined and his complexities are revealed, confirming the validity of the holistic approach that is evident in oral traditions and Indian art. However, the scientific approach on the trickster has defined the trickster, binding him to a purpose. These linear and (hard) scientific theories contrast with the Native pedagogy and the research of Amethyst First Rider (1994), Percy Bull Child (1985), Lewis Hyde (1998), and Jo-Anne Archibald (1990), who make a clear distinction that the trickster is not bound to any one character. However, Nathalie Piquemal (2003) and Native writer Paula Gunn Allen (Piquemal 2003) argue that education derived from orality and literacy is shaped by two different worldviews. Vine Deloria Jr. (1969, 1977 and 1994) explains how the difference in Western and Native worldview came to be in many of his publications cited throughout this study. Further describing the Native perspective, I have chosen First Rider’s graduate thesis on the trickster because her research is embedded in traditional knowledge that is not available in the majority of academic writings. First Rider describes in her own thesis the Native perspective and through quotes by Blackfoot Elder Percy Bull Child to demonstrate the reality that exists for First Nations people. I also put together examples of writings by Kiowa author Scott Momaday (1997) and Native storytelling researcher Bo Scholar (1984) to clarify that Native reality is alive in Native communities. Shawna

Cummings' (1995) graduate research also puts together examples of Cree playwright Tomson Highway who describes Native reality through his own creative efforts.

Chapter Two – The Trickster as Artist literature supports seven categories that examine Native artists' responses to the trickster, and how the roles of artist and trickster parallel each other. The literature supporting this section is from Highwater (1976), Hyde (1998), First Rider (1994) and Lincoln (1993). This parallel is made possible through what First Rider and Highwater call the transformation process. These transformations can also be found in oral traditions and the research by Burkhart (Waters 2004), Archibald (1990), Kroeber (1998), and Vizenor (1984, 1989, 1990 and 1991). The transformation process involves the audience, according to Highwater (1981) and Cummingham's (1995) research on Highway's creative process, and in Allen Ryan's (1999) study of the late Anishnabec Carl Beam's artistic process. In contrast, Cordova (Waters 2004) offers insight into the traditional role of the Native artist, and examines the responsibility Native artists have to the larger collective.

This collective agreement is explored through the Native perspective of Native authors Highwater (1981), Momaday (1989, 1997), Catjete (Waters 2004), Deloria (1969, 1977 and 1994) and Burhart (Waters 2004). It is through the Native perspective that Ricketts (1966) and Highwater (1981) reveal the possibilities of the artist as a trickster who is also a transformer. These associations can also be seen in the oral stories included within this chapter shaped by Radin (1956), Erdros (1984), and Highwater (1981), who depict the physical evidence of trickster as a shape shifter. According to Hyde (1998), shape shifting and transformation abilities of the trickster can also be seen in the similarities between the origins of the word "art" and the Native perspective on art. Hyde (1998) also finds the trickster to be a re-creator because of the association with being

male, whereas a female trickster is found in Jeanne Rosier-Smith's (1997) research in Native literature and in Ryan's (1999) exploration of Rebecca Belmore's work, and in Lincoln's (1993) study of Harry Fonseca's paintings.

Chapter Three – The Art of the Trickster provides the reader with background information on Indian art history and the challenges it faces. The second section of this chapter examines how trickster strategies overcome such obstacles through various modes of humour and more serious political dialogues.

The first section compares Janson's (1977), Price's (1989) and Kroeber's (1998) thoughts regarding "primitive" with author Stanley Diamond's (Montague 1968) expression of frustration with the label of "primitive." Authors Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault (Nemiroff et al. 1992), curators of *Land Spirit Power* held in 1992 at the National Gallery of Canada, note that the labeling of Indian art as primitive was encouraged by the first exhibitions of Indian art in the 1920's and 40's, and that attempts were made to parallel Indian art to Western art history. By 1980's, new attempts were being made to understand Native culture; however, *Primitivism in the 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* 1984 did not seem to follow this undertaking (Grande 1994). For example, the exhibit was considered an example of how galleries and museums have decontextualized Native art and culture. Decontextualization of Native art occurred for the next few years and an example of this is in the exhibition *The Spirit Sings* in 1988. By 1992, Native curators McMaster & Martin (1992) note that focus of the exhibitions displaying Indian art has shifted, and exhibitions such as *Indigena* are an example of change for the representation of Indian art. Exhibitions such as *Indigena* insisted that the Native perspective be voiced, and demanded that Native art

be properly represented in the galleries and main collections throughout North America. However, at this time not all exhibitions were making use of the Native perspectives or First Nations recourses and authorities that had the expertise on how to display Indian art, such as *Land, Spirit, Power* (Young Man: Memo 2006). Nevertheless, the text for *Indigena* demonstrated the Native perspective through direct artist statements that are heavily quoted in this chapter. Also concerned with proper representation of Indian art is *The Arts and Craft Act*, which according to McMaster (Rushing 1999), deeply influences the market. The market is where Ruth Phillips (Phillips 1989) says Indian art has been located and labeled “low” art by the modernist critique. These labels need to change for Indian art to move beyond the periphery, according to Young Man (McMaster & Martin 1992 and Young Man 1998), McMaster (Graburn 1993 and Rushing 1999), Nemiroff (Nemiroff et al. 1992), Todd (McMaster & Martin 1992) and Arthur Koestler (1975) insists that humour is medicine for the soul. Contemporary art exhibitions are evidence of this change or shift and that the Native perspective is critical to understand Indian art and that the trickster is a tool for understanding the Native perspective and its messages. Deloria (1994) clarifies why there has been confusion surrounding the Native perspective, blaming stereotypes supported through the media that have resulted in false images of Indian people and our culture.

The second section of this thesis examines artists’ statements that debunk these stereotypes through his examination of trickster strategies such as humour, irony, puns, wordplay, satire, toxic humour and political messages. In the third section, Deloria (*On & Off the Reserve* 2000) explains why humour exists within Native communities from the film *On & Off the Reserve*, suggesting that humour has endured because it is a tool

for cultural survival and to overcome a colonial history. Humour within Native communities often demonstrates the mistreatment and misrepresentation of First Nations people. Highwater (1976 and 1981), Vizenor (1984, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991) Lincoln (1993), Nemiroff (Nemiroff et al. 1992), Barbara Babcock-Abrahams (1975), and Ryan (1999) are cited mostly in this third section for their connection to trickster and comedy. Native artists in this chapter such as Edward Poitras, Fonseca, McMaster, Powless, Farmer, Naganosh, Swentzell, and Luna also make their connection to trickster humour. Vizenor's (1989 and Lindquist & Zanger 1994) theoretical explanations describe trickster discourse and humour as an action, but not as an aesthetic presence. Trickster humor has reared its head in more serious biting political messages, as the final section explores. More serious artists noted are Boyer, Beam and Jane Ash Poitras use cutting irony, which is also considered a trickster tactic. Houle (Rushing 1999) is used to conclude this chapter with the notion that a new language is emerging, which Beam suggests is the "trickster shift."

Chapter Four – First Nations Artists Relationship to the Viewer purpose is not only to complete the triangular relationship of the artist to the art, art to the viewer, and the viewer to the artist, but also to illustrate how the trickster re-educates his audience through traditional styles of tutoring. In the course of exploring how the trickster does this, the Western assessment of visual experiences is used, examining four exhibitions *Primitivism in the 20th Century*, *The Spirit Sings*, *Land Spirit Power* and *Indigena* that were pivotal for Indian art's movement toward contemporary acceptance a movement that is being called the "trickster shift."

In the case of these four exhibitions, the audience's response is examined through vision strategies observed through this chapter. According to Leonard Diepeveen

(Diepeveen & Van Laar 1998), there are three types of audiences that can be classified, and these offer clarity to the relationship between the audience and artists, which are explained in Chapter Four. This relationship is also determined by numerous vision strategies, for example, the action of the gaze that is rooted in Caucasian patriarchal ownership, notes Kaplan (Snow et al. 1983), a feminist writer. Also a feminist writer and of colour, bell hooks (2000), has also describes her challenges of the gaze. Ruth Phillips (Jessup & Bagg 2002) calls these challenges within vision theory “scopic regimes,” and she continues to explain the visual bias of Western art discourses towards Indian art. These power relationships are enforced by the marginal placement of the “other,” which according Babcock-Abrams (1975), is a space for voice. This space is where Vizenor locates the trickster, and which Atkinson (2001) accepts as a space of continuous discovery. Probyn (1993) examines the importance of marginal people speaking for themselves, and allowing their experiences to be accepted as valid knowledge. From her own experience, hooks knows how tricky and risky moving out of the marginal space for voice can be. She and Babcock-Abrahams share the opinion that there is power inside marginal space. However, Young Man and Todd (McMaster & Martin 1992) insist this obligatory space forces marginal people to accept the dominant ideology and interpretation of their history. In closing of this chapter, both essays within *Indigena* are studied, in which both confirm that spectatorship is under the rubric of active vision and the trickster.

Vision strategies are political, as it was for the MoMA exhibit when supporters of Native art were outraged at the curators’ disregard for the context of “primitive” work. The curators defended their actions because the exhibition supported the modernist agenda, noted Diepeveen (Diepeveen & Van Laar 1998), who agrees this exhibition’s

intent was to elevate “primitive” art. The curators continued their defense in a literary battle in *Artforum* magazine, against art critic Tomas McEvielly (1985), who does not agree that this elevation took place, nor was it the curators’ intent to raise the bar when it comes to critiquing Indian art. The exhibition *The Spirit Sings* held in 1988 continues to presents political complexities surrounding decontextualization of Indian art, and in specific, how classifications of art operate. Nonetheless, the exhibits *Indigena* in 1992 broke this chain of poorly represented Indian art as both exhibitions’ texts included artists’ thoughts and feelings on their relationship with the audience. Whereas, *Land Spirit Power*, 1992 disregarded SCANA’s concerns, and lost sight of the Native perspective. I have noted some of these artists’ statements from both 1992 exhibitions to examine the artists’ attempts to deconstruction of the mainstream ideology. I conclude this chapter with Cree/Chippewyan artist Jane Ash Poitras’ (Ryan 1999)and Cree artist Gerald McMaster’s (Greenburg et al. 2000) thoughts on having to manipulate space and stereotypes by making use of trickster tactics.

Chapter Five - Trickster Business explains how the trickster shift is located within the complexities of communication, and within a Native perspective. Also in this chapter, postmodernism is compared to trickster discourse because it is unbound, like the trickster. In this freedom, both artists and curators are unchained and they can begin to analyze themselves from within and from what Masayesva (Claxton et al. 2004) insists is the Indigenous aesthetic. However, from a Native perspective, no definition can be applied to the trickster but it can be a standard for freedom and what Vizenor (1989) believes occurs because of the transformation process that happens in a multiplicity of authoritative voices. However, Todd (McMaster & Martin 1992) notes that she is uncomfortable with this idea of an array of scholarly definitions for First Nations art, for the reason that

colonial assimilation tries to rid us of our collective thoughts. Todd is also leery of postmodernism's recent inclusion of Indian art, for the same reason of dominance over cultural identity. Young Man (McMaster & Martin 1992) is also concerned about the links that postmodernism is making with Indian art that threaten to swallow it into a melting pot called "universality." Young Man, Phillips (Jessup & Bagg 2002) and Lucy Lippard (1990) all seem to agree that there is a need to rewrite history from the Native perspective. This should be possible, according to Young Man (McMaster & Martin 1992) and Little Bear in the film *Kainayssini Imanistasiwa: The People Go On* (Todd 2003), who note the non-fixed philosophies that allow the Native perspective to be adaptable is possible because our perspective is embedded within the land, and this land, that is a part of us today. This idea that the land holds an adaptable quality for our identity is made possible because First Nations people believe that the land connects all living beings and beings that have lived before. Therefore, all animate beings share in energy that is connected to the land and to each other. The land or "Mother Earth" birthed our origins and this is where our knowledge and perspective derives from, and where we will return, to be renewed. Deloria (1977) concurs and insists that Native perspective is different from the Western thinker, and that in our thinking offers adaptability, which is often referred to as renewal.

This chapter concludes with the recommendation that contemporary Native artists are making a call for a new or renewed language and an Indigenous aesthetic that Victor Masayeva and Steven Loft (Claxton et al.2004) refers to, which is critical for continued cultural existence. Catherine Mattes (Watson 2001) and Carl Beam (Ryan 1999) insist changes are occurring because of translation and the "trickster shift" that artists are

demanding is implicit to oral traditions that have shaped our identities and will continue to do so.

It could also be said that postmodernism is moving beyond linear thinking and analysis, and can explain why the trickster's deconstruction tactics such as humor are being considered cutting edge for academic analysis. Gerard Hoffman (Graburn 1993), notes this correspondence between postmodernism and trickster discourse, and locates postmodernism as "in-betweenness," which according to oral traditions is also trickster.

The final section, A Synthesis of main ideas through Chapters One to Five. This synthesis takes place where a normal conclusion would be located, for the simple reason that in a Native perspective, conclusion does not take place because all things are in the continuous movement that Burkhart (Waters 2004) notes. The literature within this final chapter blends into new combinations and renewed clarity for all the main points that find the trickster to be an instrument for the future survival of the Native perspective. Most of the literature sources are re-consulted, to hold up the main hypothesis. The only new concepts are introduced are by Samuel Miller (Hyers 1969) also provides new concept in this chapter in his comparison of the trickster to the clown as a tool for self-assessment, which is also supported by many Aboriginal artists and writers throughout this study.

Study Design

This study will consist of:

1. Contemporary artists' statements about their experiences with the traditional trickster figure and their art-making process.
2. Examples of Native art and figures that include trickster strategies that reeducate the audience from a Native perspective.

3. Traditional trickster stories that support the Native perspective on the trickster.
4. A synthesis of this entire study.

Implication of the Study

This study will aid in clarifying the Native perspective on the trickster character, and present information on contemporary First Nations artists who are utilizing trickster tactics to keep the Native perspective alive and productive among First Nations people. The research will be practical to those people who transmit Native Science, but also assist those who have little knowledge about the Native perspective. This analysis of the trickster character from within a Native perspective will also challenge misconceptions about Native art throughout history. This examination encourages the critique of Indian art from within, which also may open the assessment of Native art to a larger audience who may come to understand it on its own terms and the system of knowledge that inspires it. This study also offer readers who are unfamiliar with the Native perspective the openness to understand the culture and the environment in which we live through the trickster information provided. In my mind, this openness can bring an end of negative stereotypes, and reinstate those First Nations people who have suffered loss of culture and self, both of which have been in jeopardy since European contact.

Chapter One

An Overview of the Trickster Figure

*what happened to you?
i figured you
got scared
i figured you
ran off*

*i figured you
left us to face
those white men
all by ourselves*

*that made me mad
'cause every
where i looked*

*there was more
heart break
than happiness*

*i thought THAT
GODDAMN NANABUSH
WHERE IS HE WHEN
WE NEED HIM*

*you were always
around back then,
the stories say so*

*and Coyote and Hare
and Raven finished
their work, but*

*you, what ever
happened to you,
TRICKSTER*

*you left us dangling
in mid-air
with those missionaries,
politicians and other
Christians snapping
at our heals*

*well, i never saw
Santa Claus either
goodness know i tried*

to be a good child

*then i found Christmas
goodies stacked in my
parents' bedroom cupboard*

*there was Jesus Christ too
and his blessed mother
these people were good as gold
but didn't know a thing*

*about INDIANS
nor really cared to*

*anyway, Nana bush
i figured you
turned coward²*

This chapter is an overview of various disciplines that have attempted to describe the trickster. This overview is critical to achieve a sense of his questionable character and the problems that surround his mythic role. Within newly developed sciences, scholarly pursuits of the trickster's function have designated the trickster as an archetype, which creates a description on what it means to be human. However, within this research, I have not offered a conclusive definition of the trickster, as the meaning of the trickster within Native American oral traditions is elusive.

No other character in Native American myths has confused ethnologists to the degree to which the trickster has. This confusion is compounded by the amount of information surrounding the trickster; no other character from myth or folktales has been written about more than the trickster. Since European contact with Native people of North America, non-Native authorities have collected and translated North American

² Lenore Keeshig-Tobias essay "Trickster Beyond: Our Relationship" in the text *Indigena*. Eds. Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin. Vancouver: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992. 102-3.

Indian oral stories on the trickster, leading them to debate the trickster role within and among arenas of anthropology, psychology, religion, folklore, and literature.

Anthropology on the Trickster's Function

On the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon, some people tell a story about a wandering anthropologist who came across a coyote caught in a trap.

'Please let me out of this trap; if you do, I'll give you lots of money,' the coyote said.

'Well, I'm not sure. Will you tell me a story, too?' asked the professor.

'Sure I will; I'll tell you a real, true story, a real long one for your books.'

So the anthropologist sprung the trap, collected a big handful of bills from the coyote, and then set up his tape machine. The coyote sat, rubbing his sore legs, and told a long story that lasted until the tape ran out. Then he ran off.

The anthropologist went home and told his wife about what happened, but she wouldn't believe him. When he reached in his pocket to show her the money, all he came out with was a handful of fur and dirt.

And when he went to play his tape for the other professors, all that was on the machine was a pile of coyote droppings.³

Anthropologist Paul Radin's book *The Trickster: A Study in American Mythology* was the most widely quoted and influential text on the trickster. Radin's research equates the Winnebago Nation's trickster character to that of developmental human psychology. Unfortunately, these outdated ideas of Radin's are still accepted by many researchers regarding the trickster. However, anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who has also completed influential research on the trickster; his book, entitled *The Zande Trickster* (1967), equates the African trickster to a social structure rather than to folklore. Evans-Pritchard argues that there is no original version of a story in folk material, including

³ Story collected by Barre Toelken in *Giving Birth to Thunder, Sleeping with His Daughter: Coyote Builds North America* by Barry Lopez. New York: Avon, 1977. xi-xii.

original versions of the trickster, which further supports Radin's argument that the trickster is a mere model created by the human psyche for the sake of evolution. Although Evans-Pritchard's research on the trickster did not include the Native American trickster, or the Native perspective on the trickster character⁴, he rather compares his theories to Radin's research on the Native American Winnebago trickster.

By 1972, anthropologist Brian Street devised his own hypothesis on the function of the trickster. He analyzed Evan-Pritchard's Zande trickster and compared his own findings to Radin's research on the Winnebago trickster (Singer & Street 1972). Street argues that the role of the trickster is a "delicate balance between creativity and destructiveness" (Doty & Hynes 1993:19). Street emphasizes that the trickster's function is a model of disorder, and enemy of boundaries who represents what happens when societies norms are not followed.

Other anthropologists who have studied the function of the trickster include Claude Levi-Strauss (1966), who presents the trickster as a representative of binary opposites, "but in particular of that between immediate sexual gratification and the demands of civilization" (Doty & Hynes 1993:20). Levi-Strauss's ethnography is succeeded by the research of Michael Carroll (1981 and 1984) who denounced leading anthropologist Robert Pelton's (1980) study on the trickster as universal figure. Pelton shares this opinion with the renowned anthropologist Victor Turner (1967), who also views the trickster as a symbol of liminality, which he believes is a permanent space to access recreative power. Pelton's research on the African Ananse trickster determines

⁴ In North America, the Native perspective on the trickster does not support an evolutionary model. This type of human evolution is not part of our belief systems but rather a trust in the concept that all living things are interconnected and that change and growth occurs because of the renewal process that can be activated by the trickster.

that the trickster's role is a contradiction in itself and he concludes that the trickster is not an archetypal idea but rather a symbolic pattern that contain a number of figures. From this, Pelton also concludes that the trickster figure is holistic in nature and causes society to rethink boundaries and the nature of social order. Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1968) concurs with Pelton's work, and asserts that the social function trickster is the very reevaluation process. In these wide ranges of efforts to classify the trickster by anthropologists, the trickster becomes more mystified, which is precisely the Native American interpretation on the trickster's character as presented within oral traditions. The Native perceptive on the trickster will be examined closer later in this chapter.

Trickster in Jungian Psychology

Psychologists Carl Jung and Karl Kerenyi's research was the most influential on Radin's investigations of the trickster as a figure representative of primitive development, and as a construct of the human psyche. Radin includes Jung's essay in the final chapter of his book to support his own theories of development. In Jung's essay he examines the process of the human psyche and how the conscious and unconscious influence the mind. Jung's analysis of the unconscious psyche is divided into two areas, the "personal unconscious" and the "collective unconscious." Jung insists that the trickster figure is evident in both areas of human evolution. According to Jung, the "collective unconscious" calls upon the psyche to conjure up the symbols of archetypes like the trickster. Jung's archetypal trickster is comparable to Radin's representation of trickster as primal purity. Radin insists that the trickster represents a "primitive" state of mind; Jung's definition of the trickster is similar in the following description:

He is obviously a “psychologem,” an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity. In his clearest manifestations he is a faithful copy of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level (Ricketts 1966:333).

The Ethnology of the Trickster

Western science’s intense examination of Native American myths and symbols has pushed classification of the trickster beyond studying behavioral aspects of the trickster and into a cultural research on the trickster character. Ethnology focuses on groups of people and their distributions, origins, and cultural characteristics. Ethnological deliberations surrounding the trickster role and purpose has also found contradictions within the trickster character. In the following description of the trickster, ethnologist Karl Kroeber explains why these contradictions occur within the trickster’s function:

He [the trickster] weirdly contradicts himself because he is caught within confusing changes of direction in two modes of discourse. His identification of himself as an editor who is a “folklorist trained in the history of literature” highlights the confluence of doubly shifting currents, which sucks him into denigrating an “alien” artistry he enthusiastically praises (Kroeber 1998:5).

Kroeber also suggests that because of the influence Franz Boas’ has on ethnology and anthropology. Boas forever altered the fundamentals of anthropology in his approach to cultural content, by placing emphasis on people and their effect on the environment. This approach changed the way tribal people were perceived for some, rejecting the museums’ popular scientific portrayal of Indigenous people. Kroeber is in accordance with Boas and in addition states that once our minds are free from “modernism’s disguised commitment to metahistorical explanations” along with assuming “that cultures are not intermeasurable, we clear the ground for more complex understanding,” which will result in a “an authentically respectful appreciation – of unfamiliar forms of

discourse, such as oral myths”(ibid:16). Today, ethnology and anthropology have grown beyond the confinements they once knew, and grown past research bound by cultural prejudices, evolving into areas of phenomenology that are more closely linked to the Native perspective for its observation techniques. This comparison will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

a) Trickster as Trickster, Transformer and Cultural Hero

The ethnological classification system of “trickster-transformer-cultural hero” was developed by Mac L. Ricketts in his essay “The North American Indian Trickster,” which clarifies the theoretical debates between various disciplines surrounding the role of the trickster. Ricketts notes that this trickster-transformer-cultural hero creates problems because of the combination of personages the trickster presents, and his contrary roles. According to anthropologist Daniel Brinton (1896), the reason for these combinations is that the trickster evolved from a higher deity, and because of the common belief of the trickster as hero and transformer, his function is confused. However, Boas disagrees with Brinton’s theories and sees the trickster as a derivative of a primitive aspect of selfishness and greed, which accidentally benefited humanity. Nevertheless, both Brinton and Boas view the trickster as an evolving figure of sorts, which seems to be based on “sheer abstract reasoning,” according to First Nations academic Alfred Young Man (Young Man, Memo 2006). Ricketts seems to concur with Young Man, insisting that “nowhere do we find a trickster who is not also, in some respects, a cultural hero..., [and that] Boas’ original purely egotistical trickster is entirely hypothetical” (Ricketts 1966:329). Boas supports a two-trickster theory, which is within the categories of the egoist transformer and the altruistic transformer. According to Boas, the traditional trickster is most

commonly the egoist transformer and the contemporary trickster is the altruistic transformer. Boas states that the egoist trickster “is not considered by the Indians as an altruistic being but as an egoist pure and simple” (Boas 1898:7). However, according to Shawna Cunningham’s graduate thesis, in Native art and literature “the trickster figure is currently re-entering the state of Native existence” (Cunningham 1995:45) and that two tricksters that are currently present are the traditional and the contemporary.

Boas’ theories have been widely accepted by various scholars, but refuted by Mac Ricketts, who insists that there is sufficient evidence to establish the trickster as trickster-transformer-cultural hero from its own original form. Ricketts supports the theory that the trickster is not merely an evolving figure, but one who embodies all trickster-transformer-cultural hero qualities. Ricketts bases his theory on the experiential knowledge of Native Americans, who have a high regard for their ancestors who have passed on cumulative knowledge to the people through their oral traditions.

The Trickster in Education

Past studies by non-Native scholars, like those already noted, have concluded that the trickster is an archetype for human evolution. Sadly, these theories have become attached to the definitions of the trickster. One example of this kind of classification is also seen in the conclusions of educator Northrop Fryre, who also characterizes the trickster as an archetype. Frye claims the archetype is “a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one’s literary experience as a whole” and that this is the case for the trickster. (Lundquist 1991:23)

To date, Native oral traditions are being translated into the English language and literature as a means to connect with a larger audience and as a tool to keep oral traditions available. Many contemporary Native artists and writers believe that the translated oral traditions have the ability to educate “the people” in the same traditional way because of the fundamentals of the trickster within oral teachings. These fundamentals include the trickster’s transformable character that invokes the imagination of an individual, told either on paper or orally. This trickster strategy to summon the imagination is what makes the trickster such an extraordinary tool for education, because of how the story is internalized because of his indirectness that allows the individual to respond intrinsically. This subjective approach to storytelling is examined by Blackfeet Elder Percy Bullchild and trickster researcher Lewis Hyde, who examines how the trickster functions from a Native perspective as a successful educator.

In a Blackfeet description of the trickster, Bull Child states the trickster’s origin:

No one knew where he had come from, just himself knew who he really was. He knew he had transformed himself into another being. Crowfeather Arrow was Oldman, Napi (Bullchild 1985:127).

In Western myths of the trickster figure, he is a profane character, who struggles with inner turmoil of an insatiable appetite, such as the Wolf in “Little Red Riding Hood”, “Sylvester the Cat” and as “Smeegle” in the more recent film “Lord of the Rings,” based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s series of books. Similarly, in Native myths, the trickster is not always presented as human but rather as having human-like characteristics and whose appetite drives him to further desperation and self-destruction. Hyde gives an example of the trickster’s self-destructive behavior, in the following story about the two tricksters, in their attempts to satisfy their hunger and survive:

Rabbit came to a field of watermelons. In the middle of the field there was a stick figure made of gum. Rabbit hit it with his foot and got stuck. He got his other foot stuck, then one hand and then his other hand and finally his head. This is how Coyote found him.

“What are you doing like this?” asked Coyote.

“The farmer who owns this melon patch was mad because I would not eat melons with him. He stuck me on here and said that in a while he would make me eat chicken with him. I told him I wouldn’t do it.”

“You are foolish. I will take your place.”

Coyote pulled Rabbit free and stuck himself up in the gum trap. When the farmer who owned the melons came out and saw Coyote he shot him full of holes (Hyde 1998:19).

In Native myths, the trickster can also possess an unattractive physical appearance and teaches his audience through his own experience but also has the capability of doing good. It was initially thought by Western scholars that the trickster figure was profane or evil and in place to teach the society of the moral code of conduct. This thinking was perpetuated by the development of ethnology based on the Native trickster. However, today he is seen as an enforcer of culture, because of his unquenchable appetite associated with the human condition, which always seems to get him in trouble. Hyde, the author of *Trickster Makes This World*, believes that the trickster is a master of deception and this is a requirement for art. The insatiable character of the trickster can also be viewed in Western culture as a taboo, influenced by Judeo-Christian beliefs where human desires or indulgences are not encouraged. However, in both Western and Native philosophy, the trickster provides an example of what happens when overindulgent behavior occurs. Again, this makes the trickster figure an excellent educator through his own example, all the while illustrating the dangerous possibilities one could face in the overindulgence of appetite, sex, money, food, drink, and power.

Education is not easily defined or agreed upon, as Lundquist points out in her book *The Trickster: A Transformation Archetype*, and notes that her predecessor Neil Postman utilizes the trickster in the classroom as a “counterargument” to challenge the existing mindset or mainstream thinking. Postman views the trickster as a marker for the counterargument and as “a metaphor for the function of education” (Lundquist 1991:1). Postman has a dichotomous agenda when it comes to the trickster in the classroom. He concludes that the trickster is a method to compare, and is a counterargument to the Western mindset which suggests that the trickster is defined in opposition to the mainstream ideology. Radin’s definition of the trickster character also supports theories of the trickster as an oppositional archetype. When the trickster is considered a counterargument, he is also then a binary opposite. Philosopher Jacques Derrida (1976) notes the problems with binary oppositions in Western thinking and believes that people routinely create binary oppositions as ways of understanding the world around them but is problematic since one side will always fall short and be seen as the lesser of the two. Jo-anne Archibald from the University of British Columbia also explores dichotomies but focuses on the dichotomy between orality and literacy. She claims that literacy takes precedence, referring back to Derrida notion that one will take precedence over the other. Archibald’s theory of literacy taken priority over orality can be explained through Western cultures emphasis on literacy, as the “vehicle for intellectual advancement” (Archibald 1990:66). Correspondingly, binary oppositions are dangerous for the Native American trickster and the native perspective as a counterargument because subordinate position attached to the “other” position. Therefore, the trickster needs to be viewed

from his traditional role as an educator found within oral teachings and not as a mere counterargument to Western thought.

a) Literacy vs. Orality

Western education influenced by the early writings of Greek Philosopher Plato, challenged the traditional teaching methods of oral stories. Plato found oral teachings to be filled with much emotion, and because of this, he insisted that literature should be the key tool in educational situations, due to the written words' detachment from emotion and the benefit of the logical thought process. Nathalie Piquemal's essay "From Native North American Oral Traditions to Western Literacy: Storytelling in Education" examines how "literacy and orality have more important implications that go beyond the issue of whether a culture uses a writing system" (Piquemal 2003:1). Piquemal essay points out that orality and literacy come from two diverse worldviews. Native writer Paula Gunn Allen agrees and suggests that the literal worlds utilize the structure of "conflict-crisis-resolution," whereas the world with an orality consciousness bases itself in a more holistic way of thinking. Gunn states that "[t]raditional tribal narratives possess a circular structure incorporating event within event, piling meaning on meaning, until the accretion finally results in a story. The structure of tribal narratives, at least in their native language forms, is quite unlike that of Western fiction; it is not tied to a particular timeline, main character or event" (ibid: 2). This notion of holism is what First Nations' knowledge systems are based upon, whereas Western platonic traditions are driven by science. Vine Deloria's essay "Civilization and Isolation" (1977) notes these contrasting worldviews. Deloria explains that the Western worldview depends upon "mathematics for their analyses and insights of nature;" witness to this is Western division of reality

and truth into categories or disciplines of study (ibid:12). Deloria calls this fragmentation “Western specialization.” However as Deloria notes, Native reality does not operate this way, and rather functions in a constant state of motion, and manifests itself in cyclical or repetitive patterns, placing emphasis on process. *The Task Force on Criminal Justice System and its Impact on the Indian and Métis Peoples of Alberta* explains further how Native reality functions and the notion of interrelation comes about from the result of constant flux.

The holistic view leads to an implicit assumption that everything is interrelated. Interrelatedness leads to an implicit idea of equality among all creation. Equality is brought about by the implicit belief that everything, humans, animals, plants, and inorganic matter has a spirit. Anthropomorphic factors are not important because metamorphosis readily occurs. The common denominator is the spirit (Cawsey 1991:9.3).

First Rider’s research on Native American philosophy describes interrelationship and how the trickster figure fits into a holistic worldview, because all living things belong in a “spider web” of relations, relating and responding to each other. First Rider also notes that all living things are imbued with a spirit, and because all living things have a spirit, the trickster has the ability to transform his physical form from one animate being to the next (First Rider 1994:15). This abstract and transformable character of the trickster suggests Jeanne Rosier-Smith, the author of *Writing Tricksters: Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Literature*, is what keeps the traditional trickster figure contemporary. Rosier-Smith also observes that writers today, both Native and non-Native, are utilizing trickster strategies in their contemporary writings. These strategies will be examined in more detail in the following chapters, but for now, it is important to note that Native writers are bridging oral stories with literacy. The connections keep oral teachings applicable to an ever-changing Native reality, teaching people through oral

traditions that the trickster possess the ability to transform in any given circumstance and transcend any reality into a space of ultimate freedom. In this lesson, the audience members or participant is also part of the story or transformation process and also gives the observer the freedom to transcend (Rosier Smith 1997:xiii).

The Trickster in Native American Literature

In taking an interdisciplinary approach to the trickster phenomenon in Native American mythology abstract transformations are made possible by the trickster. Both literature and art provide a better understanding of the trickster figure as an abstract transformer who prompts his audience to raise complex questions about life. The story itself opens the possibilities of new meaning; each individual receiver of the story who will tell it in a new way and this will keep the story alive. Contemporary Native artists and writers are aware of this renewal strategy, and have been revitalizing the tribal trickster and his mythology to sustain the traditional worldview. Cree playwright Tomson Highway feels strongly that these stories are essential to Native cultural survival. He believes that “[u]ntil we have a generation of Indian people out there who have been inundated with Nanabush stories and incredible literature written by our people, in their language, we won’t really have our words as people, as a distinct culture” (Loucks 1991:10).

Contemporary Native artists and authors, as educator/tricksters, responding to postmodern discourse have positioned Native oral traditions within the mainstream, and thereby make these traditions accessible to a larger audience. However, only recently has Native American oral literature been receiving acclaim for pushing the creative envelope,

but in the same breath, they have been criticized for a lack of coherent structure. Trickster researcher Kim Blaesser concludes that this condemnation is present because of the traditional trickster's "episodic nature." Blaesser's discovery lines up with oral traditions and more contemporary Native writers work such as Anishnabec author Gerald Vizenor, who has insisted on the non-representation of the trickster figure and the trickster's ability to inhabit one or more living being, adding to this idea of a lack of structure within oral tradition.

Vizenor has had an enormous impact on the way Native literature is perceived. He is writing within the trickster paradigm and within oral traditions, rejecting the "linear progressive formulation underlying the interpretation and the privileging of cause-and-effect logic in the reading of mythic cycles" (Blaesser 1996:140). This linear approach leaves out many trickster strategies unexamined such as examples of humour, play and chance. Vizenor coins the term "trickster consciousness" to describe the Native perspective on the trickster that is in a perpetual state of flux and holistic. Also in this holistic thinking, Vizenor does not separate the reader from the trickster. Blaesser, who studied Vizenor's work, describes this lack of separation between the reader and the trickster as indicating a direct relationship between both. Blaesser describes:

To one who identifies the goal of trickster consciousness as the creation of liberation discourse and who envisions the ultimate transformation of readers into trickster, as Vizenor does when he writes, "The active reader becomes obverse trickster," such separation is untenable (ibid:141).

Blaesser further examines the power of the transformation process by analyzing Barbara Babcock's essay "'A Tolerated Margin of Mess': The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered." Through the transformation processes, Blaesser also identifies the power

of the imagination and how the trickster's disorderly nature initiates creativity that overrules social structural roles when notions of boundaries are dismissed. These theories are similar to many traditional creation stories and Hyde's speculations that the trickster is the act of creativity itself, and that the unstructured trickster is comparable to the Western chaos theory, described in more detail below.

The Native Perspective on the Trickster

From a Native perspective, the trickster's figure does not have a defined role and is left to the interpretation of his audience, similar to contemporary Native visual art. Subjective interpretation occurs in oral traditions or stories regarding trickster because the pedagogy of the trickster that allows individuals the freedom to apply abstract notions of the traditional story to their own related experiences. Personal experiences are thought to be a source of knowledge, obtained through one's own lived experience and from past generations' experiences. This transmission of knowledge happens because we are all connected through the never-ending perpetual state of flux that keeps all animate beings connected. This continuous movement is made possible by the energy that all animate beings contribute to and is renewed by the lived experience and knowledge of those now living and of those who lived before. From the idea that all living things are in a state of flux, deep connections are made between Native people and all other animate beings.

The flux may explain Native reality; however, the discursive trickster cannot be explained through this. The trickster leaves questions and debates ongoing because no conclusion can be made if all things are in continuous state of movement. However, some of the confusion can be explained using the Native perspective, and the trickster role as

an enemy of boundaries and a transformer who is adaptable to all forms of expression, such as literature and visual arts. This lack of definition and his role as a boundary crosser opens the possibilities of the trickster in a visual language and gives hope for freedom and change. From this, the trickster moves beyond the linear confinement; however, the next chapter will explain the trickster's lack of restrictions in more detail.

The freedom that the trickster offers also conflicts with the already noted Jungian and Radin's linear theories of the developmental trickster serving human psychological and religious need. Mac Ricketts' 1966 essay "The North American Indian Trickster" illustrates religious aspects in Native American beliefs that gives clarity to the trickster roles. Ricketts makes note that the trickster-transformer-cultural hero teaches man "to use what has been given to him and follow in the paths laid down for him by those who traveled before" (Ricketts 1966:331). This lines up with Native American knowledge that, as noted, is based on experience of those now living and those who have lived before. Lakota scholar Deloria and Blackfoot scholar First Rider concur and note that religion is in a "continuous process of adjustment" or state of flux noted by First Rider who describes the "flux" as a critical part of Aboriginal Philosophy:

[From a First Nations perspective] one can see that there is no great concern about how the trickster figure came into being and the scope and limits of his nature and powers. He or she just is. But looked at in view of the concept of constant motion/flux, one can readily see the perspective of Aboriginal people: all of creation is forever moving and changing" (First Rider 1994:30).

According to First Rider the concept of "just is" is a result of the trickster's ever-changing character and therefore no true definition can be attached to him; this may solve and explain the serious debates surrounding his role. Karl Kroeber also supports a First Nations' perspective and views the trickster as unfinalized. He believes that Indian oral

stories, “suggests that meaningful linkage between episodes may often be more complex than is revealed by the unidimensional [non-Native] interpretations of Radin, Babcock-Abrahams, and Sapir” (Kroeber 1998:237). In this, Kroeber insists that the traditional role of storyteller gives a fuller meaning to the trickster.

The Trickster in Native American Storytelling

The trickster’s closest definition within oral traditions is a “boundary crosser” and as an educational medium which has been handed down from generation to generation.

Percy Bullchild explains:

We Indians do not have written history like our white friends. Ours is handed down from generation to generation orally... The sun came down and abided with his children in many instances to talk with them, to teach them certain things they must learn to use or do, and to give advice to them of how to survive the many treacherous things in this world he created from them (Bullchild 1985:2-3).

Oral traditions give a lesson or have an underlying moral message, and have a quality of lived experience that is manifested through creative imagination. Some of the best examples can be seen in the influential literary works Kiowa writer Scott Momaday, who makes observations on the relationship between the imagination and reality. Momaday explains the possibility of altering reality and the power in the creative process:

[T]he matter of oral tradition suggests certain particularities of art and reality. Art, for example...involves an oral dimension that is based markedly upon such considerations as memorization, intonation, inflection, precision of statement, brevity, rhythm, pace, and dramatic effect. Moreover, myth, legend, and lore, according to our definitions of these terms imply a separate and distinct order of reality. We are concerned here not so much with an accurate representation of actuality, but with the realization of the imaginative experience (Momaday 1997: 28).

Bo Scholer also observes the importance of experience within Native reality. He believes, “These experiences, which we may subsume under the general term visionary, offer texture and depth to man’s spiritual life and understanding but are not conceived as separate from day-to-day experiences. This holistic concept is the breath of tribal being (Scholar 1984:136). Scholer also notes the vital role of storytellers and their responsibility as those individuals who will keep the Native perspective and culture alive:

Storytelling is a communal act which represents man’s attempt at world construction. It is a means of continual re-creation in the tribal world of man and of cosmic and psychological order, and a way of reaffirming all the subtleties of life while teaching sacred ways and customs. Thus storytelling is the vital cord that binds all human life to that of the Great Mystery, and it is the pulsating blood that colors the individual experience and provides psychological and conceptual protection for the community (ibid).

From the statements of scholar, Momaday and Bullchild, the importance of the storytellers’ role with First Nations communities is seen, for cultural and identity survival. Yet, sadly, these oral traditions are not as readily available to all members belonging to First Nations ancestry due to assimilation attempts. However, literature has offered cultural information that they may seek. Shawna Cunningham’s graduate thesis notes the effects of translating the oral into the literary:

[T]hey [literary stories] are removed from the imaginative world of artistic interpretation incarnated through oral recitation. Therefore, literature is not the “end-product” of oral tradition, for oral tradition exists independently from progressive development (Cunningham 1995: 14).

Cunningham insists that literature should be seen as only a means to maintaining mythic reality, as storytelling is an art that cannot be fully translated without a physical relationship between the teller and listener. However, contemporary written traditional storytelling continues to come closer to fusing some of the challenges between orality

and literacy, through the abstract trickster character. Contemporary American Cherokee/Greek author Thomas King has written numerous stories that boundary cross, and includes many tricksters within his stories, as have the contemporary writings of such Native authors Scott Momaday, Leslie Silko, Gerald Vizenor, Tomson Highway, Simon Ortiz, and Drew Hayden Taylor. Anthropologist Robin Ridington proposes that First Nations literature is part of a long tradition that Ridington calls narrative technology, “where stories become experience and experience gives rise to the stories” (Ridington 2001:221). Ridington also observes the interaction between the storyteller with the audience, which offers a theatrical component: “the reader is a part of the story of each novel; the story is an old story” (ibid). Native playwright Tomson Highway concurs and has chosen to work in the medium of theatre, because of the connection it has with traditional storytelling. However, many First Nations visual artist are also taking responsibility for teaching the once popular art of storytelling through the visual arts, which is also traditionally known to many North American Nations. How these First Nations visual artists are transmitting their perspectives through the trickster is examined in following chapters, but for now, it is important to note that Indian art is communicating its own value system that is unlike the frame-of-reference that has been historically applied to understand Indian art and culture.

Chapter Two

The Trickster as an Artist

*We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves....
The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined.*⁵

The mere suggestion of the trickster in traditional oral stories told by North American Indian people produces “the expectation that this particular performance will cause important ideas to come alive in exciting ways” (Toelken 1969:225). The stories may differ but what remains the same is that these stories encourage change for the overall well-being of the collective. However, in many cases, the harsh realities of assimilation and colonization have resulted in pushing oral traditions into other modes of expression, giving rise to the question of whether the meaning remains the same when oral traditions are translated into other modes of expression. This question has been addressed by many contemporary visual artists who retell old oral teachings in various modes of expression, jumping outside linguistic barriers and into the visual arts. The process for a story to be transformed into the visual images can be explained through the trickster character and his many strategies that understand the human mind and desires. This chapter will examine how the trickster in the visual arts is synonymous to the trickster in oral storytelling and how artists, like the storytellers, become tricksters themselves. This chapter is the first point on the modified model that examines the relationship between the artist, the art and the audience.

⁵ Quote by Scott Momaday

Transformation of the Trickster in Oral Traditions and Literature

Only by understanding the traditional act of storytelling can we see how oral communication works and how meaning found in storytelling can also be found in the visual arts. Oral communication includes types of listening with all senses, including the physical response of the listener. This is technically called the total physical response method (TPR), which “is based on the idea that language is learned by the whole body, not just by the ears and mouth” (Hinton 2000:108). Oral stories embody TPR, having a participatory quality that involves the audience on many sensory levels. It is this involvement of the audience’s responses that makes a simple tale powerful enough to create lasting images and transfer knowledge that is learned, remembered, and passed on to the next generations. This explains the way in which Native reality achieves its truths and reality, that is, through experiential knowledge of the living and those who lived before.

Cherokee philosopher Brian Yazzie Burkhart explains that “[f]or American Indians, knowledge is knowledge in experience...” (Waters 2004:20). In this description, Native truth or reality is based on experiential knowledge that is cumulatively collected through generations; this accumulation can explain our reverence for elders. This knowledge is also cumulative because of the continuous flux, as explained in the previous chapter. It is within the flux that things have the adaptability to change and stay alive. Oral tradition’s survival is one of the many principles of Native philosophy that demonstrates that animate beings belong in a spider web of relations because everything is in a continuous state of movement. This philosophy can be compared to the Western

notions of chaos theory on the premises of energy and movement. Oral stories encircling this infinite continuum can make words and stories themselves very powerful, so powerful it is thought by some that the very telling of story has the ability to heal, harm, or to make characters come alive. These words are thought to be so potent that some words and stories can not be told at particular times of the year, for it would cause a negative response within the environment. Scholar Sam Gill describes the power of words:

Native Americans commonly view songs, prayers, stories, and other oral events as spiritual forces whose effect and purpose extend far beyond ordinary functions of conveying information or entertaining. Certain words when spoken or sung affect the world, give it shape and meaning. Words can cause pain and suffering as well as create beauty and orderliness (Gill 1982:39).

Native writers Scott Momaday and Gerald Vizenor are no strangers to the ability and power that words possess, and have been called storytellers. Both of these authors tell their stories within the medium of the English written language, and even though some experts choose to believe neither that literature nor English possess the ability to transmit the TPR as the original version told orally would. However, both of these Native author's writings have gained popularity within the mainstream for their stories' cultural transmission, facilitated by oral traditions and the Native perspective. It is my belief, and that of many others, that both Momaday and Vizenor are successfully transmitting the same emotions and feelings as would an oral storyteller. The authors' results are made possible through the Native perspective, in which the trickster is a transformer and an enemy of boundaries through the freedom of the imagination that both these authors accomplish through multilayered text, which expresses layers of realities, that encourages a response deeper than a typical story told on paper. Although, I also believe that the

experience of the oral story differs from the written one, this difference makes the written no less important, however.

As noted, the transformative process from orality to literacy is possible because of the trickster. Vizenor insists that this process is made possible because the trickster is a sign in the language game that is purely oral, a game vital to the continuity of tribal communality. Vizenor continues to note that “[t]he trickster is real in those who imagine the narrative.... the trickster is imagination” (Vizenor 1989:190). Vizenor believes that the trickster is not made of structural codes in the language game but rather is the narrative that causes audience participation in the imaginative process. The trickster discussion for Vizenor, falls within comic discourse, and the trickster is at the same time nothingness and a liberating force of the mind. He exists in a loose seam of the consciousness, “that wild space over and between sounds, words, sentences, and narratives” (ibid:196). For Vizenor, imagination is fundamental to tricksterism and imagination gives storytellers the ability to convert their identity by becoming the trickster in their attempts to demand their audience’s thoughts. However, Vizenor claims that this transformation process is not possible through visual communication. For him, representation in visual form limits the imagination, whereas aural perception offers the audience a more multi-layered perspective, akin to the trickster character. However, this opinion is not shared by many visual artists, who insist that visual language is not unidirectional. Vizenor notes Walter Ong notes the difference between the written word and oral narratives in “Orality and Literacy,” in the transformation of consciousness. He claims, “Oral speech is fully natural to human beings in the sense that every human being in every culture...learns to talk” (Vizenor 1984:8). Similarly, Karl Kroeber admits that

aural perception is more explored territory and “has received none of the attention lavished on visual perception in recent years, and how we imagine aurally remains virtually unexplored territory” (Kroeber 1998: 227).

Today, the trickster still exists in contemporary visual arts; even though this is a different genre he is still an enemy of boundaries, opening the imagination like he always did in oral traditions. This freedom that the trickster presents is often wrongly associated with postmodernism, which will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Five, but for now it is important to raise the issue that this classification causes concern for many Native artists regarding their cultural and historical politics and identity. The trickster is a fairly new and trendy concept for the mainstream, even though the trickster is a traditional aspect of Native culture, including creative outputs such as art and craft that have been passed on and which have maintained our world views. However, our creative outputs get thrust back into the mainstream and are then left to the scrutiny of non-Native authorities who make a classification for our art such as “craft” and “fine art,” or “contemporary” and “traditional stylized.” These labels continually frustrate many Native artists, especially those sitting on the periphery to the mainstream. Contemporary Native artists have responded to these classifications and are also more closely examined in Chapter Five.

Do Native Artists Have a Responsibility to their Audience?

In researching the Native artist’s perspective, the similarities between the trickster’s and artist’s roles are revealed. Cree playwright Tomson Highway makes clear the importance of this relationship between the trickster and artist, as he describes the

trickster's role as "...standing at the very center of that (Native worldview) universe," he goes on to comment that "without the spiritual health of that figure I think Indian people are completely screwed" (Cunningham 1995:3). Highway observes that Native artists and people working with spiritual lives have a responsibility to our Native culture to bring the trickster and his teachings to their audiences. Cunningham sees eye to eye with Highway and notes that it is imperative to bring back the trickster character. Highway explains how the trickster within our Native stories, which he calls mythology, is essential to our Native perspective:

History tells the story of the physical movement of a people across that landscape. And mythology tells the story of the spiritual movements of that people across that landscape (Highway 2003:19).

Highway's statement supports the critical role of the Native artist; however, not all Native artists are willing to carry such a heavy responsibility. The recently deceased Anishnabec artist Carl Beam commented on the issue of Native artists' responsibility, or rather the lack thereof:

I don't feel responsible. I want to be actually irresponsible, but it doesn't matter. No matter what I do, it seems to be a very responsible position if we understand the word responsible. That means you give a response as an artist (Nemiroff et al.1992: 84).

In other words, Beam does not want to take a position of responsibility for the collective, but rather a position of response as an individual. Through Beam's 1980 watercolor entitled *Self-portrait in My Christian Dior Bathing-Suit* (Figure 1), Beam explains his response as an individual, and the problem that the idea of the individual raises within Native culture.

In Canada we have Native artists but I haven't seen anywhere an individual - where a microscope has been taken to a Native individual... We need to show that a Native person could in fact *be* an individual... Instead of showing "the Indian" again, we need to see the wider focus of *being* Indian (ibid:50).

On the other hand, non-Native author Jamake Highwater insists that the idea of the individual and the collective is not disconnected in the minds of First Nations people, and that this separation is not possible.

The Indian does not make the separation into personal as contrasted with impersonal in the Western sense at all. What he seems to be interested in is the whole question of existence and reality; and everything that is perceived by the senses, thought of, felt, and dreamed of, truly exists for him... as *inseparable* aspects of the real (Highwater 1981:56).

In this, Highwater makes an error in his perception of Aboriginal reality, but what Highwater wants to make clear is that that Native and Western perspective greatly differ, which many Native people seem to agree on this fact. Jicarilla Apache/Hispanic philosopher V. F Cordova clarifies and notes how Native people as individual response to the larger collective in their art-making process, in a more traditional sense, than what Beam may have been referring to:

An artist, the individual, has a certain responsibility in the community. The talented individual is not seen as a "self-made" person. The talents are more likely the result of genetic chance. What the artist has is the result of a gene pool and the administration of the group. The artist has the responsibility to share what he does with the group. He cannot be stingy or self-centered (Waters 2004:253).

Cordova also finds that traditionally within Native communizes, everyone is seen as having the ability to be an artist, but it is not until the community recognizes an individual as an artist is he/she an artist. Today the Native artist shouldn't be trapped by the labels of working from a collective and individual space, but should be considered as an academic person illustrating how they recognize the world around them. Cree artist

and curator Gerald McMaster says being labeled is part of being an Aboriginal artist, and that this can restrict the artist to categories. McMaster states, “Indeed, the adjective ‘aboriginal’ seems like an inescapable identity; now more than ever ‘aboriginal’ serves as a reminder of the responsibility to their aesthetic, historical, political, social, and economic identities” (Rushing 1999:88). McMaster continues to suggest that despite the labels that Indian artists face, they must consider two communities, both of which have a different history and reality: “Given the importance of these dual communities, the...[Aboriginal artists] are both historically and conceptually important, since they relate to both the idea of the mainstream and to that of the land” (ibid).

Native Science

It is clear through the definitions provided a different reality and perspective exists for First Nations people. Oglala Sioux, Black Elk, who affirms the Native reality and its uniqueness:

“...they must live together *like one being*,” he makes it perfectly clear that for Indians the oneness of consciousness is not an ultimate and fixed reality but a sacred capacity for centeredness, for an integration of the self and the world that is learned. It is a lesson learned through a vision of the unspeakable plurality that transforms the person of wisdom into the shape of all shapes-so that the powers within and around him may live together like one being (Highwater 1981:67).

In Black Elk’s description, he explains how Native people relate to their empirical and mystical world. Black Elk points out what is essential aspect of traditional storytelling, and the fundamental key in understanding the imagery of Native people. Kiowa writer Scott Momaday shares in this Native perspective; his stories told today are much like the Native stories that have always been told, weaving what Western thinkers may call “make believe” characters into a reality, through the imagination. Momaday hopes to

indicate something about the nature of the relationship between language and experience, just like it occurs in oral traditions.

This complex layered relationship between language and experience has also inspired the writings of Vizenor, who describes the trickster as the oral process and as the sound of language. He believes in order for this “to be meaningful requires not mere physical perception but also a socially trained imagination” (Kroeber 1998:227). In order to possess a socially trained imagination, one must first understand the culture and the most fundamental form and structure of its collective agreement. This collective agreement is made up of “members of a society, linguistic group, and/or nation-state [who hold the same view] regarding the nature of reality,” including costume, beliefs and values (First Rider 1994:12). It is through the collective agreement, a reality is achieved in which Native artists are able to transform into a trickster-like mode through their creative process. This process will be explained in more detail in the next section, but at this point, it is critical to realize that creativity can be used to gain insight into a Native reality. Native philosophy embraces the inherent creativity of nature as the foundation for both knowledge and action. Understanding an artist’s reality is much like understanding the culture which the artist belongs. Therefore, creativity that the trickster figure and Native artist demonstrates signifies a Native American discourse that is truer to who we are as a people, as opposed to a mere scientific archetypal trickster who is a representative for human evolution.

As noted earlier, Native reality and its knowledge are founded on experience, not only the experience of the individual but also the experience of the larger collective, including all animate beings that are imbued with a spirit. This philosophy extends

beyond the Western classification system of living beings. The Native perspective that all animate beings are imbued with a spirit is possible due to the constant state of flux that all living beings belong to. This relationship creates an interrelationship of living things belonging to the “spider web of relations” that we are all in response to and have roles to play. This explains the Native perspective on “title” or “ownership,” as oral traditions inform us of our responsibility to the land and all living things that belong to it, but not to full entitlement of the land and all living things that belong to it. In American Native American philosophy we must preserve our connectedness to the land and each other, and never desert this way of thinking, but continue to understand the world through these relationships. This describes the experiential knowledge of Native reality through belief of interrelationship. First Rider also expresses interconnectedness occurring as the result of experiential knowledge. First Rider has labeled, for the sake of clarity, seven paradigms that are main patterns that are found in Native reality they include: all natural things are animate; all animate beings are imbued with a spirit; interrelationship; time being an important referent as opposed to time; trickster; renewal; and all living things being in constant state of flux, which is at the root of all the paradigms (ibid:14). However, these paradigms are not analytical categorization but rather an educational tool: Indian thought is a simple way of being. This philosophy as noted by First Rider, is the term “just is,” a reality of Native philosophy that resists analysis due to the perpetual movement of all things.

The underlining concept of perpetual flux within the Native perspective explains the lack of conclusions within Native philosophy. “The limits of questioning” occur or as First Rider calls “just is,” which is a result from the continuous state of motion that

allows for non-conclusive material, and prevents the categorization and data collection that phenomenology is also known for, which Edmund Husserl, the founder, coined as phenomenology. Phenomenology is also believed to be about the experience, and through this, where knowledge and meaning is derived. Phenomenology can relate to Native science in the way Husserl explains. He believes that all science and knowledge come first from the lifeworld and must always return to it (Husserl 1970). In this way, phenomenology is similar to Native science; however, the “limit of question” or “just is” prevents data collection and categorization. Native reality is more related to a process of general synthesis that is never complete because of the continuum. However, Cherokee philosopher Brain Yazzie Burkhart favors Native reality because it is a philosophy whose foundation requires perpetual thinking and observation, but not formulating theories or conclusions (Waters 2004:25). Thought based on this Native reality is constantly moving and is therefore progressive. However, this continuum should not be confused with mere recycling, because of the allowance for the new. The flux is not a closed circle but more like a coil or spiral that never ends. First Rider calls this the “renewal process,” a paradigm that is essential to Native science for the sake of cultural adaptability. Native Studies scholar Gregory Cajete suggests that it is possible to equate Native American Science to a state of perpetual phenomenology, due to the fact that phenomenology and Native science are both based in the idea that earthly experiences are wrapped in “cultural concepts of time, space, relationships, and that linguistic forms are rooted in this perceptual biological awareness” (Waters 2004:46).

Cajete calls these cultural concepts “maps of knowledge,” including art and language that have increased human diversity of technologies. He also insists that these

“maps of knowledge” reflect how First Nations people see their world, and that our belief in the continuum. Cajete goes on to parallel this continuum found in Native reality to Western notions of chaos theory and the trickster:

Chaos theory describes the way the nature makes new forms and structures out of the potential of the great void. It also represents the unpredictability and relative randomness of the creative process, appearing in mythology throughout the world in stories of the trickster - the sacred fool whose antics remind us of the essential role of disorder in the creation of order (ibid: 48).

Here, Cajete suggests that flux forces the new or the creative impulse of creation. He further explains that , “[h]uman life at all levels is wholly a creative activity and may be said to be an expression of the nature within us with regard to ‘seeking life,’ the most basic of human motivation since it is connected to our natural instinct for survival and self preservation” (ibid:47). This illustrates how art and language play a vital role in cultural preservation, as they are metaphors for concepts of creativity, allowing for the trickster or creativity to be developmental or as Cree art historian Alfred Young Man refers to art and creativity as “the highest source of knowledge” (McMaster & Martin 1992: 85).

The Transformative Artist as a Trickster

*A picture is something which requires as much knavery trickery and deceit as the perpetration of a crime...The artist does not draw what he sees, but what he must make others see.*⁶

⁶ By Edward Degas from the book *Drawing from Life* by Clint Brown and Cheryl McLean, 1997.

The Native trickster works in the same way that the chaos theory does. That is, the chaos theory holds that a small event will often set off a larger event, which is called the “butterfly effect.” However, in Native Science called the “renewal process.” The Western term “chaos theory” offers insight into human creativity and how the trickster is associated with creativity; the trickster is at the center of change, triggering a butterfly effect due to his greedy nature. The trickster’s boundary-crossing ability is due to his self-indulgence and greediness as well as his unsuccessful attempts to control change in his own favor. However, he has been known to be successful on a few occasions, but often finds his success is not truly what he desires.

Through the trickster’s failures and activities, he exemplifies the power of how change is triggered and how transformation takes place and a new scenario is created. This is also how artists, storytellers, writers, and medicine people transform, by acknowledging the state of transformation or flux that they are a part of. Ethnologist Mac Ricketts notes that this recognition of change is what divides shaman or medicine men from tricksters. He insists that tricksters make change for their own benefit, whereas healing people have the larger collective interest at heart. However, this selfish trickster, working towards his own agenda, does sometimes benefit the group, as in the following Blackfoot story about Old Man longing for a female companion describes:

Old Man [trickster/Napi] decided that something was missing in the world he had made. He thought it would be a good thing to create a woman and a child. He didn’t quite know how they should look, but he took some clay and mud and for four days tried out different shapes. At first he didn’t like the looks of the beings he formed. On the fourth day, however, he shaped a woman in a pleasing form, round and nice, with everything in front and back, above and below, just right.

“This is good,” Old Man said, “This is the kind of woman I like to have in my world.” Then he made a little child resembling the woman. “Well,” said Old Man, “this is just what I wanted.... (Erdoes & Ortiz 1984: 469).

This ability to change one's environment by words, actions or thoughts demonstrates the power of the creative imagination or thought. Many Native people believe that as humans we bring our reality into being by our thoughts, actions, and intentions and that is why Native traditions and prayers focus on the continuance of life. In this power of mind, we can see the beginnings of the creative imagination. The power of the mind and its ability to alter reality explains why words and thoughts within teachings are so important. In our customs it is also encouraged to never speak or think badly of anyone because of the consequences it may have.

According to many Native artists and writers, through the act of creation or re-creation, there is a transformation process that occurs for artists, and they become what they are creating, in the same way that imagination or thought become powerful words.

Highwater describes it best:

Indian oral tradition and the teachings of holy people make it clear that 'becoming something else' is not exactly what is meant by the English word 'transformation.' So I am not trying to convince anybody that the metamorphosis of one thing into another is a possibility in terms of Western realism. But there are other worlds and other realities (Highwater 1981: 61).

In these other realities for Native Americans that include the concepts of transitions, is no easy task for Western thinkers to understand, according to Highwater.

Contemporary Cree artist Jane Ash Poitras also explains her transformation process through her artistic endeavors:

I have fun with being a trickster in my work...The Trickster is somebody who is always playing tricks. He's always doing things. He's always fooling people, right? So, I'm a trickster. I take this old piece of map, right? I transform it into a work of art, right? This piece of paper was never intended to be...in a frame on acid-free board, right? ...I kind of like the idea of taking stuff, like taking

garbage...and making art out of it – transforming it - being a transformer. And in a way that’s what tricksters are. They take things and they transform them (Ryan 1999: 105).

Alfred Young Man also feels this transformation that is believed by First Nations people is to a large extent misunderstood. Young Man describes the how the transformation process works for First Nations people in his text *North American Indian Art: It’s a Question of Integrity*, using two illustrations as examples.

The following figures [Figure 2 and 3] illustrate two ways of saying the same thing. Both have as their fundamental premise the dissemination of myth and legend, normally related orally, presented here visually. Whereas figure 23 [See Figure 2] shows how Indians see their relationship to the world of animals, birds and insects in a way which denotes a kind a physiological transformation, figure 24 [Figure 3, in this study] puts forth the idea that humans and animals are brothers, not in the sense that two males are brothers, but in the way all things are related, in a metaphorical sense (Young Man 1998: 37).

According to Ricketts, these transcendent qualities that are attached to the art are a result of the trickster’s original act of creativity, since he was there “from the beginning; and he is known as the one who has caused things to be arranged as they are” (Ricketts 1966: 339). Therefore since the trickster is thought to be the cause of transformation and change, creative efforts that are encouraged by the character in turn transmit cultural ideas through language, art, storytelling, dance, and writing.

The Word “Art”

As previously mentioned, the act of creativity for Native artists does in many cases differ from Western concepts of creativity. However, Lewis Hyde points out that in the source of the English word “art” is a derivative of the Latin word “joiner” or “hinge” (Hyde 1998:254), which relates to the Native perspective on the trickster as a

representative of boundary crossing and in-betweenness. Hyde describes the birth of word “art:”

There are two Greek words that can mean “joint.” The first is *áarthron*. “The *áarthron* connecting the hand and arm in the wrist,” says Aristotle. An *áarthron* can also be a connecting word in language, an “and” or a “but” for example, as if the flow of speech required its own little wrists and elbows to become intelligible (ibid).

Hyde describes the Greek word “harmos” which also means a “joint in the body” but is more commonly know as a “joint” that is made by an artist or craftsman. This is compared to the word “art” in Native languages, where there is no separate word for art, as it is not considered a special event. Therefore, art is considered to be a part of the everyday living experience. However, Hyde’s research points out a connection in the origins of creativity in both Western and Native perspectives through concepts if in-betweenness.

The Trickster as Re-Creator

In examining the origins of creativity, the trickster is also in attendance, as a creator or, as Hyde describes, a re-creator. The trickster is usually associated with the male gender; Hyde explains the trickster possesses masculine attributes because of the trickster’s ability to re-create. Hyde equates the trickster with re-creation rather than creation due to the trickster’s incapacity to be responsible for the survival of offspring. In other words, it would be difficult with the trickster’s insatiable libido, which is often associated with the male figure and the act of sex, to be responsible for the original act of creativity. Hyde writes, “Tricksters do not make new life, they rearrange what is already at hand” (Hyde 1998:341). It is the trickster’s appetite for sex for the sake of gratification

only that is more so associated with men because of the women's birthing responsibilities and responsibility for the survival of her offspring. Because of the oversexed nature of the trickster, there is rarely any mention of trickster's offspring within oral traditions (ibid). However, exceptions have been found primarily among the Pueblo. Researcher Franchot Ballinger has found about twenty female coyote stories from the Pueblo people; yet Hyde notes these female tricksters are never considered cultural heroes and rejects Ballinger's foundations that these female tricksters come from matriarchal tribes because according to Hyde most North American Indigenous people are matriarchal.

Female Tricksters

On the other hand, Southwest Native artist Harry Fronseca often illustrates a female coyote in his work. In Figure 4, *Rose and the Res Sisters, 1982*, Fronseca names the female coyote Rose and calls her a "partner-in-crime and a companion" to Coyote (Lincoln 1993:145). The author of *Indi'n Humor*, Kenneth Lincoln, describes Rose the female coyote, as a sexual character with her male trickster partner:

[S]he wears a rose-red dress with glitter-on-acrylic spangled camellias. Silver stars sparkle on a violet background. One leg is lifted in her dance, high heels and painted fingernails glistening crimson. Coyote levitates by her side in a pink-and-black checked suit, red-glimmer camellia (matching her dress) in his lapel, with a pink-and-green striped tie against a pale blue shirt. It's dizzying. The tile dance floor is checked black and white, the painting framed in lavender. Both of Coyote's high-heeled, gray-and-black dancing shoes rise off the floor. They soar with his gray bushy tail, reaching for the dancers' arched necks, Rose's raised arms, and the two camellias under her left ear. The couple's razor-toothed grins tell all: Coyote play transcends predatory hunger. His phallic tail adds a touch of Freud to the picture (ibid).

However, author Jeanne Rosier-Smith states in her text *Writing Tricksters: Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Literature* that non-Native contemporary writers refer to the trickster in a non-gender specific way. She writes:

Central to the nonwestern storytelling traditions on which Kingston, Erdrich, and Morrison draw, the androgynous trickster is infinitely changeable, ancient, and yet perpetually new (1997: xiii).

Anthropologist Victor Turner chooses to believe in an uncertain sexual status in diverse mythical characters such as in the case of tricksters Loki and Wakdjunkaga who transformed themselves into women (Sills 1972:580). Contemporary Mohawk artist Rebecca Belmore's Figure 5, *Coyote Women* (1991) seems to illustrate her frustration with the stereotyped female sexuality and utilizes Indian humour to get her serious points across. Bellmore writes on humour in her work:

I think I'm using it as a way to make people laugh, but I have something serious to say as well 'cause it's not all funny. I'm not just trying to make people laugh. I'm trying to make them think...And I guess I don't see a mask for my purposes as hiding something, because I think as an individual, as a performance person I wear many masks. That's sort of my role as a performance artist – to wear different personas, whether it's acting like a fool, like the horse dress – that's kind of foolish, like the fool - but yet, in that fool there's a lot of wisdom. There's a very serious side that people may not at first glance see. So that's how I mean 'mask'... (Ryan 1999:146).

Bellmore raises the issue of the mask that feminist theorist bell hooks has also addressed. Southern Black writer hooks also notes the trickster's embodiment of shifting identity that allows for the possibility of a new language. Women of colour such as hooks are thought by author Rosier Smith to perceive the trickster as a positionality and as a “mix of subversive and affirmative survival strategies as a source of personal and communal strength” (Rosier-Smith 1997:19). Laguna-Sioux writer Paula Gunn Allen also speaks of the multiple perspectives of the trickster and sheds light on how the trickster allows a

space and voice for the marginalized perspective. These multiple perspectives will be examined further in Chapter Four in regards to the research of Barbara Babcock-Abrahams. The trickster's ability to deconstruct, offers a space for women wearing multiple masks which then allows a space for the marginalized to speak about themselves from their own cultural voice, while remaining within the margins.

However, despite the new female tricksters, the trickster historically has been considered male who exhibits an insatiable libido, such as Coyote who is studied by Radin and Jung for discoveries into male sexual psychology. The oversexed libido of the trickster is described by Radin as a common trait among many stories regarding the male trickster's unquenchable appetites. Within oral traditions, the trickster's physicality will also be portrayed as being oversexed, evident by his enlarged penis, in order to illustrate his insatiable appetite for sex. The following story, "*Coyote and Chipmunk*" recorded by Paul Radin illustrates this point:

'Trickster, what is you are packing? Your penis it is you are packing!'

'My, what an awful thing he is saying, that contemptible person! He seems really to know what I am carrying.' On he went. Shortly after this, and from a definite direction, he again heard singing. It was as if it was just at his side:

'Trickster, what is it you are carrying? Your testicles, these you are carrying.'

'My, who is this that is mentioning these things? He must indeed, have been watching me. Well, now I will carry these things correctly.' Thereupon he emptied his box and threw everything out. Then he placed his testicles underneath next to his back. As he was doing this again, suddenly, he heard someone singing right as his side:

'Trickster, what is it you are packing? What is it you are packing? Your testicles underneath, your testicles underneath!'

'My, what a contemptible person it is who is thus teasing me! He must have been watching my pack.' So again he rearranged his pack. He now put the head of his penis on top. Then he went on but soon, unexpectedly, he heard the singing at his side again:

'Trickster, what is it you are packing? What is it you are packing! The head of your penis you have placed on top, the head of you penis you have placed on top!'

'My what an evil one it is who is saying this,' and he jumped towards him. But the one who had been singing ran away, exclaiming, 'Tigi! Tigi! Tigi!' It ran into

a hollow tree. It was a chipmunk. 'I will kill you for this, you contemptible thing,' said Trickster. Thereupon he spoke to his penis, 'Now then, my younger brother, you may go after him for he has been annoying you for a long time.'

So he took out his penis and probed the hollow tree with it. He could not, however, reach the end of the hole. So he took some more of this penis and probed again, but again he was unable to reach the end of the hole. So he unwound more and more of his penis and probed still deeper, yet all to no avail. Finally he took what still remained, emptying the entire box, and probed and probed but still he could not reach the end of the hole. At last he sat up on a log and probed as far as he could, but still he was unable to reach the end. 'Ho!' said he impatiently, and suddenly withdrew his penis. Much to his horror, only a small piece of it was left. 'My, what a great injury he has done to me! You contemptible thing I will repay you for this!' (Radin 1956:38).

This story is an example of body mutilation, as a result of the trickster's inability to keep control of appetite for sex. The trickster has also been known to sneak up on women and copulate with them, willingly or not. However, he is sometimes foiled, evident in the story above where the trickster's penis is chewed into pieces by the chipmunk and thrown into the water to be transformed into food and plants for man according to how some tell the story. This story is another example of Hyde's theory of trickster as re-creator. It also emphasizes that something of benefit can occur from the trickster's selfish behavior. This is obvious in the following story told by a Brule Sioux which was recorded by Richard Erdoes in "*Iktome Has a Bad Dream*":

Once in the middle of the night, Iktome woke up in a cold sweat after a bad dream. His friend Coyote, who was visiting, noticed something wrong. "Friend, what's the matter," he asked.

"I had a very bad dream," said Iktome.

"I dreamed I saw a very pretty *winchinchala* about to take a bath in the stream."

"It doesn't sound like a very bad dream," said Coyote.

"This girl was taking her clothes off. I saw her naked. She had a very fine body."

"My friend, decidedly, this is not a bad dream."

"I dreamed I was hiding behind some bush at quite a distance from her. As I watched her, my penis began to grow. It grew exceedingly long. It was winding toward her like a long snake."

"There is nothing wrong with this dream."

“My penis was like a long, long rope. It went all the way over to that girl. It went into the water. It touched her.”

“*Kanji*, cousin, let me tell you, I wish I had such a dream.”

“Now, my friend, the tip of my penis entered that girl. She didn’t even notice it at first.”

“*Kola*, I’m telling you, this is a fine dream.”

“Then my penis entered the girl all the way. She seemed to like it.”

“This is as good a dream as I ever heard of, my friend.”

“Just at that moment I heard a great noise. I had been so excited in my dream that I hadn’t noticed a team of horses pulling a big wagon. It was right on top of me, a *wasichu*’s-a white man’s-wagon. It was coming at a dead run, and the white man was whipping his horses. This wagon was very heavy, my friend, it had heavy wheels of iron. It was going between me and that girl...”

“Friend, you were right. This is indeed a very bad dream,” said Coyote (Erdoes & Ortiz 1984:381).

The trickster has been known to share many forms and names, from animal to human, from the Plains Coyote to the West Coast Raven, and even at times is also known in human form as Old Man, Napi the Creator, or Nana ‘b’oozoo, the son of the Creator. Unfortunately, despite his function, name and form, stories like the ones above have been classified as “archaic expressions” according to anthropologist such as Paul Radin. Radin’s research psychoanalyzes sexuality in terms of the “primitive” mind, which he equates to First Nations people, he notes that sexuality occurs for trickster in oral traditions because of the “primitive” or Native persons; awareness of himself and his environment. Radin is also firm that the signs of physical sexuality in the trickster character exemplifies that “...we have reached a new stage in Wakdjunkaga’s [Cree trickster] development... defining him more precisely, and psychically and physically” (Radin 1956:135). However, from a Native perspective these stories are not mere mythic reality, but is rather a knowledge system that once understood the power of the imagination, the transformative process and creativity of First Nations people, which have been teaching First Nations to be aware of their environment and world. It is the

storytellers and artists who keep these oral traditions breathing in Native communities, through their own trickster-like character, which in turn reeducates a perspective and challenges their already existing ones through their trickster strategies which the following chapter will make sense of, the art created by tricksters and First Nations artists that are using trickster strategies to maintain a Native perspective. This complex exchange of meaning from the artist to audience will be examined further in the fourth chapter.

Chapter Three

The Art of the Trickster

*I'm no prophet. My job is making windows where there were once walls.*⁷

This chapter will examine the second point on the model, the visual representation of the trickster and those artists who employ trickster strategies. Information regarding the visual representation of the trickster figure in Native art throughout history is sparse. It has been only in the last hundred years or so that trickster discourse has been written about, and only in the last thirty that the trickster has been written about in the arena of Indian art. Throughout history, Indian art has been mostly located on the periphery of mainstream, serving as an evolutionary model, or found in the marketplace, viewed as craft. For the most part, the identity of First Nations culture and people has been unknown to the mainstream and has been misrepresented by the media. Today, Native artists look to the guidance of their own voices for knowledge derived from their experience illustrated within oral tradition and art. This inward look at Indian art has encouraged a Native perspective for First Nations people whose worldviews are currently engaged in a conversation with the mainstream art world in terms of trickster tactics. I will examine this in more detail in Chapter Five. This chapter, however, will include a brief historical overview of Native art and pivotal exhibitions that have received popularity, in order to establish how contemporary Native artists are applying trickster devices such as humour for their own educational and creative purposes.

⁷ By Michael Foucault in the book *Trickster Makes This World* by Lewis Hyde, 1988:283.

Western art critics have always had difficulty in defining Indian art; their efforts attempt to parallel Indian art with European art, maybe in hopes of understanding and categorizing pre-Columbian art. Alfred Young Man points this out in his essay “The Metaphysics of the North American Indian Art,” that Indian art is not an entirely new development or hybrid, since European contact, but rather that “Native art is, in fact, part of a continuum of Native American cultural and metaphysical existence that has persisted for thousands of years with no loss of authenticity” (McMaster & Martin 1992:81). This notion of “lost authenticity” has faced the Indian artists since the market’s development of Indian Art and the elite art connoisseur, whose taste was equated with legitimization and that made Indian art a fetish for many collectors. However, today postmodernism attempts to legitimize Indian art and to give voice back to the marginal artists. Therefore, these marginalized artists are forced into vital roles for the identity of Indian art, as they attempt to shift the colonial boundaries that have been applied to our art. With respect to the Native philosophy of interrelationship and lack of compartmentalization, I have no definition to offer for Indian art, but rather I will introduce the issues and concerns that surround Indian art in order to illustrate the continuous influence of the trickster figure.

A Brief Historical Overview of Indian Art: An Uphill Battle

a) “Primitive” art

“Primitive” art is a term coined by the new settlers, a word that today is outdated. This word, according to French anthropologist Rene Huyghe, “...is no longer fashionable” (Price 1989:1). However, anthropologist Sally Price insists that writers unfortunately still employ the term “even though the evolutionist connotations permeate

through it” (ibid). WH. Janson’s widely read text, *History of Art*, attempts to revise the term:

“Primitive” is a somewhat unfortunate word.... Still, no other single term will serve us better. Let us continue, then, to use primitive as a convenient label for a way of life that has passed through the Neolithic Revolution but shows no signs of evolving in the direction of “historic” civilizations (Janson 1977:35).

I prefer the earlier description by writer Stanley Diamond, in his essay “The Search for the Primitive” that appears in Ashley Montagu’s *The Concepts of the Primitive*:

Primitive is, I believe, the critical term in anthropology, the word around which the field resolves, yet it remains elusive, connoting, but never quite denoting, a series of related social, political, economic, psychological, and psychiatric meanings. That is, *primitive* implies a certain level of history, and a certain mode of cultural being... that is continuously obliterated or attenuated by the process of civilization, and more radically so than we are usually able or willing to acknowledge; as a result, the image of an identifiable, cross-cultural, pre-civilized, and, yes, a prior human nature has practically disappeared from our conceptual lexicon (Montague 1968: 99).

In his explanation of “primitive,” Diamond points out the very frustrations First Nations art faces today, with history’s attachment to the word “primitive” that has seemingly become interchangeable with Indian art prior to European influence. Earlier reports made by anthropologists and scientists can be partly to blame for this term, since many had concluded that First Nations people no longer existed and that prior to contact all Indigenous people were in fact “primitive.” For example a Native man named Ishi was thought by many scientists to be the last “wild Indian.” Ishi lived in California in the early 1900s, ethnologist Theodora Kroeber insisted that Ishi was “... a man of stone Age culture subjected for the first time when he was past middle age to twentieth-century culture” (Kroeber 1989:9). Ishi was thought never to have been in contact with “civilization,” and was therefore considered “pure or uncontaminated by Western culture” (ibid). It is also in these notions of pureness and uncontamination that Native

materials and art have been classified, such as pre-colonial and post-colonial, to better make sense of the vast amount of objects “found” or taken from Native people. However, this classification system has led to a lack of ownership of cultural items for many First Nations people and Nations. These classification systems have also contributed to the identity problems for many Nations, and has increased faulty stereotypes that can be seen in early exhibitions of Indian art.

b) The first exhibitions

The very first exhibition display Indian art in Canada was hosted by the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) in 1927, entitled *Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern*. It supported Indian art and artifacts as “primitive” and as a foundation for more “evolved” cultures. Ethnologist Marius Barbeau is in agreement with the NGC’s intentions of displaying Indian art as a backbone for the more “significant” modernist artists. Barbeau describes the art of both First Nations and non-Native artists included in the exhibition as coming from the same place, while remaining within their own known customs; however, insists that the Native art included was improved by the important modern artists.

The interrelation of totem poles and modern paintings displayed in close proximity made it clear that the inspiration for both kinds of art expression sprang from the same fundamental background. One enhanced the beauty of the other and made it more significant. The Indian craftsmen were great artists in their way, and original; the moderns responded to the same exotic themes, but in terms consonant with their own traditions (Barbeau 1932:337).

Fourteen years later in 1941, The Museum of Modern Art held a second exhibition entitled *Indian Art of the United States*. This exhibition was organized by Rene d’Harnoncourt the manager of the Indian Arts and Craft Board. However, this exhibition

did not make any attempts to make parallels between Indian art and modern art but rather classified itself as an “overview” of Indian art, and was organized in accordance with archaeological research. According to art historian Rushing this 1941 exhibition was a positive and evolutionary demonstration for Indian art. He believes that the exhibition was a “decontextualization of ancient art, contextualization of historic art, and recontextualization/aestheticization of contemporary art...that were meant to shape the visitor’s experience of the visual material presented in the exhibition and ensure its acceptance as a vital and living art” (Rushing 1941:8). However, Diane Nemiroff is not of the same opinion that the exhibition was meant to reshape the visitor’s experiences but was rather served more as support system to the modernist agenda. In Nemiroff’s sketch of both exhibits, she describes the drastic changes that Native people were undergoing since European contact and the dilemmas they faced, such as loss of identity and their traditional ways, and the bigger question of how to maintain their sovereignty. However, different the exhibitions, both determined a misrepresentation of Indian art, and demonstrated how Indian art was exhibited for an agenda that was not their own.

c) Primitivism in the 20th Century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern

Change and development may not have occurred as one may have hoped by 1984; the exhibition entitled *Primitivism in the 20th Century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* held by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was curated in a way that also kept “primitive” or Pre-Colombian Indigenous art out of its cultural context. This decontextualized exhibition assumed a progression line of descent from the “primitive” to the modern artists. *Primitivism in the 20th Century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* included only the modernist artists’ names and dates and excluded

references for the Indigenous art and artists. This act showed the curators' agenda to illustrate "primitive" art as a lower level of art, and the exhibition "became a pretext for enhancing modernism at the expense of primitive culture" (Grande 1994:106). The modern artists included in the exhibition were Picasso, Gauguin and Calder, to name a few, while the "primitive artists" names were unknown to the public due to the curators' omission. Figure 6 demonstrates one of the curator's errors, juxtaposing Pablo Picasso's *Guitar* with an unknown Grebo mask from the Ivory Coast. In this, the curator has been accused of implying that Picasso's modernist interpretation was instinctually much like that of the "primitive" mind. This exhibition clearly misrepresented Indian art and demonstrated "primitive art" in much the same way those museums and galleries have done since the invention of the curio cabinet, where well-traveled persons displayed their collected items in their cabinets of curiosity.

d) The Spirit Sings

Since the 1980's, new commitments to multiculturalism were being made by the museums and galleries, beginning with the exhibition *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, which opened the Calgary Olympic Winter Games of 1988. However, this exhibition was protested against for many reasons. The first reason was due to the lengthy land claims battle that Shell Canada, the sponsor of the exhibition, had with the Lubicon First Nations people that was financially draining the Lubicon people. Secondly, the exhibition included sacred objects that traditionally for First Nations protocol are not privileged to an open audience. Thirdly, there was a lack of request for contemporary Native artist's involvement. Instead more than five hundred objects of Native Canadians, collected from various ethnographic collections were shown.

However, The Glenbow Museum, who hosted the exhibition, claims, “[t]he exhibition’s primary purpose was to bring this older material together to emphasize the diversity, continuity, adaptability, and resilience of the native cultures of Canada, which incorporates a world-view distinct from that of mainstream Canadians” (McClelland & Stewart 1987:10). However in the eyes of many First Nations people and critics, the Glenbow’s intended purpose failed as a comprehensive study of Canadian Native Art, due to its lack of inclusion of the Mi’gmaq and Maliseet Natives from the exhibition. This exclusion of two of Canada’s most Eastern Nations was a major faux pas in the minds of many, especially of those Nations omitted.

e) Contemporary art

The demand for the Native perspective is what birthed two of the most powerful contemporary First Nations art exhibitions, held in 1992. The first exhibition was entitled *Land, Spirit, Power* and the second was *Indigena*, recognizing five hundred years of cultural genocide of First Nations people. *Land Spirit Power* was held in Ottawa by the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), in celebration of Canada’s 125th birthday. In fact, it was not until 1987 that the NGC purchased its first work by a Native artist when it acquired Beam’s painting entitled *The North American Iceberg* (Figure 7). Just prior to *Land Spirit Power*, the World Assembly of First Nations made the statement that, “it seemed no longer possible or desirable to represent a whole movement, let alone a culture” (Nemiroff et al.:38). This statement reiterates the belief that shift has been made from the anonymous Native artists and their art being presented without description, to Native artists being catalogued and featured with entire biographies. In this new look into Indian art, new questions faced Indian artists, their work and they way it was exhibited.

In fact, *Land Spirit Power* was curated by three different people, a Native and two non-Natives. The curators' various backgrounds were proposed to enhance the exhibition's diversity, along with the distinctiveness of diverse contemporary Native artists across Canada. Mi'qmaq artist Viviane Gray notes the possible difficulties these curators may have faced. In her essay "Indian Artists' Statements Through Time," she insists that "[i]t is difficult to categorize the [N]ative Indian artist by nationality (Canadian, American, etc.)... [Many] belong to tribal groups that straddle the two countries and do not affiliate themselves with either of the Euro-defined countries" (Graburn 1993:137). However, the NGC hosts of the exhibition restricted the exhibition to only Canadian Indigenous people. According to Gray, this is a problematic distinction. The reason given for this restriction was for funding and promotions, which seems to take priority over history and truth.

The *Indigena* project that followed was said to be a wake up call to both Native and non-Native people. The project marked the five hundred year "discovery" of the "New World" from the Native experience. These experiences included Native artists from across North America, who seemed to have similar running themes that included the missed opportunity for the new settlers to access a cultural Native experience. The artists included in the exhibition were asked to reexamine the colonial process, a deconstruction of which revealed the following themes:

- Aboriginal values and philosophies within their own framework, without the need for validation from Canadians of European ancestry
- personal and cultural histories of five hundred years of colonization
- academic critique of Euro-North American values, theories and practices
- recognition that 1992 is not only an arbitrary date in history, but also a point of departure for the future (McMaster & Martin 1992:15)

The exhibition also led to the all-embracing catalogue for the exhibition, also entitled *Indigena*, which included the perspectives of Native writers'/scholars' that are integral to

the analysis of Native art because they reject the ethnocentric language of colonialism that denies Native American distinctiveness. *Indigena*, according to curator Gerald McMaster, sought to create a Native perspective and addresses issues that range from the early extinction “to current questions of self-government in Canada today, including the Oka crisis, and from the fragile sense of identity to the strengthening hope of cultural tenacity” (McMaster 1992:66). However, both exhibitions resulted in awareness and potential for Native artists to be in positions of control of how their work is exhibited and made, and also improved the audiences’ understanding of the historical facts and philosophies of First Nations people from a Native perspective. The exhibitions also made a statement on Canada’s apathy toward the hardship and poverty within Native community in Canada. The Native artists took the opportunity to question and initiate a new discourse for Indian art.

f) The Arts and Craft Act

Despite all of these efforts to change people’s minds on the validity of Indian art, questions of authenticity still surround Indian art, which seem to delay more pressing matters when it comes to Indian art. These notions of “authenticity” are very much supported by the American and Canadian governments who control the status of First Nations people, based on blood quantum in the US, and lineage in Canada, but only for those whose Nation signed treaties or are recognized by the government. Only for those Nations who have signed treaties, in the US, possess the right to employ the term “authentic Indian art” for marketability sake of their art and those Native artists in the US who are not federally recognized as First Nations and choose to exercise the term could

lawfully face large fines and jail time. However, in Canada, no legal act has been created or passed.

With the success of Indian arts in the market place, the US government created a protection act called the *Arts and Craft Act of 1990*. As a result of act, the market has felt the effects and the controls of act can be witnessed by the production of work that is sometimes altered by the artist to have a more stereotypical “authentic” Indian feel. Artists have been known to embellish the “Indianness” of their work for market value. Cree artist and curator Gerald McMaster explains his own concerns for the development of Indian art in the market as he seen it in Santa Fe:

There was a power in the market. It drew students downtown because tourists were there and it was an opportunity to sell. The students and artists from the region began to be drawn into the vortex of the market. You make...what the tourists want. There was not too much experimentation because there was no concern about it. They weren't pumping out artists who were very critical of the material, they were just pumping out artists who could create stuff. It all looked like work that was geared to be picked up and carried away (Ryan 1999:29).

In McMaster's observations he points out the control that the market has on the production Indian art, the consumer's influence on Native artists and harmful effects the economy has on Indian art.

g) Tourist art

Art historian Ruth Phillips informs her readers that “tourist art” is also classified as “kitsch art” (Phillips 1989), which according to modernist critical thinker Clement Greenburg, kitsch art “is a product of the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of western European and American and established what is called universal literacy” (Harrison & Wood 1996:533). Greenberg also suggests that some artists are tempted by “kitsch's enormous profit” and they have been known to “modify their work

under the pressure of kitsch” (ibid:538). However, Phillips insists on the legitimacy of Native “kitsch” art as a location device for Indian art that explains the location of Indian art since European art history has been attached to our Indian art history. Phillips furthers her argument, “At present, for example, we have no good way of approaching commercial ‘tourist’ art, although these objects comprise the bulk of what Native Americans have made in the centuries since contact” (Phillips 1989). Greenburg alludes to why some Native artists may have adopted kitsch art, but insists that kitsch art gives a false sense of culture or is a “quick fix.” This “quick fix” is a metaphor for kitsch or tourist art being equated with being extremely hungry and going through a fast food drive-thru to satisfy your hunger, but being only temporarily satisfies hunger due to the lack of substance in the drive-thru food. This sort of short term solution or temporariness that kitsch presents to culture may be appealing to Native artists on many levels: one level might be its marketability and another may be Native artists’ disassociation from mainstream culture. Kitsch may be a symbol for this lack of connection, or the driving force might simply be the promise of profit.

h) A new language

According to Young Man, all of these categories that have been applied to Indian art throughout history, including tourist art, are problematic because they present a Eurocentric history. Young Man continues to note that many Native artists are rejecting the Western premise that Native is being accepted by universal ideas and being thrown into a “melting pot.” He also stresses the importance of the Native perspective and that it does not sit on the margins of the art world but is rather a leader in knowledge (McMaster & Martin 1992:85). Gerald McMaster agrees with Young Man, quoting French

philosopher and social critic Michael Foucault, who insists that domination of a culture is possible through colonizing attempts made with the notions of universality. Foucault also suggests that universality is a part of “Western domination whose assumption is that the Other is striving towards similar goals” (Rushing 1999:83). What Young Man and McMaster believe, as do so many First Nations artists that the Native perspective should be the accepted authority for its own art. McMaster proposes that a new language is needed in art, as a replacement of the existing mainstream language that encourages universal notions. McMaster states, “The practice of post-colonial writers has been to advocate a ‘re-placement’ of language, which involves seizing it from the center and “re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place” (ibid:85). He continues to note that Aboriginal artists such as Carl Beam know this strategy of re-placement, evident in his work, and within the work of Native artists. Métis artist Edward Poitras also suggests a new language:

I would like to suggest that a group of us malcontents get together and perform the sacred ritual of the Dadaists for the origin of a new name. We will choose a new language that nobody can identify with and we will purchase a dictionary for it. We will shoot an arrow at this dictionary and the word upon which the tip of the arrow touches will be our new name. This will give us the new freedom that we need, because nobody will know what to expect (ibid).

However, this idea a language has also been contested by many Native artists and communities who share in Young Man’s theory that Native art is a continuum. This perspective on Native art mirrors the way in which Native knowledge is achieved, through our ancestor’s experiential knowledge and our own living experiences. However, Diane Nemiroff proposes that Native artists can find refuge in postmodern theory because she believes Indian art “has engaged in deconstructing the image of the unchanging *other* as a fictional construct of European identity formation” (Nemiroff et al. 1992:38). Métis

artist Loretta Todd does not agree with Nemiroff and believes terms like postmodernism that are applied to Indian art, imply a link to colonialism. Todd states:

What does the use of these terms mean to our cultural production? And what relationship do they have to colonial history, and to our continued struggles with our own territorial and cultural sovereignty? Is it possible to incorporate these terms into our own practice, or should we eschew them altogether? (McMaster & Martin 1992: 73)

Todd's questions and concerns surrounding postmodernism come for good reason, due to postmodernism origins historically derived from modernism, that are rooted in an ethnocentric framework. In fact, Todd points out that "[t]he term 'modern,' comes from the Latin word *modernus*, applied to separate the present from the times of the Ancients" (ibid:73). Todd cautions that postmodernism can force Indian art on the periphery, leaving control of its fate to the movement. Therefore, Todd suggests that the Native communities need to play "catch up" in the institution of art and deconstruct the position of the "other." Many Native artists have been deconstructing the position of Indian art, by playing with stereotypes. Through this deconstruction process, meanings have been flipped around in powerful ways, much in the same way that the trickster would.

Stereotypes & Popular Culture

However, deconstructing these stereotypes is no short order for Native artists, with these stereotypes being strongly supported by the media. Recent examples are the popular movie productions by Disney, *Pocahontas* and *Spirit*, that are geared to children for entertainment and which maintain preexisting stereotypes. The late Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. explains how these stereotypes have developed:

For generations it has been traditional that all historical literature on Indians be a recital of tribal histories from the pre-Discovery culture through the first encounter with the whites to about the year 1890. At that point the tribes seem to fade gently into history, with its famous war chief riding down the canyon into the sunset. Individuals appear within the history only to the extent that they appear to personalize the fortunes of the tribe. A mythical Hiawatha, a saddened Chief Joseph, a scowling Sitting Bull, a sullen Geronimo; all symbolize not living people but the historic fate of a nation overwhelmed by the inevitability of history (Deloria 1994: 27).

Deloria concludes that “Indian people are exactly opposite of the popular stereotype” found in Hollywood films (Deloria 1969:146). However, productions including the “Hollywood Indian” make millions dollars off the image of the Indian, while only continuing to add to a false sense identity. This false sense of identity already plagues many First Nations people because of the academic assimilation that occurred during the residential school era, which left many Native people feeling disassociated from their own cultures. However, on the contemporary art scene, Native artists are speaking on their own behalf, and challenging stereotypes in a variety of ways. This is done by taking on the role of the trickster and playing with these existing stereotypes. In this trickster role the artists poke fun at the serious taboo topics of racism and the causes and effects of assimilation and cultural genocide, not so funny themes. In these attempts to re-educate, Native artists face an uphill battle with the mainstream dehumanization of Indians, who have been shot dead, beaten, and mass murdered while defending their own lands. The essay “Indians & Hollywood Humor” soberly notes the seriousness of this dehumanization of Indians:

[T]his process of dehumanization of the "enemy" makes it possible to laugh heartily even at representations of genocide. Few Americans would chuckle at pictures of stacks of Jewish corpses at Aushwitz. Nor would they cackle happily at images of black slaves being lynched. Although Americans did laugh briefly at vicious Hollywood stereotypes of Japanese during World War II, these films are

rarely shown and would now be generally interpreted as racist diatribes. But "Cowboys and Indians" films are still interpreted as harmless fun and suitable for children of all ages (IAIA home page 2004).

Stereotypes have become devices for unyielding atrocities against First Nations people; however, humour is a weapon to fight these typecasts, and Native artists are using humour to shift their audience's preconceived ideas and re-educating them on unconscious and conscious levels.

Locating the Trickster in Humour

Arden King, author of *North American Clowns and Creativity*, notes that laughter is a key instrument posing new ways of constructing human reality. King suggests that the trickster is a role model for challenging stereotypes and encourages the evolution of human existence through the medicine of laughter. Oneida Comedian Charlie Hill calls this "turning poison into medicine" (*On & Off the Res* 2000) and Anishinabe poet Marie Annharte Baker insists "[t]o be able to laugh at oneself is one of the greatest gifts of an Aboriginal heritage (Annehart Baker 1991:48). However, humour is virtually unexplored territory in Western academic research into Indian art. Many Native artists have handled stereotypes in humorous ways, allowing the viewer to learn from a newly created dialogue controlled by the Indian artist. This process involving the audience will be further explained in the next chapter, but for now it is essential to examine how the trickster enters the space of comic discourse to reeducate his/her viewer through laughter. Laughter is a device Native people have been using long before contact through a wide range of techniques such as double entendre, parody, puns, satire, teasing and irony. It is a well-known fact among Native people that humour is essential to our way of life,

making a funny joke to affirm one's local knowledge and give one a sense of belonging to a larger collective. Humour also allows a lighter-hearted approach to some serious realities that many First Nations people face, such as the loss of culture, alcoholism, and poverty. Native scholar Vine Deloria Jr.; explains that Indians all over North America are sharing in similar occurrence due to the harsh effects of assimilation, and humor can be a pan-Indian experience.

Deloria also believes in the traditional social mechanism for humor. He points out the following three points about traditional humour:

- keep the learders humble
- keep the families together
- enables families to get together without conflict. An extremely viable tool, much more so than humour is in other societies (*On & Off the Res* 2000).

Traditionally, teasing was also used as the method of social control, according Deloria. In fact, this type of sarcastic teasing was also in use by chiefs during the time of treaty signing. An example of this is when the infamous Iroquois leader Red Jacket used forms of sarcasm upon his meeting with Mr. Cram of the Boston missionary Society in 1828:

[T]he sun is bright, our eyes and ears are open and unstopped, so for a change listen. "Brother! You say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why do not all agree, as you can all read the book?" (Lincoln 1993:27)

This sort of cutting direct humour is well known among the Native communities and is still practiced today. To outsiders this type of humour may seem a cruel or harsh treatment, but in fact it is often used by someone who cares enough about another to tease

or ridicule them, to keep them “in line.” Tribal teasing is described by Deloria as one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Native humor.

For centuries before the White invasion, teasing was a method of control of social situations by Indian people. Rather than embarrass members of the tribe publicly, people used to tease individuals they considered out of step with the consensus of tribal opinion. In this way egos were preserved and disputes within the tribe of a personal nature were held to a minimum. Gradually people learned to anticipate teasing and began to tease themselves as a means of showing humility and at the same time advocating a course of action they deeply believed in (Deloria 1969: 147).

Anishnabec artist Ron Naganosh utilizes teasing as a strategy to get the attention of the government and the mainstream art scene (Figures 8 and 9 are Naganosh’s 1991 shields, Figure 8 entitled *Shield for a Yuppie Warrior* and Figure 9 entitled *That’s All It Costs*). Both of these Shields reject the sacredness of art objects and of the anthropologists’ notions of artifact. Ryan concurs and calls these works an example of “construction and deconstruction, both becoming and unbecoming” (Ryan 1999:101). Here Ryan draws on Vizenor’s “doing” trickster theory, which Vizenor claims is incomprehensible, as opposed to the trickster as a specific “being.” Vizenor, sums up the “doing” trickster as not a museum being, nor “an aesthetic presence” (Vizenor 1989:13). Vizenor describes:

[T]he 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 (Laga 1994:78).

In his essay “Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games”, Vizenor faults anthropologists for not interpreting tribal literature correctly, and for participating in trickster discourse by getting caught by his traps in language (Vizenor 1989:189). He also blames anthropologists again in “Earth-Drivers: Creation of the

Mythological Male” for bringing about separation ideas and secular seriousness that still surrounds the trickster character. Vizenor writes that these ideas attached to the trickster incorrectly separate the trickster from humour (Vizenor 1989:xv). Throughout several of his writings, Vizenor presents his own explanations of the trickster who he insists is a “comic holotrope.” Vizenor’s following explanation shows how the trickster can also be located within comic discourse:

Tricksters are real in stories but not in the flesh. Tricksters are not blood or material, but imagination. Tricksters are the kind of thought that raises hope, that heals, that cures, that cannot be traced. The power of a trickster would be diminished, even abolished, by human representations. Humans are not tricksters, but tricksters can be human. Tricksters are not mortal but live forever in imagination. And the trickster is not immortal either. Tricksters liberate the mind, and they do so in a language game. Tricksters do not represent the real or the material. Tricksters are not alive in tribal imagination to prove theories of the social scientists....Tricksters only exist in a comic sense between two people who take pleasure in a language game and imagination, a poetic liberation of the mind...(Lindquist & Zanger 1994: 67)

Vizenor insists on the following that trickster discourse exists among tricksters, is about tricksters, and is a collection of expression in oral traditions (Vizenor 1989:191). Vizenor’s impact in trickster discourse has been enormous in terms of his own creative and academic writings that demythologize First Nations histories and languages. His research has influenced Native writers and Native artists to continue to re-imagine their own reality through the trickster’s ability to free the imagination from imposed definitions and from linear interpretations.

Trickster humour has many layers, including irony, which seems to have escaped the attention of leading analysts such as Radin, who have made no connection between irony to the trickster. However, analyst Lawrence Sullivan sees the trickster as a character that exploits and embodies the “ironic imagination.” In other words, the trickster also has

the ability to demonstrate double-sidedness. An example of this double-sidedness is in the Pueblos' trickster and their ritual dances that contain sexual content, which is normally a taboo topic. However, in ritual performances, the sexual content challenges the everyday mindset. The dancing Pueblo trickster figure is called the "Koshare," who shocks his audiences by disrupting ceremony and protocol. In an interview, Joseph Epes Brown explains two things that happen in this Koshare entertainment;

[firstly]it helps the people forget their petty little concerns about the routines of daily life. It shocks them out of that. Secondly, once that awareness, that alertness and openness, has been achieved through the initial shock, then it is possible to communicate on another level through the use of humor... (Brown 1979:55).

Figure 10 illustrates this Pueblo Koshare in Roxanne Swentzell's *The Emergence of the Clowns*, 1988. Swentzell is a Pueblo artist who is recognized as one of the most inventive of Indian potters. She describes her work in relation to the boundary crossing trickster:

I would say I am still communicating with figures. I want to symbolize women, and my culture, and humanity. I am trying to say things to the world, and the response has been amazing! My pieces are crossing cultural and all kinds of boundaries. People from all over the world see things in my pieces. It has been very, very exciting to me, the ultimate communication (Peterson 1997).

California Maidu artist Harry Fonseca depicts the Plains trickster Coyote in Figure 11, entitled *Wish You Were Here*, 1986. He paints the coyote in a tourist-like Hawaiian shirt that has a watermelon print, a fruit that is often associated with the Pueblo trickster. The title also makes a traveling reference. The irony seems to be that the indigenous Coyote is a tourist on his own traditional Pueblo territory. Aside from humour, Fonseca's work has a political message as biting as the reality in which Fonseca created it. His work portrays a reality that is filled with a survivalist vision for Native people, which Fonseca seems to foster. Figure 12, *Pas de Deus #2*, 1984, illustrates Rose, a female coyote, in a pink ballerina tou tou and Coyote in his macho leather zipper

jacket and his high top running shoes performing *Swan Lake*. Although it is an obviously humorous painting, Fonseca speaks about the serious survivalist message that is often referenced in oral traditions:

I don't know how Rose and Coyote got on the swan's back, that's not important. The thing is they didn't kill themselves and they weren't overcome by evil. They didn't let outside forces take advantage of them (Lincoln 1993:151).

In these biting messages, laughter seems to be an on-going process for collective healing that is flourishing in Native communities, and is beginning to be noticed by ethnographers who are examining Native languages and their ironic capabilities. However, by no means does this mean that humour is restricted to oral traditions and verbal patterns, in fact these messages have the ability to become just as powerful or maybe more so when combined with a range of visual patterns like that of Native art.

Fonseca work (Figure 12) shares an ironic quality that can compare to Carl Beam's (Figure 13) entitled *Burying the Ruler*, 1991. However, Beam does not wish to be attached to specific labels such as irony. Beam says, "Don't paint me as an ironic artist... Irony is just one of many aspects; there are other ones in there" (Ryan 1999:244). Beam's unrelated juxtaposed images also invoke up a string of puns. Cherokee author Thomas King describes punning in Native communities:

[V]ery bad puns and lots of them and having to hear the same jokes over and over again. I think the majority of Natives in Canada, if they're not bilingual, they come pretty close to it. Some are even trilingual. It means you can play with language. And because many of the communities still have a strong basis in oral storytelling, play with language, punning, joking is crucial to that thing we call Native humor (King 1993-4: 4).

Cree artist Gerald McMaster is also no stranger to punning and wordplay. See Figure 14, *Hau! The Quest Was One*, 1990, for an example of this. McMaster plays a

trilingual pun on the word “Hau.” In Figure 15, entitled *Trick or Treaty*, 1990, he pokes fun at the ever-so-serious political situation for Native people in Canada in the 1990’s, by painting former Prime Minister John A. McDonald as a clown, with the text: *Trick or Treaty. Have I got an Act for you. Your jokin.* The text is written in black on the rich yellow painted surface to reference Halloween. McMaster completed this work at the time when the Prime Minister of Canada was Brian Mulroney, suggesting that the political situation for Native people is frustrating since their position is not taken seriously. McMaster describes the work:

This sort of rhetoric employed by McMaster can also be classified as parody. Métis artist Edward Poitras knows this well, employing parody in his work in regards to the Kachina trickster. An example of this is his 1989 work entitled ‘*Witness*’ *koshare clown doll*, Figure 16. The trickster theme is familiar to Poitras who was the first Native artist to represent Canada at the world’s most prestigious art exhibition, the *Venice Biennial*. That particular year the theme that was chosen was *Identity and Alterity*, the latter meaning "otherness." Poitras was thought to be the perfect candidate for the theme. Poitras’ roots are both Aboriginal and European, and he claims to belong to a “distinctive third culture” that is a combination of both; this is a key element in his projects and the trickster’s point of entry into his work. Nancy Tousley, author of the essay, *The Trickster*, describes the trickster in his work (see Figure 17). Tousley explains entitled *Coyotean* that was included in the 1995 *Venice Biennial* exhibition, as combining strategies of iconography and combining formal vocabularies from both European and Indian art.

In these sculptures, Poitras evokes a past that is forever alive in the present. As well, Poitras has created a veritable dog's palace for Coyote, covered with gold leaf and graffiti, which signifies both the greed that propelled European

exploration, exploitation and destruction, and the desire for the New World “other” (Tousley 1995:36).

For Poitras, the coyote trickster figure allows him and the environment to contradict each other. Therefore, when experiencing a Poitras installation, a crisscrossing of margins occurs, much in the same way, according to Poitras, that the boundaries shift in his own reality as a Métis person.

It is this dual perspective that Native artists are permitted the ability and cleverness to poke fun at the historical misconceptions, as well as the ability to reconstruct their surroundings from their own viewpoint. Through this position, Native artists today are re-educators, whether this is their objective or not, they create an exchange of ideas between Natives and non-Natives. These educational artists often choose to educate in humorous ways that have always been taught through the traditional trickster figure. Education or lessons are much easier to digest through humour; yet, it still forces Native artists into political positions. However, Mohawk artist Bill Powless has said that his paintings are not so much political but are rather are created to get reaction, especially for the non-Native audience that he targets.

Powless has been playing with images of parody for a number of years and enjoys the reaction the he stirs in non-Natives who are sometimes unsure how to react to his sometimes “politically incorrect” images of Native people. In Figure 18, *Beach Blanket Brave*, 1984, he presents the classic stereotypical Native “brave” in a speedo to match his stereotypical muscular cut body. The “brave” is holding a beach blanket in one hand and an inner tube and newspaper in the other; these items contradict his own stereotype, by placing him in association not only with leisure but also with contemporary knowledge.

The same cutting political message occurs in Figure 19, *Indians' Summer*, 1984, another beach scene. Powless portrays an obese Native man smiling with confidence in a speedo, umbrella hat, and holding a popsicle. This painting interrogates the flawless and pure stereotypical image of Native people. What makes this painting more jarring is to view it from a Western perspective. That is, the “imperfect” and especially overweight man shocks his viewers because of Powless’ overt political incorrectness of the stereotype. The following letter was written to the editor of a newspaper called *Tekawennak*. The writer seems to be offended by Powless’ painting that touches on the topic of obesity:

May 29, 1985
“Obese is sick!”

To the Editor:

Art is beautiful in many ways, shapes and forms, but the advertisement for Art’85 falls way short of humor [and has] creativity suitable for a freak show. I see nothing but disgust every time I see this dumb looking Indian with his belly blown up like a balloon and his boobs hanging and this stupid umbrella hat on his head. The Indians through the years have been stereotyped as being fat, lazy, illiterate and just plain stupid, even in cartoons. In conclusion, what is the artist trying to prove? This is 1985, the human body is beautiful but obese is sick (Obese 1985: 5).

Powless reminds people of what they do not want to see: the truth. Obesity is a real problem faced by some Native Americans, due to the drastic changes in diet since contact, lack of financial stability, and lack of dietary knowledge to provide proper food within the home.

Through examples of artists like Powless, we can see how contemporary Native artists are using humour to deconstruct stereotypical images of Native people and out-of-date systems of cultural representation. This deconstruction process that involves humour is what Native artist Gary Farmer calls “toxic humor” (Ryan 1999:168). Cree playwright Tomson Highway believes the toxicity of Native humour is necessary for the healing to

take place: “the poison must first be exposed” (Longclaws 1989). No matter how toxic their message, the humour in Native art has demonstrated how Native people keep from the anguish they suffer from due to results of colonialism. Humour seems to be therapy for the wounds by the powerful remedy of laughter.

The above artists noted are all examples of contemporary Native artists who use a type of humour as a device for handling the pain and reality of forced marginality within our society. Arthur Koestler, the author of *The Act of Creation*, also insists that humour is medicine for the soul.

Laughter, as the cliché has it, is “liberating”, i.e. tension-relieving. Relief from stress is always pleasurable, regardless whether it was caused by hunger, sex, anger, or anxiety. Under ordinary circumstances such relief is obtained by some purposeful activity which is appropriate to the nature of the tension. When we laugh, however, the pleasurable relief does not derive from a consummatory act which satisfies some specific need. On the contrary: laughter prevents the satisfaction of biological drives, it makes a man equally incapable of killing or copulating; it deflates anger, apprehension, and pride (Koestler 1975:51).

Koestler points out the healing aspect of the trickster figure that Native artists also employ; however, Koestler does not include a direct analysis of trickster humor but he compares the “primitive” humor of Native people to that of children’s, insisting both are selfish. Koestler believes, “Jokes which appeal to children and primitive cruelty and boastful self-assertion are much in evidence, and the same is true of the historically earlier forms and the theories of the comic” (ibid:52). French Socialist Pierre Bourdieu gives explanation this narrow minded thinking: “The ideology according to which the most modern forms of non-figurative art are more directly accessible to the innocence of childhood or of ignorance than to the competence acquired by training” (Bourdieu 1993:226). In addition opposing Koestler’s theories is Luiseno-Diegueno artist James

Luna, whose opinion of tribal Native humour is much more sophisticated. Luna insists, “My appeal for humor in my work comes from Indian culture, where humor can be a form of knowledge, critical thought, and perhaps to just ease the pain. I think we Indians live in worlds filled with irony and I want to relate that in my works” (Nemiroff et al. 1992:192).

Koestler psychoanalyzes the potential reasons humour exists with art and culture, and studies two fundamental patterns in the act of creation, which divides laughter into two matrices, the intellectual path and an aesthetic experience: “Briefly, this means the perception of a situation or idea in two self-consistent but mutually incompatible frames of reference – what he [Koestler] calls the ‘disociation of two matrices’” (Babcock-Abrahams 1975:184). These theories could explain the trickster’s “double mindedness,” which French philosopher Henri Bergson defines as “creative and comic if it belongs simultaneously to two independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time” (ibid). Koestler’s theories to why humour is present within art and culture, seem to be in line with what Native artist have been saying all along, that the trickster is multilayered semiotic sign that is encoded within the communication of the trickster, which is challenging the misconceptions of Indian people and their culture.

The More Serious Trickster

However, not all Native artists are willing to display humour in their work; that is, they would rather get their message across in a more serious way. These artists who choose to create more sober work, often influenced by their residential school

experiences, have also been labeled “political artists” but are still creating work that employs trickster strategies. Bob Boyer, a Métis artist knows this well, he is labeled a political Native artist and associated with trickster art, substituting the typical canvas with blankets; this act is a powerful message, recalling a time not so long ago when the government’s treatment towards Native people was genocide through the distribution of blankets infested with small pox that nearly wiped out all the Nations indigenous to North America. His 1983 work entitled *A Government Blanket Policy*, Figure 20, is a representation of this very government act. Boyer explains the use of blankets in his work in an exhibition catalogue by the Edmonton Art Gallery:

I was thinking “blanket policy for Indian” – everyone always says a “blanket policy.” So the blanket policy of course is to overcome Indians. And one of the easiest ways to overcome Indians is with policies from the government. It’s frustrating for Indians. Policies, policies – they’re always changing them, manipulating them (Phillips 1991).

Boyer describes the symbolism of the blanket as a reference to the destruction of Indian culture and the continuous frustrations First Nations people still face in regard to government policy.

Carl Beam is also no stranger to the term political art, often creating stirring emotional themes of the residential school that inflicted ruthless tactics of assimilation. Beam attended residential school as a child, trying to understand the reasons why he was forced to attend. When I spoke with Beam on a casual visit to his Adobe home on Manitoulin Island, just after the World Trade Center was destroyed on September the 11th, 2001, he spoke of his generation’s pain and how the world around him influenced his current work. He showed me the beginnings of a painting that he was working on, about the destruction of the World Trade Center. Beam’s work *Forced Ideas in School*

Days, 1991, Figure 21, also exemplifies the serious nature of his work. Beam's following statement is text included within the work; it reflects his grave experiences of residential school:

I remember all my friends and I going to church every day because we were suppose to *change* from being *Native* to *non-native*, probably never white...and yet, in spite of severe brain-washing everyone did remain [N]ative...I'm sure Christ would have enjoyed that .

Like Beam, Jane Ash Poitras, a Cree/Chipewyan also attended Boarding School: *Sacred Heart* in Edmonton, Alberta. Poitras experiences are further expressed in her work, seen in *Family Blackboard*, 1989, Figure 22. Poitras makes no qualms about directly addressing the injustices and assimilation through the education system, in her work or in her statements about her life. In the 1992 exhibition *Indigena*, Poitras noted how the trickster gave her and the people the power to heal their assimilation wounds through the trickster's teachings. Poitras accepts as true that healing can be achieved through the power of spirituality, which she also believes the trickster offers, in his transformation abilities, as discussed last chapter, which Poitras finds instrumental. For Poitras, transformation that the trickster presents is critical for shifting these feelings of submissiveness, which was introduced to many Indigenous people of North American through residential school, into a feeling of well being.

Through the trickster role and figure, numerous artists have dedicated their work to empowerment and political agendas concerning First Nations people. Native artists are continuing to be motivated by their frustrations with the mainstream treatment and the numerous injustices that are endured daily by First Nations people. In turn, Native artists are producing powerful satire that will hopefully continue to re-educate all audiences using a new language that is based within traditional knowledge. Native curator Robert

Houle concludes this chapter best in his explanation of how Native artists are forced to create new languages for the sake of the existence of our long-established teachings. Houle believes that “[t]he new language has the power to evoke the supernatural creatures found in the meditative formalism of Haida graphic art, to echo the incantations recorded with a secret code on a Potawatomi prescription stick, and to summon the animal spirit found in the fetish assemblages of shamanistic art” (Rushing 1999:86). This chapter began by looking into the history of Indian art to understand how the trickster strategies are being practiced by Native artists to maintain a Native perspective. The next section analyzes these trickster tactics such as types of humour to indicate that contemporary Native artists are expressing a language that is serving as a reminder of First Nations identities and politics. One could conclude that the language found in Indian art is doings of the trickster.

Chapter Four

First Nations Artists Relationship to the Viewer

Art - drawing, painting - is an intelligence of some kind, the hand and the eye bringing the imagination down upon the picture plane; and in this a nearly perfect understanding of the act of understanding. Ha!

Someone looking into a glass at someone looking into a glass-transmitted to the fingertips, an understanding not of ice bears and fright but of these and more, a composed unity of fragments which is a whole.⁸

Some artists insist their art cannot exist without an audience, placing the viewer in a significant role to the artist. The spectator's observations are influenced by a number of circumstances, such as space, place, time, preconceived notions, education, and personal experiences that can either affect them on a conscious or unconscious level. Native artists have been known to study the state of affairs that affect the viewers, and play with their preexisting notions in an ironic trickster-like way, hoping of re-educating the audience's thoughts regarding First Nations people and their culture, as discussed in the last chapter. This chapter, however, will examine the First Nations artists and curators relationship to their audiences, and their hopes to give a better understanding of the Native perspective. Naturally all individuals bring their own history to a work of art and it would be impossible to study every individual response. I will look at how contemporary First Nations artists and curators claim to shift the control of contemporary exhibitions showcasing Indian art, and examine general critical responses of four pivotal exhibitions that have included Native art, in hope of understanding why contemporary Indian artists are concerned with sharing the Native point of view that impinges on the audience's response to First Nations culture. In First Nations artists and curators attempts to deliver

⁸ By Scott Momaday in the book *The Ancient Child*. New York: Dell Publishing Group, 1989

the Native perspective, which has not always been to the management of Native people themselves, this chapter will also expose the politics of viewer's role and how trickster's strategies that have been known to shift power that the audience reacts to.

Audience

However, before examining how Contemporary Native artist are attempting shift control and altering their audience's thinking, the viewer and their roles must be clear. In Leonard Diepeveen's essay "Art and Its Audience: The Women with Four Toes," he notes that the audience is secondary to self-expression; however, he also notes that the audience does have certain amount control of how the artist work receives mainstream attention. Diepeveen furthers to developed three categories that every viewer can be placed. Elizabeth McLuhan, a professor from York University, also suggests that there are various types of audiences especially when viewing Indian art, she describes:

I found one of the interesting things being in a Gallery that has a mandate which is international, primarily modern, is that the audiences are very different. From past experience I've found there is segregation of Indian Artists from other artists. There is a segregation from the art world, the world of critics and other writers. One of the surprising things to me at York University, besides that very general audience is, you take a show that you have done and presented somewhere else, and you put it in this other gallery, and I'm amazed at how different audiences can be. The audience there was quite amazing (Young Man 1988:32).

The relationship between the audience and art has been observed by artists for a long time, and parodied in Figure 23, *Barry's World*, which notes the association between art and audience and the very "foundations of Western art history" according to Young Man (Young Man 1998:22). In this illustration, it is obvious that artists have been altering the audience's perception throughout history; this is a component of the trickery the artist

possesses. In this trickery, we imagine the artist and audience relationship at the control of an antagonist artist.

According to Diepeveen, there are three types of audiences, the specific, the personal, and the incidental audience. Diepeveen has provided examples of each which will be summarized. The first, the specific audience, is not so much defined by the individuals who make it up, but is rather defined how that artist perceives them. “The specific audience is an audience whose carefully delineated parameters ideally situate it to receive a specific work of art” (Diepeveen & Van Laar 1998:81). The second, the personal audience, is opposite of the specific audience. The personal audience derives from the claim that the artist makes art for themselves. Diepeveen suggests that this category may have come to be from the concept that the artist is as genius. And lastly, the incidental audience is a combination of both the personal and specific audience. According to Diepeveen, these three categories may not be precisely exact in all occasions, but they work for most cases and most audiences can be described by one if not all three of these groupings.

In this chapter, four highly publicized exhibitions that have and have not been at the control of Native people themselves, are analyzed for their types of audiences’ responses. All four exhibitions and the artist statements’ included in this section will clarify Diepeveen type’s of audiences. Lastly Native artists’ statements are included to underline contemporary Native artists’ and curators’ agenda to negotiate space that change stereotypes in the mainstream, by utilizing trickster strategies in the process of deconstructing myths about Indian art and culture.

The Gaze

However, to have a handle on how the trickster has played tricks on his audience and how these artists are shifting authority within contemporary First Nations art, aspects of Vision theory need to be explored. In examining the gaze that resides within Vision theory, which is the lens in which the audience looks, can it be determined how an individual will perceive something on a conscious or unconscious level. To examine the gaze's effects, psychoanalysis is employed to understand the ownership of the gaze that is influenced by a history of patriarchy within our society. The gaze in our society is considered Caucasian and male, not male literally, but active as masculine within our language and other structures within our society that in turn affects unconsciously affects the way we see the world (Snitow et al. 1983:30). Feminist theory and Native American studies appear to share a concern for the unfairness the gaze presents.

Gayatri Spivak and bell hooks, both feminists of color, have studied the function of the gaze and its implications to women and minorities. Anne Kaplan's essay "Is the gaze male?" exposes the gaze as masculine. Kaplan believes psychoanalysis is a useful tool to deconstruct Hollywood films and to show how the media perpetuates patriarchal society. Evidence of this masculine gaze is the endless male dominated leading roles in cinema, excluding women from positions of power. A similar note of concern can be that these roles are usually occupied by Caucasian men. The discovery of the ownership of the gaze in many ways was exposed by feminist theorist, which has also opened the door for the "Other" to speak on her own behalf. However, some claim that acceptance of marginalized spaces forces people into an overcrowded room, and which sometimes leaves people competing for voice.

Hooks furthers her theories by linking the gaze with the metaphor of the mask. She describes herself as wearing a mask, a double mask that she wears as a woman of ethnicity, because of the ownership of the gaze by the “white” male. This mask can be explained further by Ann Kaplan’s location of the male gaze within cinema and media, which is thought to mimic our society’s social structure. Kaplan explains that women’s roles within media and cinema “do not function as signifiers for a signified (a real woman), as sociological critics have assumed, but signifier and signified have been elided into a sign that represents something in the male unconscious” (Snitow et al. 1983:30). From this, it can be seen that neither the marginalized nor women do not own their image and that Vision theory investigations help clarify the challenges that the First Nations artists have to endure in their attempts to make art for an audience that does not always share the same Native perspective.

Anti-ocularcentricism & Ocularcentricism

To shift control of the gaze, vision strategies can be analyzed through aspects of scopic regimes which examines the authoritative apparatus of post-colonialism and the history of relationships of power. According to Bryson, scopic regimes are “a tool of domination-by men of women, by white imperialists of other races, by scientists of nature” (Rushing 1999:100). In other words, scopic regimes are a way to understand ocularcentrism and visual bias of Western art discourses and its willingness to deny the Native perspective.

Art historian Ruth Phillips insists in her essay “Art History and the Native-made Object” that these scopic regimes can be devices to uncover ocularcentricism. She

explains that anti-ocularcentricism is a critique that has grown out of responsiveness to visual art; in particular to postmodernism. Phillips further notes that initially anti-ocularcentricism agenda was to removing itself from modernism and recover the primacy of the visual experience. Phillips suggests that anti-ocularcentricism and ocularcentricism critiques have been helpful for many marginal artists because it has given people a new way to understand the location of marginalized artists and shift these relationships of power.

The Marginal “Other” is a Trickster

According to Phillips, Native artists have utilized this ocularcentric critique to examine the politics of vision and their marginalized position. Classical sociologist Robert Park and his student Everett Stonequist also describe artists as marginal and different, they believe the marginal artist is “the boundary of two cultural areas where the occupying group tends to combine the traits of both cultures” (Babcock-Abrahams 1975:149). According to Stonequist, then, a marginal person is between two cultures, possessing dual sociality. Similar to this train of thought is Babcock-Abrahams’ essay “A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and his Tales Reconsidered”, that concludes that the trickster and marginal person who possess a dual personality. However, within First Nations culture the artist nor the trickster are considered to be marginal, maybe on the periphery at movements but their roles are thought to be important to the whole community. According to Jicarilla Apache philosopher V. F Cordova:

[A Native] artist need not be a Bohemian on the fringe of society, and perhaps more related to the madman than to the healer and the scientist. The artist, like the scientist, is a seeker of knowledge. He examines the world and portrays what he

has learned in order to share that knowledge with his community (Waters 2004: 151).

However, according Anishnabec writer and authority on the trickster Gerald Vizenor, “The trickster upsets the balance, if for no other reason than to keep people alert to their own survival and power to heal. The crossbloods are tricksters; they settle the new worlds in their own blood” (Vizenor 1991:68). In this Vizenor, notes also this duality personality of marginal people in his own position as being marginal to the mainstream and a marginal person within the already marginal space as a “mixedblood,” which he claims as being truly trickster, marginalized from the marginalized. Vizenor believes the hybridization of “[m]ixedbloods are the best tricksters, the choice tricks on the tribal bloodline, like these mongrels on the porch” (Vizenor 1988:xii). This metaphor, although seemingly negative, gives control to the marginalized. Sociologist Orrin Klapp, who sees the marginal person as one who is not controlled by society, and defines marginality as being outside or between the boundaries of dominant groups (Klapp 1954:21-34) However, like Vizenor Elizabeth Atkinson sees the positive worth of marginality, she shares her feelings in her essay “Deconstructing Boundaries,” where she describes embracing the “in-between-ness” and being excited by this continuous space of “redefinition and discovery” (Atkinson 2001:311).

Marginality exists when dichotomy exists, and when boundaries are crossed. Anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep analyses the recent usage of the term marginal within anthropology, and finds marginality a process more closely linked to his three descriptions of separation, liminality, and lastly regression. Anthropologists Victor Turner has expanded on the anthropological terminology surrounding “liminal process” or in-between-ness. Babcock-Abrahams has also located the trickster in places of transition

and temporality, which confuse reality and illusion. In Babcock-Abrahams' overview on the trickster, she insists that the role of trickster is needed as a "part of social life without which social organization would be impossible" (Babcock-Abrahams 1975:152). Babcock-Abrahams concludes that marginality should not be viewed as a residual space, but rather symbolically important as a social context that includes negative patterns or an anti-structure of our culture, which in turn can help us better understand ourselves.

Is marginality a space of resistance for the Native perspective?

Native artist Loretta Todd does not agree with a universal approach to marginal space. In her essay "What More Do They Want?," Todd argues that Native art being forced into marginal space, and in turn being reduced to support Western ideologies of postmodernism. Todd warns that when Native art accepts this space of marginality, it is then being evaluated by the Western aesthetics and history, and supports dominant culture's position as the authority. Todd encourages Native artists to seek a unity that does not place Native art as a participant in Western theoretical discourse, but rather places Native artists as leaders for their own dialogue. She quotes Gitksan artist Doreen Jensen to support her theory. Jensen notes the importance of this unity: "How will Indian art and artists survive as distinct peoples and art forms if they continue to allow only outsiders to ...interpret the importance and value of the art and influence future generations of Indian artists?" (McMaster & Martin 1992:77).

Representation is one of the biggest challenges postmodernism faces: who will speak for whom? This is one of the very concerns Native people and artists have had since contact or rather since history had been written for them. Feminist theorist bell

hooks is familiar with this concept of speaking from her own cultural experience as the “other” and the difficulties to find a voice in and out of African American communities. She finds that often marginalized people isolate themselves in the space of the “other.” However also hooks believes those who do hold on to the “other;” can beat poverty, and nihilism. They “invent spaces of radical openness” but also need a stronger community for continuous support (hooks 2000:148). In this, hooks suggest it is possible within marginal space for Native artists to have voice, and suggests that this space is a necessary for survival. On the other hand, feminist theorist Elspeth Probyn’s essay “A Problematic: Speaking” notes how cultural studies should not be weighed down by cultural agendas, because they are wrapped in politics and do not consider the individual. However, Probyn does note it is important to understand a people or cultures and to have them speak from their own voices, because they “convince us of another level of abstraction: of their being, their individual selves” (Probyn 1988: 29).

In other words, these feminists seem to accept marginality as a space of resistance because it fosters voice from within. In fact hooks insists that this space offers “one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (hooks 2000:150). Similarly, Babcock-Abrahams links marginality with the trickster figure and finds power within this space, as does Atkinson who voices the following about her own experience with in-between space and being trickster:

Seeing myself as a trickster might enable me, at last, to abandon the identity of angel and make a serious and playful exploration of my multiple identities in a more genuine attempt to represent my messy selves to the world. Neither one thing nor the other, I am both and all, not in order to please and appease, but in order to do justice to myself as a human being (Atkinson 2001:314).

However, not all people find freedom in this marginal space, such as many Native artist who like Young Man insists that Indian art “does not deserve to be allocated the lowly status of ‘marginal art’” and sees this space as forced on Indian art and limiting to its development (McMaster & Martin 1992:85). This lack of acceptance of marginality space from Native artists, may very well be linked to the Native perspective on the trickster as an integral part of the community and as well as the artist who is thought to encompass trickster like qualities. Even though the artist and trickster might be considered to operate from a different metaphysical make-up, they are considered essential to order of the universe.

The Visual Experience

Visual experience is clearly a political experience, and Indian artists have been more than eager to take command of what they produce and how their art is perceived by a Native and a non-Native audience. They have been given more opportunity to do so since 1992, when two critical contemporary art exhibitions questioned the historical and contemporary situations of First Nations people. Both exhibitions demonstrated the differences in the visual experience and brought public awareness of the Native perspective on colonial history. Essays included in the exhibit’s text *Indigena* by Young Man and Todd support this, these authors insist that “before any kind of meaningful visual exchange can take place between Native and non-Native peoples, the dominant perspective must be dismantled and room be made for Aboriginal perspectives” (Jessup & Bagg 2002:252).

Andrea Naomi Walsh, the author of “Complex Sightings: Aboriginal Art and Intercultural Spectatorship,” examines of both Todd and Young Man’s essays in the text, and concludes from the examination of both essays included in *Indigena* that the artists’ connection with the viewer derives from spectatorship and the pleasure of viewing. Walsh calls relationship “active vision,” which she describes as demonstrating the visual exchanges between the artist and the audience through visual strategies (ibid:254). In this, the audience role is seen as essential for the Native artist not only of what the audience sees, but also how the viewer sees it, and furthermore, how these visual strategies change the way the audiences can see. This relationship between the artist and audience can be observed more closely through the following exhibitions, all of which claim on some level to give a better understanding of North American Indigenous culture and its people; however, may have merely presented political and historical inaccuracies from a Native perspective.

a) Primitivism in the 20th Century

In 1984, the MoMA exhibition *Primitivism in the 20th Century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* caused a serious public reaction as a result of the curatorial efforts of William Rubin and Kirk Varnedose who juxtaposed “primitive” artifacts with works from leading modernist painters, causing decontextualizing of “primitive” cultures. Diepeveen concurs and points out that the “primitive” art incorporated in the exhibition was included to support modern art’s agenda. Diepeveen believes “[t]he show’s strategy was to see these pairings in Western terms”; this pairing was supported “in his [Rubin’s] lengthy introduction to the catalogue, the show’s primary purpose was the further illumination of modern art” (Diepeveen & Van Laar 1998:88). Rubin intended to

compare and shed new light onto the “primitive” objects, in hopes to elevate this to “great” art. Rubin argued in defense of his curatorial efforts and noted that the non-native perspective can be expanded, if the universal notion of the “primitive” is recognized within each and every one of us. Note Figure 6 which provides an example of how this decontextualization occurred; a Grebo mask from an unknown artist and date was juxtaposed with Pablo Picasso’s *Guitar*, 1912.

Rubin and Varnedose should be held accountable for the ethnocentrism they presented. Critic Thomas McEvielly agrees and faults the curators who placed the “primitive” works beside modernist works for modernism’s own justification. McEvielly explains, “It is a simple fact, both on linguistics and on ethnological grounds, that the makers and users of the tribal objects in the MoMA show did not regard them at all as we regard our art. Why then should our concept prevail over theirs in discussions of their objects” (Clifford 1985:50). McEvielly debates back and forth with curators Rubin and Varnedose in *Artforum* magazine on the question of whether or not Aboriginal objects can be classified as art. McEvielly wrote in his rebuttal letter to Rubin, “Is it art? ...I did not say the tribal objects were not art, but that there were several senses in which something might be called art, and that some of these clearly don’t apply to the tribal objects” (McEvielly 1985:47). However, both curators seemingly share the following opinion with Collin Rhodes, who feels “primitive” art should be located within the dominant ideas in the West. Rhodes believes:

Cultural primitivism should, therefore, be regarded as the category under which all other primitivism manifestations are gathered. Given its importance, it is worth remembering that the civilized standard to which Lovejoy and Boaz refer is itself relative and prone to shifting definitions. The cultural discontent that characterizes Primitivism in modern art must be positioned specifically in relation to the dominant ideas operating in the West in the first half of the twentieth

century, represented by materialism in politics and science, and positivism in philosophy (Rhodes 1994:20).

Months later in *Art in America*, James Clifford was the second to publically critique the exhibition for its incomplete context. According to Clifford, the tribal objects were exhibited for their formal properties that were not defined from a Native perspective but rather from a Western standards. Clifford's biggest concern was about the new function of the objects took while within the space of the gallery, which forced the audience to view "primitive" art in a different way from the original way they were meant to be interacted with (Clifford 1985:50).

Through this decontextualization of Native art, the need for Native people to be in control of their own art and exhibitions can be seen in this situation, in hopes of expanding the viewers' range of perception of creativity and knowledge of how historical objects come to be known as art. *Primitivism in the 20th Century* was a major exhibition that demonstrates that the art made by Indigenous people were being presented in an ethnocentric style. Unfortunately, the questions and concerns that surrounded Indian art that were highlighted in this 1984, exhibition did not bring a deeper awareness to the organizers of the 1988 exhibition *The Spirit Sings*, even though new commitments were being made to multiculturalism at this time.

b) The Spirit Sings

The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First People was held at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in honor of the Calgary Olympic Winter Games of 1988, and included more than five hundred objects from various ethnographic collections. However, as previously noted, this exhibitions lack of contemporary Native artists, and the exclusion of Mi'gmaq and Maliseet, frustrated many because of its misrepresentation

of First Nations people and culture. This exhibition's intentions may have been showing diversity and distinctive cultures, but this goal was not achieved because the materials were appropriated into Western systems of classifications of fine art. The exhibition was also protested because of the Lubicon land claim that was draining the Lubicon people in their drawn-out court case with Shell Canada, sponsors of the exhibition. Many efforts were made to boycott by Lubicon supporters and staff. However, according to anthropologist Julia D. Harrison, the museum did not receive any written communication from the Labicon about their campaign to boycott Shell (Harrison 1988:6).

Also protesting the exhibition was Native artist Rebecca Belmore, who can be seen in Figure 24, entitled *Exhibit 671B, 12 January 1988*. Belmore's disapproval of the exhibition shaped her installation *Exhibit 671B*, which was open public performance. Anthropologist Charlotte Townsend-Gault describes Belmore's installation as sharing similar concerns and frustrations as the Lubicon people:

The components of Rebecca Belmore's museum installation for the museum without walls - frame, pose, gender, site, audience, and the temperature, punitive only to those who lack the skills to cope with the Canadian winter – combined to make it more than art-smart and therefore comfortingly co-optable. Mutely eloquent, it fused the apparently stultifying hopelessness of the Lubicon situation with an ironic refusal of a "history" without time, social context, or human beings (Townsend-Gault 1991:66).

Cree artist and curator, Gerald McMaster believes that the problems *The Spirit Sings* faced, like so many Native art exhibitions do, is a historical problem that affects many pre-literate societies. These historical problems often lend themselves to be political issues, as both exhibitions' demonstrated. This occurs because of the usage "other" resulted in a miscommunication because of the curators' abs organizers' objectives that did not consider the Native perspective. Both exhibitions' drew attention

to a need for a sharper focus on the Native perspective within exhibitions displaying Indian art.

c) Land Spirit Power

The NGC hosted exhibition *Land Spirit Power*, which was the first of two contemporary Native art exhibitions held in 1992. *Land Spirit Power* hoped to be different from any other exhibition regarding Native Art because it intended to include the Native perspective. According to one of three curators Townsend-Gault, the exhibition goal was not to attempt “to represent fully the diversity of North American [N]ative cultural expression,” but was rather that have the works be representative of ways “to translate, transform, re-invent, [and] protect,” knowledge that is integral to these cultures” (Nemiroff et al. 1992:76). In other words, the exhibition was intended to illustrate the difference in relationship Native people share with the environment, spirituality, and knowledge. However, the Society for Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA) members and supporters do share this opinion. SCANA gave the curators advice to follow but did not take the opportunity to learn from those expert voices on Indian art. According to SCANA member Dr. Alfred Young Man, the exhibition kept “making the same historical and political errors” as prior exhibitions who did not consult the Native perspective thoroughly (Young Man, Memo 2006).

The NGC also published a text from the exhibition entitled *Land Spirit Power*, cataloging the exhibitions and the curators’ and artists’ own words and thoughts. Unlike with *The Spirit Sings*, all the artists included in *Land Spirit Power* had the opportunity to respond to the exhibition’s mission and goals and also to take into account their audience’s response. One of these artists to consider their audience is Tlingit artist Bob

Dempsey who feels his specific audience is the United States. Luiseno artist James Luna, also an involved artist with the exhibit, gives an example of his own specific audience:

I make work for Indian people first, that is to say, I do not make it for the approval of the people, but so that they will get it. This also helps me to keep rooted and not get too “artsy fartsy.” I make the work simple in its message, but thought-provoking in its content as well; I consider this to be Indian logic (Nemiroff et al. 1992: 191).

However, in some cases, the artists’ primary concern is not the audience; this is called “a personal audience,” according to Diepeveen. Winnebago artist Truman Lowe might classify his audiences as personal, as he hopes to find an audience after his work has been created and does not do make it for a specific group and hope that they will understand what he is trying to communicate.

Luna, unlike Lowe, takes into consideration his audience in his art-making process. He believes that the messages within his work are some thing that only Native people will understand. In this, Luna describes a knowledge that may be exclusive to Native people; this could be considered turning the tables on a mainstream that has kept Native art out of elite spaces and prevented from being evaluated on its own merit.

d) Indigena

Indigena was the second contemporary Native art exhibition of the same year in 1992. One of the main themes within the exhibition included the miscommunication between the new settlers and the indigenous people of North America, which had serious repercussions for Native people. *Indigena* supported the Native perspective and insisted this was integral to the analysis of any Native art. Most if not all of the works included in the exhibition rejected old ethnocentric notions, and deconstructed the colonial

process. McMaster and Martin, the editors for the exhibition's text, describe the exhibition's specific agenda and themes for the exhibit:

Many artists concentrate on issues of perspective regarding historical events that have been previously ignored or overlooked by European-focused historians. They not only bring these events into sharp focus, but also attempt to provide a resolution to the problems. Thus, art functions as an expressive outlet for ideas of change, with a re-evaluation of history as the artist's primary objective (McMaster & Martin 1992:19).

McMaster and Martin included acclaimed Native writers and artists' thoughts on the position of Indigenous people in Canada today. These are a people who were not experiencing a celebration of the five hundred year anniversary of Columbus' arrival, but were rather feeling the cost of cultural genocide and therefore were celebrating a survival, and the continuance of Native life. Loretta Todd's and Young Man's essays for the catalogue, asks the audience of Indian art to recognize the Native perspective. Both essays examine how Aboriginal artists are critiquing from within, and how contemporary Native artists are including the Native perspective. Both essays conclude that Native artists need to control what the spectator sees from the Native artists' own purpose of re-education of the general public which has historically been misinformed. The final essay within the text for the exhibition is written by Native author Lenore Keeshig-Tobais who proposes that the traditional trickster is a "care taker of indigenous values," and that the "[t]rickster has once again achieved central position in Aboriginal traditions" through contemporary Native art (ibid:21). Through these words, Keeshig-Tobias gives hope for the autonomy and continued existence of Aboriginal cultures.

Negotiating Space & Stereotypes

In 1992, McMaster undertook another curatorial project, not within a gallery space but rather within the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology. The exhibition was entitled *Indian-kitsch*; the exhibition's objective was to question consumer-based and accepted representation of Indians and their culture. However, this became a tricky task for McMaster and Davis Cunningham, the exhibition's designer, because of what the space's history presented: "[A]nthropology museums often represent objects, viz. 'material culture,' of non-Western peoples, whereas art museums represent the history of 'aesthetic' objects by Western peoples" (Greenburg et al.1996:195). McMaster believes that representation of history is problematic for the contemporary Native artists because Native artists are trapped by two representational devices. McMaster further explains that contemporary Native do "not want to be treated as 'objects' in the former, yet [are] being marginalized by the latter. They realized in both cases they had little or no voice" (ibid). This under-representation has sparked new dialogues for Native artists, in terms of negotiating new spatial possibilities. McMaster concludes that anthropology museums can be transformed, and becomes space to discuss negotiations between the museum and Native people themselves.

Having to manipulate space and stereotypes requires artistic strategies from Native artists and curators, who have to make use of trickster tactics. Cree/Chippewyan artist Jane Ash Poitras became familiar with these trickster strategies; when she was invited to exhibit at the provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton, *Northwind Dreaming, Fort Chipewyan 1988-1988*. Poitras was asked to submit what she views as stereotypical Native art. She recalls what she submitted was not what the curator had in

mind, and her unexpectedly ironic titles of her paintings poked fun at the Western history of categorizing everyday living tasks of Indigenous people (Steiner 1985:62). Her titles included *Fort Chip Sewing Club* (Figure 25), *Fort Chip Canoe Club*, and *Fort Chip Lonely Heart Club*. In Poitras' overt political reaction to colonial attempts classify Indigenous lifestyles, the trickster is reminiscent; she recalls the trickster within herself:

It was a commission show and I would have never done it unless I was asked by [the curator] to do that, but we had to bring it down to her level so that she could understand it, right?... I painted them very pretty... I showed her a couple [and she said] "Oh, isn't that sweet." I said, "Yeah, isn't it just beautiful, look at this nice blue." "Oh, there's blue in there. Oh, you use that so nice." And I said, "Yes, didn't I?" [with] my evil smile and my little Weesakkeejak tail... waving in the wind [laughs] (Ryan 1999: 96).

Like Poitras who makes use of the trickster to deconstruct the existing mindset of the mainstream by examining museum practice, so does Blood artist Joan Cardinal-Schubert. However, Cardinal-Schubert insists that the humour in her work is synonymous to the trickster role but is not a strategy. She says, "The humour is just there... I can't do anything about it. It's been with me for a long time...it's part of who I am" (ibid: 144). In fact, she is fed up art theory and she prefers to talk about her experiences, which she feels is the larger picture of things. What Cardinal-Schubert suggests is that the Native perspective is not comprehended by the mainstream, nor should it because history's representation of Native art in gallery and museum spaces has been inaccurate. Art historian Ruth Phillips suggests a change within the gallery; she believes that "we [the gallery] will have to be open to new kinds of expressive spaces that these objects create around themselves. If we do this, their presence will have a transformative effect on the art gallery, opening it up to new experiences of the visual cultures of both Native and non-Native peoples (Jessup & Bagg 2002: 67).

Through the examples of the above exhibitions and First Nations artist and curatorial statements, it is clear that contemporary Native artists have set in motion the control and authority that is essential, to maintain the representation of Indian art. In these Native artists' and curators' attempts to communicate the Native perspective, trickster tactics of deconstruction and boundary crossing have been rediscovered and the "trickster shift," that was coined by the late Carl Beam, is revealed. Through these artists and curators attempts reeducate their audiences about past exhibitions showcasing Indian art, they are recognized for the ethnocentrism that they have presented in past exhibitions, which have been contemporary Indian artists and curators foremost concern, to achieve an accurate historical and political representation of Indian art and culture. In these contemporary exhibitions that demand the Native perspective as its own authority, visual politics and the role of the viewer is understood by present-day artists and curators, who communicate with their target and untargeted audience to take hold of the Native perspective through their own living example of what it truly means to be First Nations, which is not a mere support for mainstream ideologies and trends that will be examined further in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

Trickster Business

I would like to simply point out that the trickster is only one figure in Native cosmology and that he is balanced out by many others. Trickster is not the cultural norm, which is the reason many people laugh at him. He is goofy, sometimes even dangerous; at other times, his jokes work toward cultural transformation, and often he is a little of all these things.⁹

Muskogee Creek/Cherokee writer Craig Womack suggests a dissolving border between types of trickster figures; trickster discourse has always been about ideas of dissolving boundaries. Recently these ideas of dissolving boundaries and deconstruction have been being analyzed through post-modern theories. Whereas many contemporary Native artists are insisting on the survival of a traditional dissolving boundary trickster, who expresses changes, freedom and the Native perspective. Indian artists, for survival our culture are re-educating the audiences on the traditional role of the trickster, who is a customary sign of freedom for creativity. Loretta Todd clarifies this point:

Western culture is not the only one that seeks to know. The quest to find the essence, the unifying structure, “the mind of god,” is shared across cultures. In native cultures we too have stories in which our Prometheus – a trickster – seeks out fire or the sun, tricking his father, or a great chief, or an old woman, to give up the flame or light so that the people can have warmth and see the day (Claxton et al. 2005: 155).

What Todd makes clear is that Native reality also seeks further knowledge, after all the trickster on an expedition of understanding. Todd furthers her argument and spells out the difference between Judeo-Christian belief and Native reality; she notes that Native reality does not separate ideas from the world, as noted previously by Deloria. Todd,

⁹ Womack, Craig. *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*. Minneapolis: The University of Minneapolis Press, 1999.

rather, believes that Native reality has always been about our spirit being linked to the land and all living things on it, resembling string theory, which explains how all forms of life, are connected. These differences in the perspectives and on what the “trickster shift” is have been at the centre of the theoretical questions surrounding Indian art, albeit in attempts to understand it, and have resulted in our art being more difficult to locate from its original Native perspective and to be evaluated by the mainstream theories of postmodernism.

Postmodernism in Relation to the Trickster

Perhaps, with the force of his jump the trickster broke a wind that released postmodernism and the chaos theory into western consciousness that is in great need of deconstruction and renewal.¹⁰

First Nations’ consciousness and its lexicon have no doubt become a trend, and have acquired a relationship with the latest theories of postmodernism, which is also discursive by nature. This has made both trickster discourse and postmodernism similar. Their likenesses include their attraction to deconstruction and reconstruction of mainstream thinking. German scholar Gerhard Hoffmann explains postmodernism’s deconstruction and reconstruction, and its link to Indian culture. He believes that postmodernism “brings the task of twofold perspectives involving the active deconstruction of boundaries and privileges as well as the active reconstruction of man’s relationship with the environment in which he lives through a dialogue with nature. (Graburn 1993:262). In this, he suggests that art is a reconstruction of a holistic worldview, akin to the Native perspective. And also in the way that postmodern art “no longer possesses an unquestioned and unquestioning frame of *aesthetic* reference” and

¹⁰ From unknown source at Humboldt State University home page.

but remains ironic and is familiar with free play (ibid:265). This unbounded aesthetic reference is comparable to the previously noted ultimate freedom the trickster represents within the First Nations perspective.

According to Hoffmann, because of postmodernism's large influence this freedom occurs on a global scale. In Hoffmann's description of mass global aestheticization of postmodernism, parallels Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva's explanation of an Indigenous aestheticization, which dates back to the early collective ideas at IAIA in the early 1960's. An Indigenous aesthetic can be defined through the shared experience of what is "distinct about living in an indigenous community, not just giving you what is important to them personally" but what is important to the collective (Claxton et al. 2005:174). Masayesva describes how an Indigenous aesthetic can be located in notion of the interrelationship or as First Rider calls a "spider web" of relations (First Rider 1994:15) Native artist and curator Steven Loft also confirms, in his essay "Aboriginal Media Art and the Postmodern Conundrum," an Indigenous aesthetic, however Loft questions the lexicon to use to describe Native art:

Critical discourse must be at the heart of this dialogue, and while not refuting other theoretical constructs, we must shift the discussion to the issue of cultural meaning. Do we widen the terminology we use when discussing Native art, or do we create our own lexicon? Is the work Postmodernist or does it reside in its own historiography of art? (Claxton et al. 2005:90).

Nevertheless, Loft continues to note that creativity and communication came to be because of the development of oral traditions that include the trickster. The trickster is also believed by Loft to be like a form of technology through the trickster's shape shifting abilities, who is always putting forth change that Native reality embraces and accepts. As a result, Loft believes that the trickster who is associated with

communication and creativity has always been consistent with advancement and development because of the trickster ability to change and transform. This thinking seems to harmonize with French Socialist Pierre Bourdieu who sees sociology as a weapon against social oppression. Bourdieu explains in his research that uncovers such groupings like that of Indian art are code breakers for elite thoughts on art, and everyday life because of the difference that Native art presents in its meaning (Bourdieu 1993:226).

The Trickster Paradigm as a Standard for Freedom

As previously examined, these changes or transformations are equated with the trickster character, which does not possess a specific definition, as definitions are too conclusive and final within Native philosophy. The continuous flux allows the trickster to be “just is,” as a result of the Native philosophy of all living things belonging in a constant state of flux, forever changing and indefinite. Therefore, no exacting definition can be attached to the trickster or his role; however, it is critical to understand the importance of transformation and boundary-crossing possibilities through the Native metaphysical reality, where the trickster is located. Métis curator Catherine Mattes explains transformation, although she refers to this as a translation. She states,

“[T]ranslations can loosely be defined as the act of expressing the sense of one language into another parlance or form of representation. When applied to visual languages, translation can transcend the boundaries of specific movements and discourses and does not bind artists by locating them in (or up against) a particular realm” (Watson 2001:36).

Transformation is also what Anishnabec author Gerald Vizenor describes as an aspect of “trickster discourse.” Vizenor associates the trickster with ultimate freedom due to the tricksters transformation process and tricksters discourse is found in a “multiplicity of

authoritative voices,” which finds “expression in multilayered communication and simultaneous conversations, in surprise connection and ‘narrative chance’” (Vizenor 1989:x).

Vizenor's own examination of trickster discourse discovers that, according to the Western thinker, the trickster fits into mainstream postmodern theories; he calls this misplacement a “pleasurable misreading” that he also believes is a part of trickster discourse. Vizenor clarifies that postmodernism is what liberates tribal narratives because “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” (Vizenor 1989:278). From this, Vizenor concludes postmodernism’s liberation is in the innovation of the text and describes the trickster as sign for freedom. The trickster’s ambiguous character has also been studied in Hyde’s book *Trickster Makes This World*, who notes that “it is possible that there is no real self behind the shifting masks [of the trickster], or that the real self lies exactly there, in the moving surfaces and not beneath” (Hyde 1989:54). This metaphor that Hyde links to the trickster, also suggests that this might very well may be the final space the trickster can enter; where the “trickster becomes so elusive that he disappears, as a magic trick, into the ambiguity of the text [or art] itself” (Lock 2004:8).

This ultimate freedom that the trickster metaphorically presents gives Native artists the liberty to fully express the reality that has been far too long suppressed by the influence of the dominant mainstream thinking. Phillips suggests a “new” critique from

the Native perspective, which might also be with Native artist's traditional approach. She believes that Native people are generally concerned about their own critique and its control, because of the history that has been imposed upon them. She explains,

[Native people] have been disempowered in a certain way - and/or something in the Native tradition that has survived as a value, as a way of dealing with people in groups, is fundamentally non-confrontational, I think. There's a great emphasis on talking things out and arriving at consensus. And I think what [the artists] are doing is talking things out with us now..." (Hutcheon 1991:1).

Phillips describes a dialogue that is required from the Native perspective on colonial outcomes, which is something that most Native artists have been forced to confront during their artistic endeavors. How Native artists and curators should deal with these effects of colonialism within art is something that some feel that needs to be addressed in a trickster like way, which is familiar with their own healing and education process. In fact, as this research has noted, Native artists are utilizing the trickster and his strategies, which threatens a change for Indian art. However, Seneca artist and curator Tom Hill states his concerns for change in his New York presentation:

Let's use this time to rethink this, these ideas. Are we prepared to change? And if we don't change what does it mean? And if we do change what does it mean?

However, Mohawk artist Shelly Niro sees changes as required modifications occurring as a continuance, and suggests either moving forward within the circle or stepping back, as long as these changes begin at a spiritual level for the sake of appropriate direction.

It's a way of making that circle a full circle instead of being at the end of the line and being dumped on all the time. If we continue the circle around or take it back, then from a spiritual point of view, it'll be a fresh start. We can start over again. (*It Starts with a Whisper* 1993)

Niro's approach to change is a practice shared by many within Native communities. In art and life, these shifts are what Hill and many other Native artists and curators refer to

as trickster tactics and what Hill believe is a new levels of consciousness that the artist and by the audience understands. The late Anishnabec artist Carl Beam terms these occurring changes or the “new” dialogue that some have referred, as the “trickster shift,” which he seen as the blend of traditional values and present day resources (Ryan 1999:283).

Complexities in Communication

*I promised myself when I got here I wouldn't try to pull any of this elder stuff on you -like [expounding on] the cosmic wisdom of Native people.
I said, I'll leave that to the elders, and just tell people that I'm a practising artist...
In this context, probably, nobody would recognize a shaman if they'd seen one right now.
They're looking for an old paradigm. The trickster shift, they can't recognize that thing.
Well, I've been practicing that kind of stuff for quite a while - in my own estimation of course -
I'm quite an accomplished magician, a real magician.¹¹*

These claims by Native artists such as Hill and Beam that the “trickster shift” is present within contemporary Indian art, are aware and concerned of its communication relatable to the lexicon of postmodernism, which many claim is due to its complexities. Native artist Loretta Todd is leery of this approach that accepts the trickster as a large number of authoritative non-Native voices over Natives voices because of the history of colonial domination over Indian art. Todd hopes that Native art will have its own authority that is shared among its own collective philosophies. She feels that “[w]hen we assert our own meaning and philosophies of representation we render the division irrelevant, and maintain our Aboriginal right to name ourselves” (McMaster & Martin 1992:75). Todd suggests that the reason Native art is being defined by postmodernism

¹¹ By Carl Beam at the opening reception for the exhibition *Indigena: Perspectives of Indigenous People on Five Hundred Years*, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec, 16 April 1992.

and modernism is that Native people recognize the authority of the endorsers, recorders and buyers of Indian art.

More recently, postmodern discourse has allowed space and validity for contemporary Native artists, permitting them access to the mainstream, and this in turn has changed attitudes towards Indian art. However, Todd worries that when such spaces are accepted, so is the Western history that confines Indian art. Phillips concurs and suggests that postmodernism should replace “the notion of the universal ‘history of art’ with a number of discrete ‘histories of art’—the art of women, of different social class, of different ethnic groups” (Phillips 1989:11). However, Todd’s and Alfred Young Man’s essays included in *Indigena* agree that Indian art has been for far too long blended in into a universal art history. Both essays inform their readers that Native artists should be voicing their own history and controlling how their art is supposed, for the “purpose of re-telling histories and creating contemporary narratives from Aboriginal perspectives” (Jessup & Bagg 2002:252).

Aside from the problematic umbrella that postmodernism presents to the cultural identity of Indian art, many First Nations artists are exhibiting in contemporary galleries and are being included within a postmodern discourse, sharing histories, narratives, and spaces with the “other” marginal artists, bringing artists together from various ethnic backgrounds and styles into the gallery, in hopes of a non-hierarchical redefinition of art. Lucy Lippard’s text *Mixed Blessings*, notes these margins for the “other” artist and puts forth the effort to survey this nearly unfamiliar space to the mainstream. In Lippard’s study she does not wish to describe “other” artist as belonging to a melting

pot, but in fact warns her reader of the harms this has, and rather explores the individuality of the artists from various backgrounds. Lippard describes:

[“Other”] artists often act in the interstices between the old and the new, in the possibility of space that are as yet socially unrealizable. There they create images of a hopeful or horrible future that may or may not come to be. But artists are also often distanced from the world and from the people they hope to be envisioning for and with. The challenge to represent oneself and one’s community is sometimes ignored in favor of denial of difference. Confronted by the overwhelming responsibility of self-representation, yet often deprived of the tools with which to achieve it, some deracinated artists of color escape into the obfuscatory “personal” and political apathy, distancing themselves from the “ghettos” of ethnic identity seen by the mainstream as parochial and derivative (Lippard 1990:8).

Lippard does admit to finding similar themes of oppression and visual acts of crossing of these margins, such as Loretta Todd, who expresses her frustration with this new access into the mainstream:

I am still expected to discuss my culture and explore my imagination through “their” language, in terms of the traditional versus the contemporary, where Native is still inscribed with the outsider’s “fixed values and practices.” In order to participate in contemporary cultural production, my language/ imagination is expected to be expressed through the language of modernism, or through postmodernism where I am required to eschew what is “sentimental” or “naïve.” Should I suggest a Native aesthetic, or pursue issues of appropriation, charges of essentialism are made (McMaster & Martin 1992:76).

Todd’s statements are not unfamiliar to other Native contemporary artists who confront the same labels through their own artistic endeavors, such as Young Man who encourages Native artists in his essay “The Metaphysics of North American Indian Art” to challenge ethnocentric archetypes and the mainstream “ghetto-ization” of Indian art. In an interview with Young Man, I asked him if “ghetto-ization” was the same as “marginalization”, he replied that the question seemed pointless “both terms are negative in the extreme and when viewed from the Native perspective” and that they are different but one does lend

itself to the other, and that both “are issues fundamentally used as a means to keep Native art and artists out of the mainstream of Western art and museums- and education – as all cost, to the point of racism and Philistinism” (Young Man, e-mail 2006). He explains further:

[G]hetto-ization is different from marginalization in the sense that the first has to do with the ultra negative connotations which are applied to all objects and performances that have to do with First Nation or Native American art and artists, to the point that some Native artists have even refused to be identified as Native people, never mind being identified as Native artists. This was particularly acute in the 1980's where denial of ones Native identity relative to the artist's work was mainly practiced out of a fear of being "ghetto-ized" mainly because the influential racist white sector of society, the upper monied class who bought art mainly because they had the dollars, looked at Native art and artists as some kind of throw-back to a savage primitive people, which of course, was not true and that anthropological theory had, and still has, extremely negative racist connotations. It is still in evidence in the way our national museums construct their art and anthropological exhibitions. Native art "belonged" to anthropology and probably still does. The two buildings which sit across the Ottawa River in Ottawa from each other should be evidence enough of that - the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the National Gallery of Canada. Guess which one has all the Native art? Need I say more (ibid)?

Young Man believes that Native artists have a difficult task ahead of them because of the controlling art discourses that make it complicated for the Native perspective to be critiqued within its own knowledge systems (McMaster & Martin 1992:84). Lippard also metaphorically notes the challenge that “other” artists face.

Advocates of cultural democracy, of respect for difference and a wider definition of art, are often taunted with the specter of ‘the lowest common dominator.’ But art does not become ‘worse’ as it spreads out and becomes accessible to more people. In fact, the real low ground lies in the falsely beneficent notion of a ‘universal’ art that smoothes over all rough edges, all difference, but remains detached from the lives of most people. The surprises lie along the bumpy, curving side roads, bypassing highways so straight and so fast that we can’t see where we are pr where we are going (Lippard 1990:8)

In spite of of art history’s description of Indian art, it is in fact alive and well and creating new languages that are continuing philosophical teachings of our collective

agreement. As noted in Chapters Two through Five, the Native perspective is being continually challenged by the traditional trickster figure, just as postmodernism is challenged by the “other” or those who are marginalized, who, according to Babcock-Abrahams, are also trickster. Many links, such as this one between trickster discourse and postmodern theory, can be made; however most contemporary Native artists are insisting that they do fall under the large umbrella of postmodernism and that the trickster has guided their concerns for further knowledge and development. Lippard clarifies, that the “Trickster is not to be trapped in the Western context, which itself ultimately becomes ‘the victim of a not untricksterlike joke...set up by the undecidable coexistence of story but a trick played by the discourse of Trickster?’ The text the conquering scholars seek to decipher is in fact already being unraveled from within (Lippard 1990:205).

In reality, this Native American trickster has taken many shapes since the beginning, raising Young Man’s theory that Native people have been reconfiguring their world for a long time, possessed through creative activity.

North American Indian artists, on the other hand, have literally reinvented their cultures many times over with no loss of continuity with earlier Native cultures and consequently, they have had, and do have, an untold influence on the way the “outside” world perceives them. They have restructured their societies as true artists must, as technicians who were, and continue to be, involved in the actual creative process from within (McMaster & Martin 1992: 88).

In other words, Young Man suggests the flexibility within the Native perspective and transformations that the Native artist endures. This flexibility could explain the survival of the Native cultures that have endured cultural genocide for over five hundred years. Ruth Phillips and Marion Jackson both seem to be in agreement with Young Man; in their essay “New Territories 350/500 Years After,” they insist on the continuance of rewriting

history from a Native perspective (Jessup & Bagg 2002:253). In the hunt for a re-written history, as this research points out, Native artists are using the trickster to guide them in their exploration of voice, as the trickster allows for access to oral teaching/knowledge that is deeply embedded within the land and language.

Blackfoot Professor Leroy Little Bear clarifies this point in the film *The People Go On*, directed by Loretta Todd. He asserts that language is living knowledge that is embedded within the land and that is accessible to its people (*Kainayssini Imanistasiwa: The People Go On* 2002). In this, Little Bear distinguishes between Western and Native American standards of truth. The late Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr, essay “Civilization and Isolation” seems to be of the same mindset, he believes that Western thinker “increasingly depended upon mathematics for their analyses and insights into nature,” this approach has entrenched itself into “western minds the belief that mathematics is the proper description of reality,” which has also produced a “strange phenomenon in which human knowledge is divided into separate categories variously called disciplines (Deloria 1977:12). On the other hand, Deloria explains that Native reality is not about isolating things but rather embraces togetherness, synthesis, and relatedness, and is distinguished by its knowledge based within the living universe. It is within this holistic approach that Native Americans understand the spiritual nature of life that keeps the people and culture interchangeable or adaptable to their land. However, this does not mean that the Native perspective is compliant to the domination of mainstream thinking; adaptability is a means of survival. Adaptability, as shown, is a lesson taught by the trickster, through his transformable character which maintains the Native perspective. It is critical that the trickster not be lost or displaced with postmodernism’s inclusion of the “other,” it will

not survive if outsiders continue to interpret its meaning. Todd is of the same opinion and concludes, “After all the academic discussion is over, and we have examined the agendas of modernism or postmodernism with respect to our art, in the end it is subjectivity that matters: our world views as they proclaim us, in images from our lives” (McMaster & Martin 1992:78).

Synthesis

It is indeed “an aboriginal literary masterpiece.” That the trickster and the clown have become major metaphors for the artist in this century with its increasing self-consciousness of the creative process is no accident. They have been artists for a long time.¹²

Native American knowledge is concerned with practicality and the lived experience. This is shown through the example of the trickster of how to live life, by demonstrating this through his mistakes to “the people.” He is mocked in oral traditions for conducting himself in incorrect ways, often making humorous errors that are driven by his avaricious appetite. The trickster teaches that each individual possesses the power to change the equilibrium, and that behaving responsibly is important, as our actions affect the collective. In a Native perspective, each living thing possesses the power to shift the balance of everything that belongs to the collective. In this, one’s imagination can also be understood as having the power to cause a chain of reactionary events. Cree playwright Tomson Highway concurs labeling the trickster an “extraordinary figure of the imagination” (Brask & Morgan 1992:132).

The trickster can be best explained through the Native perspective and its philosophies. At the foundation of these philosophies are Native worldviews and the pattern called constant flux. Understanding the concept of constant motion is critical for understanding the Native perspective and how Native reality seeks its knowledge. Constant motion can also be compared to the Western chaos theory; however, constant change keeps all living things belonging in a spider web of relations and in balance. Animate beings are connected because all living things are thought to be a part of this

¹² By Barbra Babcock-Abrahams from her essay “‘A Tolerated Margin of Mess’: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered.” 1975.

fluctuation that is always moving, creating new scenarios each and every time. This is called the renewal process, but must not to be confused with a “new” experience because life is cyclical within the Native philosophy, as the past is viewed as the future. This process is what creates the continuum, and is how Native knowledge can be made clear, through one’s own experience and the experience of all living things, including the ancestors who traveled this world before passing on their knowledge/experiences. This importance of experiential knowledge is what makes oral traditions and trickster teachings so important for the survival of Native worldviews.

The Native perspective can also explain why I have made the decision to construct this final chapter as a synthesis, where normally, conclusions would be located. This concept of the synthesis keeps within a First Nations worldview of a continuous flux, cyclical notions and the inability to draw conclusions if the concept of all living things belonging to a continuum is taken seriously. Burkhart describes that synthesis as a part of Native thinking philosophies and believes,

[A synthesis is] a process, but it is one that is never finished. In order to complete the process, we would have to stop having experiences, for anything short of that would mean ending the process before it was complete...We must continue thinking and observing and in that way leave ourselves open to continued experience and not shut ourselves off from it in some arbitrary way (Waters 2004:25).

Chapters One and Five have explained various interpretations of the trickster and the confusion surrounding the trickster’s role within a range of disciplines. However, my foremost concern is the Native perspective views the trickster, within contemporary Native visual art. This focus on the trickster was to locate and understand his tactics which are creating new languages for Indian art and continuing the development of an Indigenous aesthetic. In spite of this focus on the Native perspective, in both chapters I

have contrasted Western scholarly definitions of the traditional trickster and the Native perspective on the trickster through numerous First Nations artist's roles which parallel the trickster's.

Putting the Native perspective into words has been made easier by Native philosophers such as Cordova whose examination includes the connection between the Native artist's role and the trickster. He believes that the artist shares a role similar to the scientist, in their quest for knowledge. However, Cordova does not believe in the comparison of the Native artist and the trickster, as many other who insist both are disruptors. Cordova bases this interpretation of the artist on through the traditional roles of the Indian artist as a "scientist, even as healer, is the Native American artist; he it is that occupies the ordered and measured universe. He represents a point of stability that endures all change, absorbs and transforms all chaos" (ibid:252). In this, Cordova describes the complexities of the Native artist, and does links the trickster to artists for their transformation abilities.

Transformations are also manifested by contemporary Indian artists, whose work consists of storytelling, sharing actual experience, observing, making use of elders, deconstructing and reconstructing of traditional narratives (First Rider 1994:47). However, these themes within Indian art have being mistakenly associated with Western thoughts on postmodernism; are what Anishnabec scholar Gerald Vizenor calls "trickster discourse." Vizenor also claims that the trickster is enfolded within "comic discourse," which is more so exemplified by figures 1, 4, 5, 8-12, 14-16, 18 and 19 included throughout this study that exhibit humour. Native artists are using humour as a technique to re-educate their audiences about the colonial wrongdoings to North American

Indigenous populations that were suffered throughout history. Specific art exhibitions, such as *Primitivism in the 20th Century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984, is an example of these continual colonial wrongdoings that need a re-education, where the curators' were faulted for the decontextualization of the Indigenous art. The exhibition was thought to misrepresent Indian art through the curators' agenda to illustrate "primitive" art as a lower level of art. The exhibition became also ploy for supporting modernism developmental theories, at the expense of "primitive" cultures and continued to force Indian art and its culture into marginalized spaces.

In these peripheral spaces, feminist writers have led the way in literature, turning this space into a place for a position of power and voice. However, many Native artists, such as Young Man are skeptical of these marginal arenas, claiming that marginal space is "yet another false image" imposed on Native Americans (McMaster & Martin 1992:85). Loretta Todd agrees with such assertions and warns that if Native artists accept such terminology and philosophies by a dominant Western culture, then they also accept the Western version of history, and the Indigenous voice is continuously muted. Cree artist and art historian Alfred Young Man solves this problematic placement of Indian art by insisting that Indian art needs to be critiqued by its own principles, based on a Native perspective that differs from the Western and concludes that First Nations and "their history and their art have always challenged the popular American and European ethnocentric archetypal notions of 'history' and undoubtedly will continue to do so" (ibid:83). This countering action is characteristic of postmodern dialogues because the "other" causes the bias previously presented in modernism to be evaluated. Indian art

falls into a postmodern category as it is the “other” evaluating the modern or Western perspective or bias. Yet, many Native artists are not willing to submit to this categorization, and are alarmed that their cultural identity and politics will be swallowed by the postmodernism umbrella and be universally perceived as one entity. Cree artist and curator Gerald McMaster makes note of these apprehensions and the time it will take before both postmodernism and First Nations perspectives on art will be viewed as equally having valid and separate histories. McMaster makes notes that, “The resistance to universal ideology of the West by [A]boriginal people has been in progress for some time, creating in turn insularity; it will take time before the two sides become engaged on an equitable basis” (Rushing 1999:84). However, Young Man insists that Indian art has been misunderstood because of variations between the Western and Native perspective, and believes they are far too dissimilar to understand each other (McMaster & Martin 1992:83).

This contrast of the Western and Native perspective on art can be understood in Cordova’s explanation of the traditional meaning of the Native artist; he notes that “the Native American artist is not, as is often the Western artist, seen as an exception to the rules of the community... He does, instead, bear a greater responsibility to the group (Waters 2004:253). Author Lewis Hyde (1998) also finds a dissimilarity of the artists’ roles. Hyde accepts as true that Native artists can be seen as bringing forth creations, assisting in the creation of the world, much like the trickster re-creator seen in First Nations origin stories. Whereas, Cordova points out, “In the West, the works of an artist are nearly meaningless. The artist is not a co-creator of the world. He is, at most, an entertainer.” (Waters 2004: 254). It is made clear in this study that the Native perspective

and the Westerns thought on art and the trickster are very much different and even at times misleading for those non-Native scholars who attempt to define the trickster within First Nations culture, including visual art.

Not only in the West have academics been attempting to define the trickster but also around the world, through various disciplines, even though the trickster is not definable from a Native perspective. Recently, the trickster has been theorized Native people; this has been mostly with the discourse of language, which has influenced the visual arts. The Native authors most responsible for these current theories surrounding the trickster are writers such as Gerald Vizenor, Scott Momaday, Leslie Silko, and Tomson Highway. These writers' oral narratives include the trickster, and who often associate him with educating, entertaining, healing, teaching survival, and boundary crossing, all of which transmits a cultural perspective. This transmission may very well explain how the traditional trickster survived assimilation and the Western theories that have attempted to bind the trickster to human development. In oral traditions, the trickster his known for is shape-shifting abilities that keep him adaptable to changes and consuming influences. Trickster researcher Lewis Hyde explains the trickster's shape-shifting abilities:

Trickster is a great shape-shifter, which I take to mean not so much that he shifts the shape of his own body but that, given the materials of this world, he demonstrates the degree to which the way we have shaped them may be altered. He makes this world and then he plays with its materials (Hyde 1998:91).

In Hyde's explanation, he explains how the trickster continues to exist through human imagination and where limits and boundaries are crossed, and where fiction is transformed into reality.

The trickster themes within First Nations oral narratives have also raised the attention of scientific studies, including those of anthropologist Franz Boas, who insists that the trickster has had three different evolutionary roles. The trickster also influenced the research of Paul Radin and Carl Jung who both laid the foundations for these trickster developmental theories. Both Radin and Jung gave rise to the concept that the trickster is the representative of the collective unconscious, reminiscent of a primal psychological stage in mankind's evolution. These types of conclusions have only added to the academic scrutiny of the trickster, in particular that of the scientific community. However, trickster researcher Barbara Babcock-Abrahams' essay disagrees with both Radin and Jung's shared opinion of the trickster as a symbol of an evolutionary model. For Babcock Abrahams preserves the thought that the trickster does not symbolize primitivism, but rather insists;

No generation understands him fully but no generation can do without him. Each had to include him in all its theologies, in all its cosmologies, despite the fact that it realized that he did not fit properly into any of them, for *he represents not only the undifferentiated and the distant past, but likewise the undifferentiated present within every individual*. This constitutes his universal and persistent attraction (Babcock-Abrahams 1975:163).

Babcock-Abrahams rather sees the trickster as being a contradictory being and insists that dualities attached to the trickster are due to the particular social-cultural function and paradox within the trickster character, which are within the margins. Babcock-Abrahams concludes that the trickster has a position of power within this marginal space, which many feminists have also found voice within these peripheral locations. However, many Native artists and authorities are not so willing to accept this space, for fear of accepting the colonial history when accepting this forced marginalized place.

The differences in perspectives examined within this study go beyond the Feminist and Native perspective, to better appreciate the Native perspective, comparing the Western and Native American standards of truth. In this contrast between the Western and Native reality, the Native holistic approach was unveiled and similarities is has with the discovery of phenomenology in their observation techniques. It has not been until phenomenology that a Western field of study has been more comparable to the First Nations worldview. However, the Native perspective is compulsory so that we can begin to understand Indian art, as past exhibitions such *Primitivism in the 20th Century: Affinity of the Tribal*, 1984 and *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First People*, 1988 sadly misrepresented Indian art. Yet, by 1992, successful and unsuccessful attempts to deconstruct mainstream thinking surrounding Indian art were being made by art museums and galleries by calling on the Native perspective. This has placed the Native artists in imperative roles for the sake of re-education and cultural politics. Two contemporary Native art exhibitions hope to challenge the colonial wrong-doings and the history of Native people and its culture to be interpreted from a Native perspective. Both exhibitions included works from contemporary Native artists from across North America, and curatorial input by Native people. However, both did not achieve the most accurate description of the First Nations' worldview. Where the *Indigena*, 1992 project went to great undertakings to obtain the goal of demonstrating the repercussions of five hundred years of colonialism from a Native perspective; *Land Spirit Power*, held the same held year, exhibition ignored Native authorities' perspectives on the execution of the exhibitions goals. However, both exhibitions raised many new questions for Indian art and forced Native artists to consider spatial possibilities and problems with museums. For

the Native artist this means challenging art spaces. One of the Native curators of *Indigena* was Gerald McMaster; expresses the challenges he faced in these new spaces, and the significance of location:

...As a contemporary (native) artist, I wanted to open a new space in an anthropology museum. You may ask: What is so unusual about this? Let me explain: anthropology museums often represent objects, vis. “material culture,” of non-Western peoples, whereas art museums represent the history of “aesthetic” objects by Western peoples. Both represent ideas; but, both offer only western points of view. When contemporary (Native) artists began to exhibit their works, very often they were caught in between two representational apparatuses. They did not want to be treated as “objects” in the former, yet were being marginalized by the later. They realized in both cases they had little or no voice (Greenburg et al.: 195).

McMaster’s words demonstrate why it is critical that Indian art be critiqued from the Native perspective, as these spaces as described above are filled with problematic histories that have misrepresented Indian art and their cultures. Below, McMaster expresses his own troubles in his position as a boundary crosser in his art practice and curatorial projects, and notes the importance of considering both the Native and Western perspectives when negotiating space with the gallery and museum.

I realized these boundaries of understanding are always in constant flux. I then questioned which side of the boundaries I stood on? Was I in some “liminal” zone, that is, a neutral space, from where I could see both sides (perspectives) simultaneously? I reasoned that if these boundaries shift, which they often do, then representation and interpretation would be problematic and difficult to negotiate; therefore, one must be scrupulous with certain knowledge and its use, or face the consequences (ibid:194).

McMaster communicates the freedom, the duality and the new paths and questions that are being raised for the representation of Indian art and the response that Native artists have. First Nations art, artists and curators have raised numerous theoretical

questions like these, adding to the ongoing scholarly discussions regarding postmodernism and vision theories.

When it comes to visual strategies, Native artists have notably taken consideration of their audience's participatory role with the work and have challenged their viewers' mindset. Audiences have been misinformed about First Nations pre-colonial and post-colonial histories for far too long. However, as noted, *Indigena* was curated in an effort to re-educate mass audiences about the Native perspective on the five hundred years of colonial mistreatment of Aboriginal people in North America. The exhibition was also intended to provide an all-encompassing view of contemporary works by Canada's artists and writers of Aboriginal descent. The exhibition's goals addressed ethnocentrism and dominance, and challenged the viewers to re-evaluate their ideas about Indian art. The text for *Indigena* concluded on a promising note, with Lenore Keeshig-Tobias' suggestion of cultural survival through the trickster and his strategies. Her essay is optimistic in conquering misrepresentation and rewriting a history that has undoubtedly created a false image of First Nations people, their culture, their history and their politics.

These sorts of stereotypes are supported and created by the media, and many Native scholars such as Young Man believe that "...stereotypes play an integral role in the way the West defines First Nations people, their history and their art...evident through a review of both contemporary and traditional Native art and the treatment it has received by the state, academia, and the cultural establishments – including museums – for over five hundred years" (Young Man 1998:11). Stereotypes perpetuate misconceptions of Native people, their cultural and their material possessions, including their art. Native artists have been using trickster tactics to debunk false images of Indians

by using humour as a means of survival and as a re-educational tool, through humour's capacity to open people's minds and hearts. How Native artists choose to represent humour in their work, through satire, irony, punning, word play, parody, or teasing is mostly a psychological exercise that encourages the audience to question its preexisting notions of First Nations culture. Cree artist Jane Ash Poitras explains how humour works for her, "you see, most people will look at it and just see the surface of it, but you've got to go deeper below the levels of the real, deep, deep, into the into the humour, and you find knowledge beyond the profane" (Ryan 1999: 106).

Poitras describes the autonomy of humour and how it can be viewed as aesthetic trickery. Ojibwa artist Carl Beam calls this use of the trickster by artists, the "trickster shift." Native author Leslie Silko's novel *Ceremony*, 1977 demonstrates the importance of this shift. Silko believe that things which don't shift and grow are dead. The trickster can be viewed as a survival tool and a traditional character that has maintained culture and encouraged much-needed changes for First Nations people. Anishinabe poet Marie Annharte Baker believes that trickster and his humour are of grave importance to Native people. She explains:

For us [Native people] to be de-colinized, we must pick the bones of a rather decadent society for a shred of meat (make mine baloney), i.e., laughter. It is harder work these days to see funny side of life. Otherwise Unfunny 500-Year-Old Drama is Genocide and Mutilation of Sprit in my recent find, Iktomi [trickster is the winner] (Annharte Baker 1991:49).

In Annharte Baker's humour and words, she notes the trickster and humour is means to handle such harsh realities of living as a Native person within North America.

This serious side of trickster humour challenges the audience to rethink the negative stereotypes, scenarios, and experiences, even if the viewer may not know how to read the work: “Art critics and Native commentators recognize humor as an important strategy in contemporary [N]ative art even if they do not quite know how to interpret or contextualize it” (Bates 1995). This is the transformation ability of the trickster character. Not only may the art not be fully understood, the Native artists may also be mislabeled as disadvantaged (like the trickster), and this is a fundamental misunderstanding of both of them. Indian art, on the other hand, in many cases has been elevated to a level of greatness in the minds of authorities, while the Native artists are still seen, and in many cases, treated as underprivileged members of society. This may explain why many Native artists and trickster find refuge in marginal space because of their unwillingness to conform. It is within this outside location where Native art is in a position to expose the boundaries of society and play with vision strategies to its own advantage; these are called “scopic regimes” or power structures.

Scopic regimes and the gaze are an analysis of spectatorship that may help determine how the viewer will respond. This response is critical to theories within contemporary art. These regimes and the gaze are devised to measure the responses of individual and understand what might influence their perspective. Tricksters and Native artists have been known to employ visual strategies that challenge colonial history. Métis/Cree artist Loretta Todd is no stranger to this and questions “the powerful relationship that exists between Aboriginal art producers and their non-Aboriginal audience and critics when the language and perspectives of the dominant society are used to analyze Aboriginal art” in her essay included in the *Indigena* text (Jessup & Bagg

2002:252). In other words, Todd asks why the Native perspective is not being used, as does Young Man, whose essay also included, and who questions how are Aboriginal artists critically viewing their own cultures and how is Native perspective critical to Native artists art making process? Both Todd and Young Man conclude that by “re-telling histories and creating contemporary narratives from Aboriginal perspectives,” control and power will be obtained for maximum “operational conditions of spectatorship” (ibid).

All of the struggles and challenges Native artists face are connected to the differences between the Native and Non-Native perspectives. Consequently, it is critical that Aboriginal art histories are represented in the mainstream as unique, so we can move beyond this overshadowing but necessary dialogue, as Native philosophy enlightens their worldview. An appropriate model for how Aboriginal art can be represented is through the exact oral teachings of the trickster character or what has been coined more recently by the late Carl Beam as the “trickster shift,” that contemporary Native artists are currently making use of or what many refer to as an Indigenous aesthetic.

Therefore the “trickster shift” implies that it is a model for the Native perspective for those who share in this worldview. This gives explanation why the trickster has often been confused with other disciplines who attempt to understand the trickster and the world from a universal approach. This misunderstanding could be further explained through the traditional trickster comparable qualities with other non-Native tricksters, clowns or hero, much like the clown that Non-Native author of the essay “The Clown in Contemporary Art,” Samuel Miller suggests. Miller describes how the clown was also a tool for self-evaluation much in the same way the trickster, as noted, is for Native people.

The clown [/trickster] recovers for us the nature of our humanity. In him, in his ludicrous contradiction of dignity and embarrassment, of pomp and rags, of assurance and collapse, of sentiment and sadness, of innocence and guile, we learn to see ourselves. We are, in short, resorted to our humanity, delivered of all the unreal bombast, the pretence of invulnerability, the emperor complex of being beyond it all (Hyers1969:90).

What Miller points out is that self assessment is made possible through trickster strategies of humour, and, as I have also included, through examples of satire, education, creation, recreation, mythology, shape-shifting, magic, language play, boundary crossing, and postmodernism, all of which were examined through this study. Through the trickster's wide range of strategies, he challenges complex Eurocentric parameters that continually attempt to define the indefinable trickster character. However, Native artists are in no hurry to peg the trickster, but rather to learn from his complexities: "I think coyote would understand and have a great laugh over it all," believes artist Mohawk artist Steven Loft (Claxton et al. 2005:96). Contemporary Native artists are opting for trickster discourse that has always been about shifting and continues to make new languages that excite the mainstream for their transformable quality. It is through the "trickster shift," or trickster discourse that First Nations artists are forever adapting to their drastically changing environments for the survival needed of the Native perspective.

This research, as noted in the introduction, is the result of the trickster discourse which enlightened my studio practice that I later came to understand, was because of the endurance of my Native perspective. The trickster was made clear to me after the realization of transformation possibilities in my art-making process and the metaphysical relationship to my art. It was described best to me by Blood Professor Leroy Little Bear, who drew a small square on a large black-board, and told me this square was the

collective agreement in which we all function. Then Little Bear told me that when artists need to be creative they leave this collective agreement and he pointed to the open space on the blackboard that was free and limitless. This rang clear to me and I realized in order to reach this space of freedom, I need to transform like the trickster and that this could be achieved through the creative process. Little Bear continued and said that artists come back to this square/collective agreement with their new insights from freedom and create art. From here, I went to my studio, looked at my works and recognized on some level I needed to transform my position within the collective limited space, to make art that was transcending like the trickster. Do to this, my imagination was required, to leave the space that I was occupying and release my mind into the limitless free space that the trickster implies in everything he does. I then began to recall trickster tales, and other traditional teachings that evoke a mind set that is creative and unbound, a skill that is practice through ceremony and viewed as sacred by Native people.

I am trickster and like him I get side tracked by desires which is sometimes to make art that will sell, or will look beautiful, or will communicate with a specific audience what is important to me. When I looked at my work that, in my mind, that was not as successful, I realized that I was not accessing the freedom of translation. Then it was clear, my work, in my opinion, that was successful, I was using a language that was not formally taught to me, a language that was more familiar with the pedagogy of my people that had shaped my worldview and spirit, the trickster.

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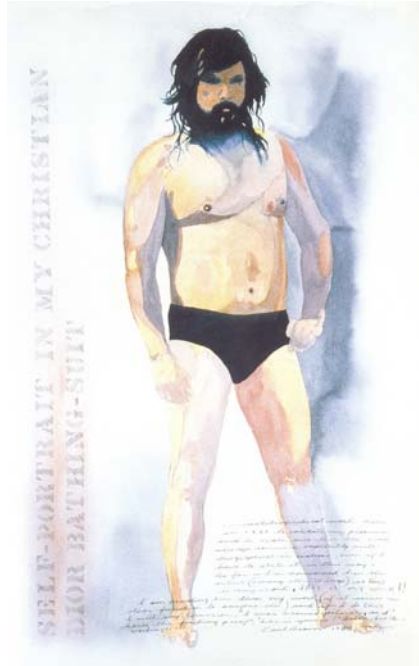
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Figures



(Figure 1)
Carl Beam

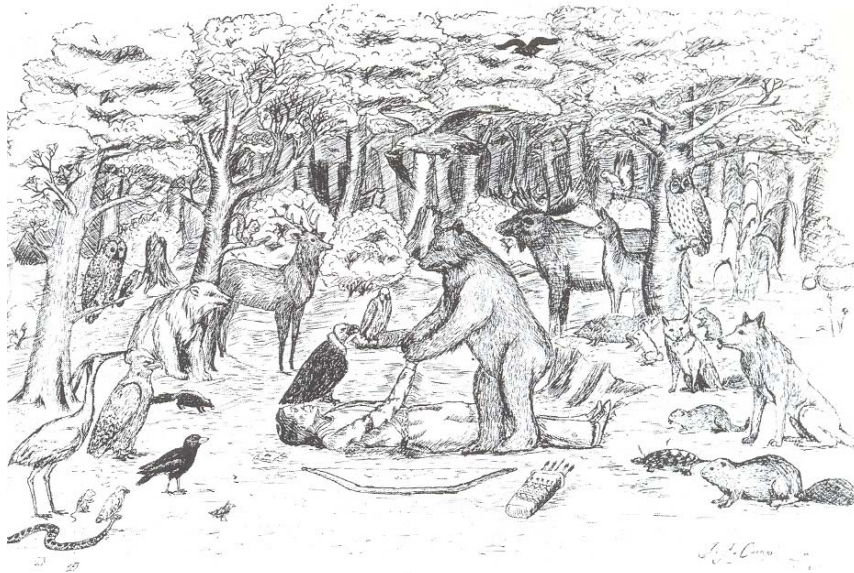
Self-portrait in My Christian Dior Bathing-Suit, 1980
Watercolour on Paper
106 x 69 cm



(Figure 2)

Raymond Johnson

From *North American Indian Art: It's a Question of Integrity*, 1998
Courtesy of the Native Land Foundation



(Figure 3)
Jesse Cornplanter
Tribute to the Slain Hero, c.1905
Courtesy of the New York State Library, Albany, New York



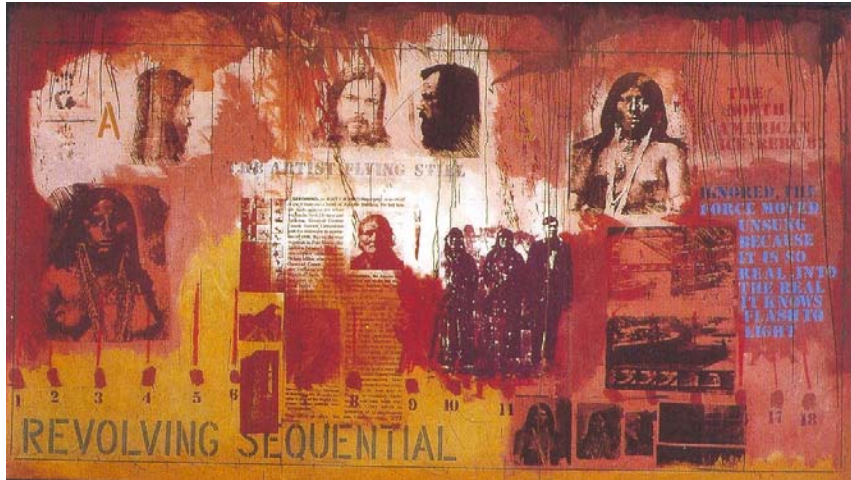
(Figure 4)
Harry Fonseca
Rose and the Res Sisters, 1982
Lithograph
76 x 56 cm



(Figure 5)
 Rebecca Belmore
Coyote Woman, 1991
 Graphite on paper
 33 x 50 cm



(Figure 6)
 (left) Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) © ARS, NY,
Guitar, 1912-13. Construction of sheet metal and wire,
 77.5 x 35 x 19.3cm. Gift of the artist, (94.1971)
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.
 Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY
 © Picasso Estate / SODRAC (2006)
 and Grebo mask from Ivory Coast.
 Wood, paint, vegetable fibers. MP 1983.7.
 Photo: Beatrice Hatala.
 Musée Picasso, Paris, France
 Photo Credit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/ Art Resource, NY



(Figure 7)

Carl Beam

The North American Iceberg, 1985

Acrylic, photoserigraph, pencil, on plexiglass

216.6 x 374.1 cm

The National Gallery of Canada



(Figure 8)

Ron Noganosh

Shield for Yuppie Warrior, 1991

Metal, silk, hide, and fur

102 x 64 cm



(Figure 9)

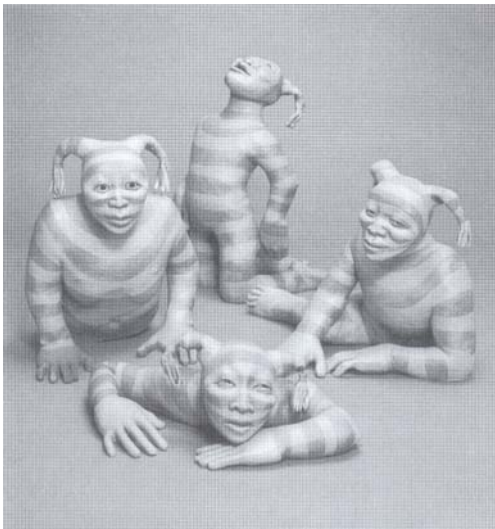
Ron Noganosh

That's All It Costs... (When You Stop At The Bay), 1991

Metal, wool, coins, feathers, nylon, paper, plastic and leather

H 139 x W 60cm x D 11 cm

The Ottawa Art Gallery



(Figure 10)

Roxanne Swentzell

The Emergence of the Clowns, 1988

Mixed media clay

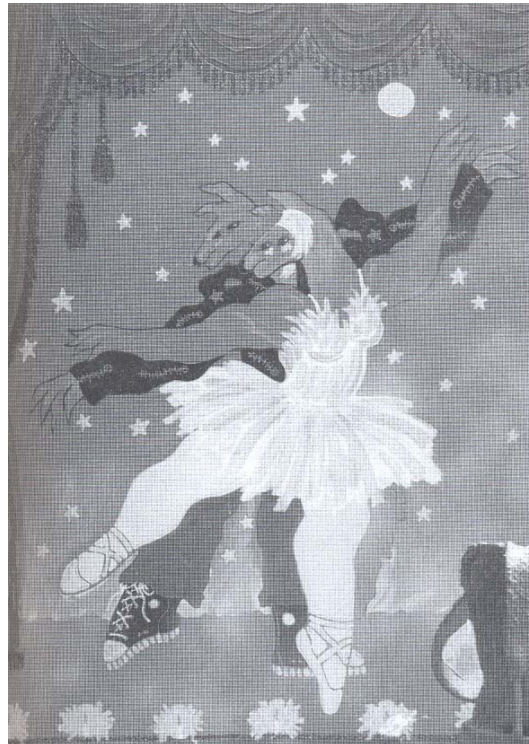
A: 55.55 x 33.02 x 38.1cm

B: 40.64 x 58.42 x 45.72 cm C: 43.18 x 35.56 x 25.56 cm D: 17.78 x 48.26 x 27.94 cm

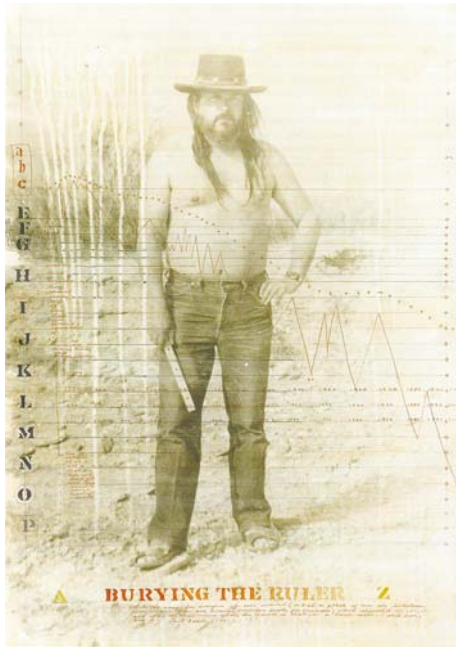
The Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona



(Figure 11)
Harry Fonseca
Wish You Were Here, 1986
Acrylic on canvas
61 x 76 cm



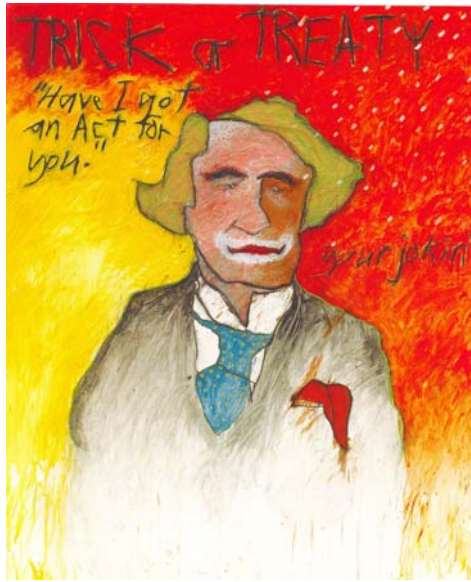
(Figure 12)
Harry Fonseca
Pas de Deux #2, 1984
Acrylic on canvas



(Figure 13)
Carl Beam
Burying the Ruler, 1991
Photo emulsion and ink on paper
104 x 75 cm



(Figure 14)
Gerald McMaster
Hau! The Quest Was One, 1990
Acrylic and oil pastel on matt board
114 x 94 cm



(Figure 15)
Gerald McMaster
Trick or Treaty, 1990
Acrylic and oil pastel on matt board
116 x 96 cm



(Figure 16)
Edward Poitras
Over The Gulf, 1989
Mixed Media installation detail from
Et in America ego
Courtesy of the Artist



(Figure 17)
Edward Poitras
Coyote, 1986
Photo by Don Hall, Regina
Courtesy of the Artist



(Figure 18)
Bill Powless
Beach Blanket Brave, 1984
Acrylic on canvas board
51 x 41 cm



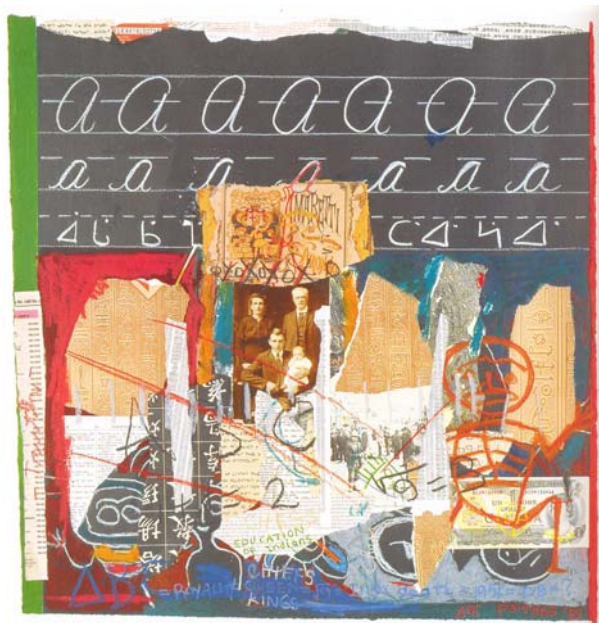
(Figure 19)
Bill Powless
Indians' Summer, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
177 x 97 cm



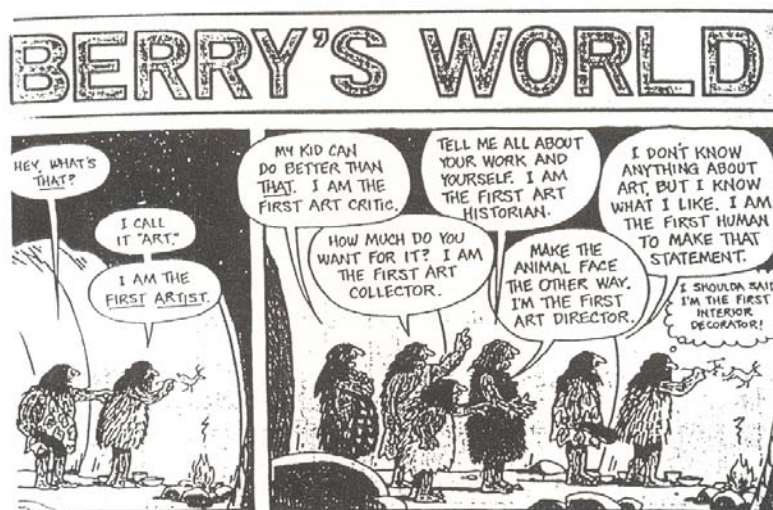
(Figure 20)
Bob Boyer
A Government Blanket Policy, 1983
Oil on cotton blanket
122 x 196 cm



(Figure 21)
Carl Beam
Forced Ideas in School Days, 1991
Photo emulsion and ink on paper
74 x 55 cm



(Figure 22)
Jane Ash Poitras
Family Blackboard, 1989
Mixed media on paper
58 x 58 cm



(Figure 23)
"Barry's World" and the beginning of art



(Figure 24)
 Rebecca Belmore
Exhibit 671B, 12 January 1988
 Performace, Thunder Bay Gallery,
 Thunder Bay, Ontario



(Figure 25)
Jane Ash Poitras
Fort Chip Sewing Club, 1988
Oil on Board
76 x 76 cm