Indigenous Perspectives of North America

Indigenous Perspectives of North America: A Collection of Studies

Edited by

Enikő Sepsi, Judit Nagy,
Miklós Vassányi and János Kenyeres

With the assistance of
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INTRODUCTION

The main goal of the present volume is to accommodate North American Native Studies—with its rich tradition and accumulated expertise in the Central European region—to the new complexities and challenges of contemporary Native reality. The umbrella theme 'Indigenous perspectives' brings together researchers from a great variety of disciplines, focusing on issues such as democracy and human rights, international law, multiculturalism, peace and security, economic and scientific development, sustainability, literature, arts and culture as well as religion. In terms of geography, Canada, the United States of America, and Mexico are covered in the volume offering thirty-five topical and thought-provoking articles written in English, French and Spanish—a truly valuable collection of Central European and North American experts' perspectives on North American Natives in a wide variety of academic fields.

In the first section of the book, articles of a more comprehensive, general focus are presented under the heading "Wider Perspectives." In his article "Between Relativism and Romanticism: Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Social Critique," Nathan Kowalsky (University of Alberta) highlights environmental issues affecting the life of Canadian Natives. American historian James Oberly (University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire) combines science, law enforcement, and spirituality in his study on the recent history of treaty-based American Indian fish & game management commissions. In the paper entitled "Aboriginal Literatures in Canada: Multiculturalism and Fourth World Decolonization," Hartmut Lutz (University of Szczecin, former president of the Association for Canadian Studies in German-Speaking Countries) surveys the historical development of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada, focusing on the impact of multiculturalism and Fourth World decolonization. Agustín Rubio Cadena (UNAM, Mexico, and University of Debrecen, Hungary) discusses the representation of Mexican indigenous people in 20th-century Mexican and world literature in the article entitled "Representaciones del mundo indígena en la literatura mexicana del siglo XX." Finally, Brian Ebel's (Embassy of Canada in Hungary) "Prospects for Aboriginal Languages in Canada" features the role of language communities and government efforts in preserving Aboriginal languages in Canada.

This section is followed by single-subject papers on various topical Aboriginal-related issues by young as well as established scholars and non-academic experts in English, French and Spanish grouped under separate headings by theme.

The section entitled "The Representation of Aboriginals in Literature, Fine Arts and Cinema" opens with Martin Kuester's paper "From Remote Reserves to the Global Indian Village: Daniel David Moses's *Kyotopolis* as Postmodern Native Canadian Drama" which centers around the role modern technology played in transforming the secluded world of reserves into a Global Indian Village. The next paper, Marija Paprašarovski's "L'intrusion des 'codes' amérindiens dans le théâtre québécois" deals with the mythological theatre of a Huron author, Yves Sioui Durand, analysing the mode and the measure in which Durand's pieces question Aboriginal identity. Cristina-Georgiana Voicu's "Aboriginal Versus the Métis Between Race and Ethnicity: Contexts in Canadian Fiction" stresses the importance of the colonizer-colonized relationship in the Canadian Native literary experience. Susana Amante's paper "'Much of What We Learn About Indians, We Learn as Children:' Counter-images to Biased and Distorted Perceptions of First Nations in Native Canadian Juvenile Literature" reflects upon a children's picture book, which represents conscious efforts on the part of its author, Thomas King, to correct stereotypes concerning Native peoples. In "Tracking the Land/Memory: Healing and Reterritorializations in Jeannette Armstrong's *Breath Tracks*," Anna Mongibello explains through the notion of re-appropriation how Jeanette Armstrong's verses try to remap the landscapes of British Columbia from an Okanagan perspective. In her contribution "In Between Western and Indigenous: Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories*," Éva Zsizsmann proposes to discuss the way Canadian Native author Thomas King uses a mixture of genres to address issues such as racism, capitalism, and Aboriginal identity in North America. In a similar tone, Eszter Szenczi, in "Cultural Hybridity in Twentieth Century Métis Autobiographies: Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*," investigates the topic of racial identity, complicated by issues of gender as these are represented in literary works about Métis women. Katalin Kürtösi's "Indians and Their Art—Emily Carr's Imagery in Painting and in Writing" maps out the ways in which the exploration and application of Indigenous art forms contributed to the literary and artistic career of the renowned Canadian modernist writer and painter. Next, the aim of Mária Palla's "From Legend to the Big Screen: Kunuk's *Atanarjuat*" is to examine Inuit identity at three levels of its manifestation: the Igloolik community in which the film was produced, the

film itself, and the contemporary Inuit community in Canada. Drawing on Freud's essays on totemism and social prohibitions, Tamás Juhász, in "Memory, Totem and Taboo in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*," concentrates on film director Jim Jarmusch's artistic world and establishes a link between the Freudian concept of denial and the cultural memory of the annihilation of the Indigenous population of North-America. In "The Bark-Peelers of the North—Ernest Hemingway's *Indian Camp*," Katalin G. Kállay examines the portrayal of Native Americans as suggested by Hemingway's famous short story, *Indian Camp*. Emma Sánchez Montañés, in her illustrated study "Representaciones de nativos de la Costa Noroeste de América del Norte en los dibujos de la expedición Malaspina (1791–1792). Realidad y ficción" analyses 18th-century paintings of Northwest-American Natives, produced in the course of a famed Spanish naval expedition. In the next paper, "Los indios del istmo de Tehuantepec en los escritos de Károly László," Mónika Szente-Varga delves into the diaries of a Hungarian engineer active in East Mexico in the 19th century, in order to offer a colourful panorama of Natives' habits in the region.

The third section carries the title "Culture and Identity." The first study, János Kenyeres's "'I Was the One Who Should Have Been Related to Big Bear:' Identification with the Indigenous Other in Recent Canadian Art and Literature," describes a relatively new phenomenon in Canadian art as the author discusses novel ways of the internalization of the "other" culture and the resulting innovative artistic forms and expressions. Krisztina Kodó's study entitled "The Creation of the Stereotypical Indian within Native Canadian Culture" investigates into the origins and different uses of the term Indian. Albert Rau's "Canadian Native Peoples—'We Are Still here'. Suggestions for Classroom Activities" explores the potentials of Native Canadians as an EFL subject. Judit Nagy and Mátyás Bánhegyi provide a detailed description of the project that led to the creation of *A Cultural Reader on Aboriginal Perspectives in Canada* and present a comprehensive survey of the key features of this significant teaching resource pack. In her article, "Indigenous Perspectives on the Landscape of North America," Andrea Bölcskei focuses on how Amerindian toponyms enhance spatial and cultural orientation among American Natives. Zsuzsanna Kövi's paper "Inuit Mental Health and Indigenous Psychology" analyses statistics of mental health problems among the Inuit, with the aim of sketching out a new, person-oriented alternative to traditional indigenous psychological therapy. The last part of this section, then, focuses on specific aspects of how Christian missions have related to Native identity. Tibor Fabiny, in "Jonathan Edwards and the Indians,"

inquires into how Jonathan Edwards's perception and understanding of the Natives slowly changed as he spent more and more time among them. In her paper "'I'll be the Indian, and You Guys the Cowboys'—Mission-in-Reverse among Lakota People in Our Days" Eszter Kodácsy-Simon, in turn, explores and expounds how present-day American Natives may help us change our own religious attitudes, by what the process she termes Mission-in-reverse.

The fourth and last section, entitled "History and Policy Making," begins with "Arctic America through Medieval European Eyes: North-East America in the Old Icelandic Annals and Greenland Deeds." In this paper, Miklós Vassányi offers a fascinating (re)consideration of the discovery of the American continent on the basis of the *Old Icelandic Annals* and the *Diplomatarium Groenlandicum,* concluding that what we know as *the* discovery of America was in fact not a single event but a series of repetitive acts. Magdalena Paluszkiewicz-Misiaczek's "Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Military" investigates into the historical perspectives of Aboriginal military service in Canada. Elvira Nurieva strikes a more political tone in her "A Separate Indigenous Parliament as a Model to Improve Aboriginal Political Representation in Canada" as she argues that a separate indigenous parliament is the best model for Canada to increase political input of Aboriginal peoples at the federal level. Carrying on with the political discussion, Dariana Maximova, in "La politique sur les questions des peuples autochtones: analyse comparative des regions nordiques du Canada et de la Russie (République Sakha, [Yakoutie])" draws a parallel between how minority policies are made in the Russian, and, respectively, the Canadian Arctic. A further political comparison is offered by Tivadar Palágyi in the paper etitled "Indigènes ou allochtones – minorités linguistiques à multiples identités: les Indiens Houmas francophones de Louisiane et les Turcs Gagaouzes russophones de Moldavie" as he makes us see how differently the term "Indigenous" is understood in a European, or, respectively, in an American context. Literary analyses merge with political considerations in Enikő Sepsi's and Csaba Pákozdi's study on "L'inconscient littéraire québecois et hongrois ou Les Droits linguistiques au Canada et en Europe centrale," in which Canada's example is set as a norm for Central European legislation on minority language use. Csejtei Dezső's "Francisco de Vitoria y la conquista de América: los comienzos del derecho internacional" turns back to the origins of international law, arguing that the great scholar of Salamanca, especially in his lecture *De Indis*, established the legislative foundations for the emancipation of American Indians. Next, Viktória Semsey's comprehensive article concerning the

"Derechos de los indios en las constituciones, decretos y manifestos políticos de México (1810–1824)" examines an important period of Mexican law history, that between 1810 and 1824, with an eye to the constitutions and political documents produced in this time interval concerning indigenous peoples. The situation of Mexican minorities is further discussed in the last two papers of the volume: Izaskun Álvarez Cuartero's "'Muerte a los que lleven camisa:' Acciones civilizadoras y conflicto étnico maya durante el siglo XIX" looks into the reasons and internal political background of the 19th-century Maya revolts in Yucatán, while José Del Val, in his "Perspectivas de los Pueblos Indígenas en el Proceso de Globalización: Multiculturalismo y Despojo" considers the actual political situation of Mexican Aboriginals in a global economic context.

We hope that this collection of research papers will offer a solid platform for further critical investigations and Gadamerian *Hinterfragung*, the condition of academic progress, as well as a useful tool for classroom discussions in universities worldwide.

Editors

PART I

WIDER PERSPECTIVES

BETWEEN RELATIVISM AND ROMANTICISM: TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AS SOCIAL CRITIQUE

NATHAN KOWALSKY

Abstract

"Traditional ecological knowledge" (TEK) is an important aspect of Canadian conservation management, but the very notion of TEK is controversial. It can be seen as conflicting with empirically-validated conservation science; its incorporation into environmental assessment can be seen as colonialist; some argue that TEK perpetuates the myth of the ecological Indian; others argue that identifying "authenticity" with "tradition" denies Indigenous peoples access to modernity. The philosophical issues here are myriad. Does TEK necessarily essentialize Indigenous peoples by requiring their identities to be static and rooted in the past? Does viewing Indigenous peoples as a counterpart to Western civilization paradoxically denigrate and venerate them as "the Other" and assume a dichotomous framework ignorant of how they actually live? Critics continue to analyze Indigeneity in terms of purity and degradation, as if the logic of virginity was not itself an historical and contingent construction of colonialism.

I argue that this fashionable skepticism is as mistaken as the "myths" it seeks to desecrate. Debate rages as to how TEK should or should not be critiqued, but how TEK might critique mainstream Canadian culture is conveniently neglected. Indigenous perspectives are thus in a bind: scholars criticize them or defend them from criticism, and yet neutralize their ability to criticize the status quo. The uncritical result is tacitly affirmative "hybridity," social acquiescence to modernity as a fait accompli. Skeptics thus presuppose that there can be no norms to which cultures are beholden, meanwhile contradicting their own relativism when interpreting tradition through the lens of Enlightenment progressivism.

By contrast, a model is needed for understanding how *appropriating Indigenous knowledge can be appropriate*. Though it is usually summarily dismissed, I suggest the radical environmental philosophy known as "primitivism" to this end: the use of contemporary, historic and pre-historic hunting-gathering as grounds for criticism of contemporary Canadian life. The paradoxes of TEK are manufactured by the agrarian logics which primitivism calls into question. Understanding TEK as social critique may illumine not only the failings of so-called civilization, but also many of the struggles faced by Aboriginals in Canada.

The intersection between anthropology, native studies, and conservation biology is strewn with many a pitfall, and the intrusion of a philosopher into the fray might come as unwelcome. Yet this nexus of interdisciplinarity is replete with competing philosophical commitments and assumptions, ranging from Donna Haraway's theory of hybridity to the epistemic and social status of science. The notion of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) exists within this contested space, affected by both socially-scientific cultural relativism and objectivist anti-romanticism about traditional cultures. What concerns is me that, all too often, these strands of theory either curtail or abolish the ability of TEK to critique the dominant social structures within which we find ourselves. My proposal is modest and tentative: I want to suggest a middle way between the two poles of relativism and romanticism which does not undermine our capacity to criticise the status quo. At the same time, my thesis is controversial: the most straightforward term for this middle way is 'primitivism,' which inevitably evokes discredited notions like the noble savage or nostalgia. Nevertheless, I will argue that a careful, contextual and critical engagement with non-urban and non-agricultural lifeways will, in principle, allow many Aboriginal traditions to stand in value-laden yet grounded contrast to the dominant culture. I will proceed by first criticizing the hybridity analysis of certain works of contemporary North American Aboriginal art, and then by analysing some basic debates in the literature of traditional ecological knowledge. Finally, by making recourse to Christopher Lasch's work on tradition, I will open the possibility that explicitly primitivist theory provides the conceptual framework by which Aboriginal people(s) can re-appropriate their traditions as grounds for critically engaging present challenges.

1. Hybridity

In 2008, the Art Gallery of Alberta, in Edmonton, Canada, showcased a number of contemporary Aboriginal artists. The overarching theme of the exhibition, entitled "Face the Nation," was the encounter and contested blending of Aboriginal and European culture in post-contact Canada. Many striking images juxtaposed concepts of the 'traditional' First Nations archetype against the backdrop of contemporary Canadian society, especially urban life. Maria Hupfield's "Scout" (2006) evokes the Sacajawea trope of the Indian guide by showing an Aboriginal woman surveying the horizon while standing alongside a canoe, but the canoe and canoeist both find themselves out of place because they are on a paved sidewalk in the middle of Toronto. Terrance Houle's "Urban Indian"

(2007) series depicts an Aboriginal man dressed in his pow-wow dancing regalia going through the motions of a white-collar workday: taking the train to work, talking on the phone while doing paperwork in the office, shopping for groceries after work, and relaxing in the bathtub at the end of the day. Dana Claxton's "The Mustang Suite" (2008) plays on the images of the horse and the Aboriginal, showing an Aboriginal boy on a pinto horse wearing Adidas athletic pants, for example, or an Aboriginal man wearing both facepaint and a business suit in front of a classic Ford Mustang car. KC Adams' extensive "Cyborg Hybrid" series presents glamour portraits of people of mixed-blood Aboriginal ancestry, each of whom is wearing a white T-shirt bearing a stereotypical and often offensive slogan embroidered in white beads: e.g., "I EAT RAW MEAT" (2008), "NOBLE SAVAGE" (2006), "I CLUB BABY SEALS" (2008).

Adams' series explicitly references Donna Haraway's theory of hybridity, as did the museum commentary on these artworks (Rice 2008). The general idea behind hybridity theory is to "explicitly embrac[e] the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self" (Haraway 1991, 174), such as 'primitive' and 'civilised.' We moderns no longer experience ourselves as one thing and not another; as cyborgs, we ought to welcome our new identity as mixtures between the various polar opposites we once kept separate, both in our conceptual frameworks and our actual lives. Applied to the aforementioned works of art, the idea is that one's identity as a person of Aboriginal descent is not defined by the traditional representations thereof. Those representations of Aboriginality no longer apply to the contemporary cultural context, and indeed they may never have applied, having often being staged or falsely constructed to reflect Euro-Canadian presuppositions of what an Aboriginal person was supposed to be.[1]

Hybridity's position on the inapplicability of the past reflects a larger anti-essentialist trend, which is opposed to seeing the identity of anything in terms of an unchanging essence or Platonic ideal. Essences are not supposed to mutate; they are not fuzzy around the edges. They are unaffected by time, and they can conveniently be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. To be Aboriginal, so essentialism

[1] For example, Edward Curtis, an early 20th-century photographer, documented what he considered the "vanishing race" of the North American Indian, but he misrepresented his subjects "by editing, erasing and ignoring any signs of modernity and Western influence from his images." His intent to portray "First Peoples as beautiful and tragic subjects frozen in time…[rendered invisible] the visual testimony of contact, oppression and enforced assimilation" (Rice 2008, 21).

goes, will mean the same thing now as it always did. Therefore, if an Aboriginal person does not embody the Aboriginal essence, then that person is not really Aboriginal after all. All too often, of course, these conditions are reduced to a Halloween costume, a historically inaccurate stereotype projected onto the subject by someone other than the subject. Hybridity thus rejects the idea that there can be an essence, some ideal that exists independently of oneself and which one must satisfy if one's identity is to be authentic.

While hybridity rejects this discourse of authenticity or fidelity to pre-existing standards of categorisation, it also holds that one's identity is not to be understood by simply assimilating to the present context. Aboriginals do not have to choose between 'vanishing' as traditional Indians into the dustbin of history, on the one hand, and becoming indistinguishable elements of the American melting pot, on the other. Hybridity affirms *mixture,* not the conquest of one binary by the other. Therefore, the works of art mentioned above suggest that being Aboriginal lies somewhere in-between those essentialised stereotypes rooted in the past, and simply being generic members of mainstream mass society. Contemporary Aboriginal persons are both fully enmeshed in the contemporary world, and yet they are unique actors within it, different from other actors in many ways.

However, hybridity applies to *everyone* in post-modern society, Aboriginal or not. Euro-Canadians are hybrids just as much as anybody else in the culture. But that, I submit, is the entire point of hybridity discourse: its affirmation of mixture serves to make difference otiose. The point of showing the incongruity between scouts and sidewalks, or pow-wows and office cubicles, or facepaint and sports cars, or seal hunting and glamour, seems to be that old-fashioned stuff is irrelevant. The juxtaposition of the traditional against the modern will more readily suggest (to the contemporary mind) that the traditional *doesn't fit* with the modern, rather than the modern being out of sync with the traditional. Implicitly, then, fitness is one's ability to co-exist with modernity. Ethnic background notwithstanding, Aboriginal people aren't all that different from anybody else. Urban Aboriginals are supposed to face the same sort of challenges that non-Aboriginals face in navigating industrial hyper-capitalist society. When there are differences—e.g., the racism faced by many urban Aboriginals, or the unique challenges posed by life on a reservation—they indicate realities that must be solved, overcome, even effaced. Though my next-door neighbour is a Cree lady, her Cree background shouldn't have any more effect on our relationship than my German-Polish-Lithuanian background. The substantive issues are those

we all face, and should be able to face together as equals. Aboriginal or not, we are all members of the same neighbourhoods, cities, countries, social classes etc.

And so in spite of hybridity's protestations to the contrary, it appears ill-equipped to resist assimilationism. It tells us that we are cyborgs, hybrids, mixtures of backgrounds and foregrounds, and that we are defined by neither in isolation. But when push comes to shove, foreground wins. Our backgrounds are ultimately irrelevant, and our task is to face the facts of the contemporary situation:

> if we learn how to read these webs of power and social life, we might learn new couplings, new coalitions. There is no way to read the following list from a standpoint of 'identification,' of a unitary self. The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive in the diaspora. (Haraway 1991, 170)

Haraway is saying there is no way to determine how we ought to hybridise ourselves, how we should navigate the mixture of our backgrounds and the foreground. All we can hope for is *new* combinations, or even "illegitimate fusions" and "'technological' pollution" (Haraway 1991, 174, 176). Dispersion is a fact; our job is to survive it by valorising degradation. Hybridity is therefore *indiscriminate* with respect to the combinations that emerge from the breakdown of classical dichotomies, and *acquiescent* with respect to the context which facilitates and environs this breakdown. There is no sense in asking questions like 'which social order is preferable?' or 'how ought we to live?', nor is there any sense to asking whether the present situation which mandates our cyborg hybridity is one which we ought to accept. Rather, the polymorphous context within which we find ourselves *just is*. It is the undisputed, and (ironically) the new good. Our task is to adapt and affirm, nothing more. There is no option other than to cyborgise ourselves with the culture that mandates cyborgism.

Therefore, because it takes the status quo for granted, hybridity theory reverts to a default assimilationism, in spite of its own attempts to avoid that result. Ultimately, resistance is futile because background is irrelevant. The only thing we can do is choose for ourselves what kind of cyborg we will be. Because traditional culture is no better or worse than modern culture (even though we're inescapably stuck with the latter), First Nations people can choose whichever combination of the two aspects they like (so long as those combinations can be made to fit within modern culture). That is, hybridity affirms the autonomous right of the individual to assert their own power over identity creation. So long as our hybridisation with modernity is our own, all will be well. The solution to

directionless cultural relativism, therefore, is self-assertion over raw, heteronomous material (i.e., what we've inherited from the past, or from 'nature') within the bounds of the untouchable status quo. In this respect, hybridity is no different than the classical model of modern science: politically unobtrusive knowledge that will give "man" the power to make nature as malleable as "soft wax...which he we will be able to cast into whatever form he chooses" (Pokrovskiy 1931; in Passmore 1980, 25).

2. Traditional Ecological Knowledge

In summary, because there is no Aboriginal essence, it is impossible to make recourse to an 'authentic past.' Cultural background is irrelevant (each one is as good or bad as any other), and so the only important thing is to fit into the current cultural context. The way to do this is to assert one's own autonomy, to create one's own identity out of whatever material one desires. Hybridity theory embodies a cultural relativism analogous to that often found in the social sciences (Benedict, 1934), and is socially acquiescent to boot. It may be right to reject essentialism, but hybridity introduces no new resources to prevent assimilationism. Nevertheless, contemporary anthropology, native studies, and conservation biology have attempted to be more accommodating with respect to Aboriginality. Canadian resource management has found it increasingly necessary to take culturally diverse values into consideration, specifically "traditional ecological knowledge" (TEK)—roughly defined as the land-value systems of Aboriginal peoples as distinct from colonial land-value systems. This includes practical knowledge of how to flourish (or just survive) in the local area, traditional landscape management tools and practices, the larger cultural context of First Nations social structures within which these practices exist, and finally the conceptual framework or worldview within which these practices make sense (Berkes 1999). However, incorporating TEK into existing formats of calculative natural resource management can be problematic, because the two often clash and may be incommensurate. TEK may actually be *resistant to hybridisation.*

The controversy over TEK in conservation management can be schematised as a theory-based conflict between natural scientists, on the one hand, and social scientists on the other. With regard to the former, the extreme formulation of scientific objectivism holds that *there is no such thing* as TEK (Widdowson and Howard 2006). As early as 1953, Gordon Day was arguing that the primarily agricultural tribes of the northeastern United States had "created sizeable clearings for their villages and fields," increased those clearings because they "foraged incessantly for firewood,"

and set fire to much of the region "to improve travelling and visibility; to drive or enclose game; and to destroy 'vermin'" (Day 1953, 342). This forestry, hunting, and agricultural activity, he argues, altered so-called "natural succession" such that "it is certain that their activities destroyed much of the forest in some places and...modified it over much larger areas" (Day 1953, 343). This is only an early example of a prominent literature which argues that empirical fact dispels the romantic fiction that First Nations people possess(ed) traditional knowledge which could positively contribute to contemporary landscape management policy. Rather, the only thing which can positively contribute to conservation management is conservation science itself.

More recently, Charles Kay argues that conservation biologists no less than anthropologists "seldom consider the impact prehistoric human populations had on their resource base or how aboriginal activities may have structured entire ecosystems" (1994, 384). He argues that the primarily non-agricultural tribes of the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains kept ungulate populations (like elk and deer) very low by what he calls "overkill." He claims his empirical data shows that

> Native Americans had no practices that were specifically designed to conserve ungulates. All native hunters are essentially opportunistic and tend to take high-ranking ungulates regardless of the size of the prey populations or the likelihood of their becoming extinct. Native Americans had no concept of maximum sustained yield and did not manage ungulate populations to produce the greatest offtake (Kay 1994, 379).

Aboriginal traditions, rather than possessing valuable ecological knowledge, actually represent "the exact opposite of any predicted conservation strategy" (Kay 1994, 359). Frankly put, therefore, the very notion of TEK presupposes the discredited idea of the ecologically noble savage.

This scientific skepticism about TEK strikingly parallels the relativism and anti-essentialism of hibridity theory: Aboriginals never were ecological, because there is no such thing as the pure, the virgin, or the undefiled: all environments are already modified by humans, all environments are already hybrids of the organic and human artifice. (And this is supposed to be equally true of traditional Aboriginal cultures as it is of colonial European cultures.) There is no ecological essence to Aboriginality any more than there is an essence to nature as it is in itself (Buege 1996). Aboriginal tradition is irrelevant, because it is no better than contemporary society: both kinds of culture greatly modified the environment, so there's nothing special about either one. The lesson, therefore, is that Aboriginals were no different—no better, no worse—than

colonial peoples. We are all in the same boat, and regardless of our backgrounds, we all must face the facts of our common foreground. The status quo is off the hook, the white man's ecological burden is lifted. Debunking the noble savage thus serves to exonerate the contemporary mainstream; Aboriginal or not, we are forced to adapt to and affirm the present without making any substantive recourse to the past.

On the other hand, social scientists more attuned to the social construction of scientific knowledge are equally critical of the ecologically noble savage, although their arguments tend to be based on cultural relativism and conceptual incommensurability rather than the purported objectivity of natural science. For example, Paul Nadasdy (2005) argues that what contemporary environmentalists mean by 'conservation' or 'environmentalism' is very different from what contemporary Aboriginal peoples mean when they use those terms. Based on his ethnographic work in Canada's Yukon Territory, Nadasdy claims that the Aboriginal peoples there choose to live in particular landscape locations for utilitarian rather than aesthetic reasons—which is supposed to illustrate a profound difference with environmental activists, who ostensibly eschew utilitarian considerations and prioritise the aesthetic appreciation of nature. Furthermore, Nadasdy's ethnographic subjects take pains to avoid calling themselves 'environmentalists' because they associate that term with the anti-fur movement. Third, he claims that these Aboriginals do not believe that nature has 'intrinsic value,' and indeed claim to respect animals as sacred while at the same time hunting and killing them (they go so far as to say that killing animals is itself a form of respect). Finally, Nadasdy sees the Kluane as having an "adversarial" view of the relationship between humanity and nature, because they say that if you do not respect nature, then nature will kill you (2005, 304).

None of these Aboriginal ideas fit what Nadasdy calls "Euro-American" concepts of conservation. He concludes, therefore, that "the people of the Kluane First Nation cannot be placed anywhere on the environmentalist spectrum" (Nadasdy 2005, 301).

> Yukon First Nation peoples' beliefs, values, social relations and practices simply cannot be categorised as environmentalist or conservationist. Nor can they be categorised as nonenvironmentalist. (311)

Traditional ecological knowledge is thus conceptually incommensurate with mainstream North American conservationism or environmentalism; each is irrelevant to the other. Nadasdy thus ends as a relativist as well:

> One could make a compelling case that the people of Kluane First

> Nation—and Yukon First Nation people in general—are 'environmentalists.' One could make an equally compelling case that they are not. It depends entirely on one's perspective; there is ample 'evidence' available to support either claim (301).

Although we are supposed to believe that Nadasdy's own evidence and argumentation is not entirely dependent on perspective and should be more compelling than the cases made by his opponents, the irony is that according to his own logic, there is no way to tell which perspective is closer to the truth, not even his! And thus, like Haraway, his only recourse is to the assertion of autonomous power. When he laments how "the discourse and practice of conservation have undermined Yup'ik goos hunters' claims to decision-making power," he cannot be claiming that Yup'ik goose hunters actually know something that the discourse and practice of conservation does not. In the absence of any way to reasonably adjudicate between different perspectives, the only thing that *should* happen is that Aboriginals be permitted to make their own decisions on their own terms. Neither science nor environmentalism should be allowed to tell them what or what not to do.

For this reason, the attempt to incorporate TEK into resource management science is sometimes viewed as a form of colonialism. Nadasdy argues that the concepts of 'environmentalism,' 'conservation' or 'ecological nobility' (which he treats as equivalent) are themselves Euro-American concepts. These foreign concepts are then applied to Aboriginal people who, it is found, do not measure up to them. Therefore, Aboriginals are viewed badly for not having lived up to a set of ideals forced upon them from the outside: non-Aboriginal North Americans "retain an imperialist perspective insofar as they continue to evaluate indigenous people's actions according to a Euro-American ideal..." (Nadasdy 2005, 293). Consequently, all persons must refrain entirely from using environmental or conservationist concepts "to evaluate indigenous people's actions" and instead focus on their particular and culturally relative relations and assumptions (Nadasdy 2005, 295). In a similar vein, Arun Agrawal argues that incorporating TEK into the discourse of sustainable development strips the former of its contextual richness and unique character, because only those elements of TEK which science or development finds "useful" will be incorporated. TEK is thus abstracted and boiled down into something that will fit the dominant framework of Western science, discarding whatever is unique about Aboriginal land-value systems. This process thus serves the power interests of the colonial status quo: Indigenous knowledge is converted "into an instrument of scientific progress, development, and the institutions that claim to control both

development and the knowledge needed to develop" (Agrawal 2002, 295).

However, Agrawal also argues that there is no "pure state" of TEK which has not been contaminated by Western scientific categories (2002, 295). The contemporary context is already a hybrid context, and so it is naive to expect traditional knowledge to offer a clear alternative to the status quo. Thus, when Aboriginal people pursue their own power interests (what else could they pursue?), they cannot rely exclusively on TEK but must also hybridise themselves with non-traditional and non-Aboriginal political strategies. In summary, therefore, both the relativistic social scientific approach and the objectivist natural scientific approach towards TEK are profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand, there may be no such thing as TEK: there is no ecologically noble 'essence' to Aboriginal identity, and thinking so is a romantic delusion. Because profoundly altering (even 'overkilling') the environment is just the way things are, non-Aboriginals and Aboriginals are in the same environmental basket. On the other hand, even if there is such thing as TEK, its incorporation into environmental concern is problematic if not impossible: either it is conceptually incommensurate with Western notions about natural value, or its incorporation therein turns TEK into a tool to be used to justify the status quo rather than serve Aboriginal interests. In either case, therefore, juxtaposing the traditional and the modern has little to no critical potential—no more than the hybrid cyborg interpretations of Aboriginal art which showed the lack-of-fit between traditional concepts of Aboriginality and the modern world. Both relativism and anti-romanticism appear functionally equivalent: Aboriginal tradition may not have anything to say with respect to the contemporary context.

3. Tradition

This ambivalence towards Aboriginal tradition is characteristic of a larger ambivalence and indeed antipathy in modern Western thought towards tradition in general. Modern science was explicitly defined in opposition to the traditions that preceded it: both René Descartes and Francis Bacon saw tradition as an entirely impotent source of knowledge.[2] For conservation science to accept TEK as in some sense legitimate would entail the repudiation of a longstanding and defining prejudice of science and indeed the modern mind. Hybridity theory associates tradition with the

[2] That is not to say Descartes did not build on the ideas of his predecessors, but rather that his own project explicitly repudiated tradition in the first two sentences of his First Meditation.

essentialised organic unities it rejects in favour of mixtures and transgressions, as if tradition can only be understood in terms of stasis, purity and uniformity. We have seen both scientific objectivism and postmodern relativism reject appeals to tradition as nostalgic—i.e., the naive assumption that the past is uncontaminated by and thus an intellectual alternative to the present—and as incoherent, because tradition is incapable of being translated or understood in the familiar terms of the present. Tradition is thus caught in a Catch-22: either it is repudiated because it is purist and essentialist, or it is repudiated because it fails to provide any examples of a pure state or essentialised identity. In both cases, it is 'out-of-date,' incapable of providing any meaningful service towards understanding the present.

Of course, many anthropologists and other scientists *are* deeply concerned about traditional lifeways and peoples, and indeed they advocate for those cultural groups as best they can. Agrawal notes how "indigenous knowledge has come to occupy a privileged position in discussions about how development can best be brought about so that finally, it really is in the interest of the poor and marginalised," and moreover that

> this shift in the fortunes of indigenous knowledge is to be welcomed. It comes after long decades, perhaps centuries, of easy dismissals of the indigenous and what it signified (2002, 287).

Like hybridity, however, the good intentions here outstrip the author's theoretical resources. Agrawal cannot say why these fortunes are improved or whether those fortunes have improved for well-grounded reasons, except by offering up the Foucauldian and Nietzschean 'just so' explanation that the assertion of Aboriginal power has prevailed over other assertions of power. Nadasdy, meanwhile, thinks that we should not "invalidate indigenous people's claims that (at least some of) their beliefs and practices are more ecologically sound than those of Euro-North Americans" (2005, 315), although if we accept his earlier argument about conceptual incommensurability, then his current claim about ecological soundness cannot possibly make sense. Moreover, as a relativist, Nadasdy cannot say *why* we should not invalidate Indigenous people's claims about their (occasional) ecological soundness, or *how* we ought to evaluate such claims, because all such considerations (as he has said) are entirely dependent on perspective and could justifiably go either way.

What this activism needs, therefore, is a better justification for privileging Aboriginal perspectives than the relativism and self-assertion currently on offer. In Christopher Lasch's words, we need to make more

"intelligent use of the past" (1991, 82). Both postmodern relativists and scientific objectivists seem to think that the only way to make use of the past is by romanticising it, falsely idealising it and then holding it up as an essential reality in contrast to the less-than-ideal status quo. And because romanticism is spurious, the only remaining options are to forge ahead with objective science as our absolute guide, or to view any cultural context—past or present—as equivalent with any other, and hope that the 'right kind' of self-assertion (as if there was one) will prevail in the melee of competing power interests. But why should we think it is impossible to make use of the past without romanticising, idealising or essentialising it? Remember that the Catch-22 tradition faces involves it being criticised both for being pure and for not being pure. If anti-essentialism is correct (I think it is), then the sensible thing to do is to celebrate the 'impurity' of non-hybridised tradition.

What I mean to suggest is that tradition is should not be conceptualised in terms of purity at all; it should not be treated as an essence, a static and inviolate reality which ceases to be tradition at all once it is changed by contact with modernity. This is, however, how anti-romanticism sees it; as an antipode of the present, tradition loses its virginal status and becomes polluted—hybridised, cyborgised—whenever it comes into contact with the present. But this misunderstands the nature of tradition. Neither time nor other traditions are the automatic enemy of a tradition per se, because as legal scholar H. Patrick Glenn (2010) points out, the very nature of tradition is its *critical appropriation of the present.* Conceptualising tradition as an essence only makes sense on a logocentric basis, a view of stability and order modelled after the timeless abstraction of the written word, but because tradition is oral (in the main), it is by nature flexible, continually changing, and adapting to new situations and information. This very fluidity is why traditions tend to appear insubstantial and uncritical from an essentialist perspective, but that judgement blinds us to how tradition's adaptive engagement with the novel facts of the present attempt to do justice to the larger body of tradition which is itself viewed as living, not static or timeless. Therefore, Glenn argues that tradition

> is unable to define itself in such a way as to preclude entry of non-chthonic[3] information. It is true that the tradition is defined in terms of chthonic information, as transmitted by chthonic people, but this is simply what a tradition is. ... Spontaneous syncretism is everywhere the order of the day. A "middle ground" is created—a "place in between," though there is constant danger of discontinuity in the tradition of the oral tradition. Yet

[3] "Chthonic" is Glenn's technical term for the adjective "traditional."

> the continuing existence of chthonic tradition indicates that openness and vulnerability are not the dominant criteria in the ongoing life of a tradition. Much more would appear to depend on what the tradition says. (Glenn 2010, 85)

So while traditions are intrinsically open to the challenges of the present, they are resilient enough to push back as well. Living traditions do not simply acquiesce to the status quo; rather, they determine whether some elements of the present may be amenable to incorporation into the tradition, whether those elements need to be modified first or outright rejected. Rather than being a romantic essence frozen in the past and subject to automatic contamination or defilement by mere contact with the present, the precise format of tradition is active engagement with the present, which is itself as malleable and contingent as the past (otherwise tradition could not selectively engage with it). Tradition is a finitely flexible standard of evaluation which, as part of a hermeneutic spiral, both modifies and may be modified by that which it encounters. Neither tradition nor modernity need be understood as unchangeable unities; neither can be essentialised, because the present is capable of critical appropriation by the past. *Tradition rejects the notion that the present (and future) must inevitably be modern.*

Of course, the Western mind is very reticent to admit this, because modernity's own self-justification is grounded in repudiating tradition any way it can. Anti-romanticism can more easily dismiss the past if it can be seen as irrelevant *by definition* (i.e., by essence) to the present. Lasch argues convincingly that *nostalgia* is an artifact of Enlightenment progressivism, a pejorative category invented for the express purpose of rhetorically discrediting any resistance to the upward march of modern 'reason's' conquest of 'nature.' *All* appeals to tradition become lumped together, all equally assumed to be romantic and thus false. Progressivism and modernity are defined by the notion that the past cannot be a moral competitor with the present-becoming-future, and so any appeals to tradition are dismissed as automatically incoherent.

But nostalgia itself is a false category:

> Nostalgic representations of the past evoke a time irretrievably lost and for that reason timeless and unchanging. Strictly speaking, nostalgia does not entail the exercise of memory at all, since the past it idealises stands outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection. (Lasch 1991, 83)

Nostalgia sees the distinction between past and present to be unbridgeable rather than continuous, which is why it wistfully pines for the past's

unattainable delights. If the past is to be understood accurately (i.e., as within time), it must be understood as neither static (i.e., outside time) nor disconnected to the present. For tradition to be understood correctly, it must be understood as relevant, neither relativised into meaninglessness nor romanticised into falsehood.

4. Primitivism

With that we sail into unfamiliar waters. Up to this point the idea that tradition is an embarrassment was intelligible (even if we did not want to agree), but there are not many resources to explain why that shame might be illegitimate. What theory of culture will result if the past is not viewed as incommensurate with the present, or if Aboriginal tradition is not viewed as irrelevant to contemporary culture? It is almost sheer reflex to assume that such a theory will be nothing more than the noble savage trope so effectively debunked by modern scholarship. To call this theory 'primitivism,' as I will, only reinforces that impression. One can hardly utter the word in English without feeling an unbidden revulsion based on hundreds of years of Enlightenment progressivism and European ethnocentrism, or invoking thousands of years of urban bias against the rural or civilised bias against the barbaric and the savage. These ingrained pejoratives dominate our subconscious *Weltanschauung* in spite of the positive semantic range of etymologically-related terms such as 'primary,' 'premier' and 'Prime Minister.' But we will not get very far towards a non-nostalgic use the past if any such framework is summarily dismissed by way of unexamined lexical reflex.[4] Let us then dare to speak of primitivist theory, and see what approach it may offer to traditional ecological knowledge.

What we have seen so far, with respect to TEK, is that underneath the controversies examined by natural and social scientists lie problematic theoretical frameworks, irrespective of the empirical data that might be presented. Before one even gets to the issue of particular TEK claims about the environment, the theories operating in the examples examined above assume either 1) 'the Indian' as an essence, 2) the ideal state of nature as 'pristine' or lacking any human engagement whatsoever, 3) definitions of 'conservation' based in modern economic calculative rationality, 4) environmentalism essentialised as respectful, non-lethal, and non-contact 'intrinsic valuing' based in aesthetic disinterest, or 5) Western science as an essence that contaminates tradition. With these assumptions

[4] For an example of such dismissal, see Adams (1998).

in play, TEK is bound to be controversial, if not intractably so, because these frameworks cannot but conceptualise tradition nostalgically—as an irretrievable past, an unattainable essence incommensurate with the essence of the modern present. We have also seen that the postmodern solution to this impasse is the assertion of power over against other, supposedly delegitimated powers, but as is the problem with the Nietzschean project generally, this self-assertion and delegitimating is itself groundless, lacking any resources for its own legitimacy (Desmond 2008). These TEK controversies, therefore, are in the market for a non-romantic (non-nostalgic and non-essentialist) and non-relativist (grounded and critical) theoretical framework.

There are (at least) three reasons why a primitivist framework avoids both romanticism and relativism. First, primitivism asserts *that the past is not irrelevant or irretrievable, because it is continuous with the present*. Perhaps the clearest entry point into this continuity is via human evolution: anatomically modern humans appear in the evolutionary record roughly 200,000 years ago with the human genome remaining relatively stable since that point, but the development of agriculture roughly 10,000 years ago introduced profound changes to human social organisation. Evolutionary psychology therefore uses this pre-agricultural period—approximately 95% of our species' chronology—to establish relatively stable conventions for human psychological capacities and behavioural patterns. This is not essentialism about human identity, but—in concert with current research in the philosophy of biology—should rather be understood as homeostatic property clustering: biological species are in flux, of course (this is what makes evolution possible), but that flux does not mean species are not stable groupings. So in spite of dynamism, relatively stable baselines can be experienced on the basis of *typicality*, not definitiveness, and *relationality,* not simply internal constitution. Homeostatic property clusters provide non-arbitrary explanatory integrity of observable stability without assuming metaphysical identity, thus incorporating contextuality, indeterminacy and variation (Wilson, Barker, and Brigandt, 2007; Brigandt 2009). The evolutionary constitution of human beings can thus provide a baseline for both evolutionary psychology (as above) and even more ambitious projects, like academically grounding Rawls' primary goods in human nature (Corning 2011). Even something as trivial as the expectation of an eight-hour sleep can be criticised as from a primitivist perspective; recent sleep research suggests that "waking up during the night is part of normal human physiology" because that is the way we evolved to sleep (Hegarty 2012). What these examples show, moreover, is that primitivism in no way requires us to 'go