

Re-Constructing the Colonizer: Self-representation by First Nations Artists

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ABSTRACT

What are the options for Native women artists, within a colonial context? Using literature from the fields of decolonization, semiotics and cultural studies, this article examines the colonial gaze and celebrates the work of Native women artists who resist its power through their artistic practices.

RÉSUMÉ

Quelles sont les options pour les femmes artistes autochtones à l'intérieur d'un contexte colonial? En se servant de la littérature venant des champs de décolonisation, d'études sémiotiques et culturelles, cet article examine le regard colonial et célèbre le travail des femmes artistes autochtones qui résistent sa puissance par le truchement de leurs pratiques artistiques.

INTRODUCTION

Laughter and The Stories We Live

Life can be full of contradictions, so perhaps it is not surprising that something as splendid as laughter could be a site for political and social struggle. Yet humour lives within cultures, and cultures contain human struggle. This article was inspired by a talk with a Communication Studies professor about stand-up comedy, and the tendency of new comics to begin their careers by focussing on poverty, oppression, disability or ethnic/cultural backgrounds. This professor, also a bi-racial woman scholar, worried that "they" (the colonizers¹) are going to laugh at us. My response was something brilliant, like, "I think that kind of humour is cool." (The stand-up comedians, of course, are *hoping* the audience will laugh at them. Otherwise, their careers are in big trouble.)

As many a Native performer or comedian has found, however, it is not easy for white, Canadian audiences to laugh at real Native people. They are more likely, in my experience, to laugh at "Indian jokes" from within their own culture: jokes about Indians which are formed, shaped, sent and received from within a world view that does not include living Native people. This humour is not about Indigenous people at all. It is a dry, distant humour intended to elicit chuckles instead of belly laughs. "We've got everything in our family, from doctor to priest to Indian Chief." Chuckle. "Hey,

Chief, how's your casino? Gonna blockade a road today?" Chuckle. "Honest Injun." Hyuk-yuk. "Hey, my Indian name is Two Dogs F***ing." Hardee-har-har. These phrases, like the absurd "woo-woo-woo" sounds that only colonizers make with their hands, have nothing to do with actual Native people and everything to do with a colonial fantasy. They're not laughing at us. "They" can barely remember that we exist in real life. The full, free belly laugh is reserved for the talent of the colonial person who imitates the Indian, in very familiar and non-threatening ways; the person who maintains the colonial fantasy of the Indian. My most direct knowledge of the colonial mindset comes from within my own mind, as a result of the minimization of my Native identity by child welfare authorities, so I speak from my own lived experience in these matters.

As a writer and performer, I face directional challenges about how to make art within this paradigm. We've all endured lengthy discussions about "what is Native art?" More to the point, however, there are questions like, "Are you an artist who happens to be Native, or are you a Native person who happens to be an artist?" Some other variations might be: Am I a Native performer who seeks to elicit pity and understanding about our long suffering as a people? Do I use artistic practice solely as a political or healing tool? If I take a break from genocide to enjoy some deliciously silly fart jokes, am I a traitor to my people? Do I give the

colonizer a familiar, "dumb Indian/savage warrior/dirty squaw" performance? Must I spend my entire artistic career trying to claim a "real/reserve Indian" voice, or can I express my own experience as an adoptee and city-dweller? Is my work always tied to my oppression as a Native person? Must my art constantly address searing social issues, because I am Native? Am I obligated to make art only about pain and violence and death, because I come from a nation, community and family that have been directly impacted by racist and genocidal practices? Must I make art only to educate non-Native audiences about my groovy, exotic, spiritual culture? Am I an artist who happens to be Native, or am I a Native person who happens to be an artist?

I believe that there are many stories to tell. We are artists, and we are members of Native communities, families and nations. From that place, we must have the freedom to participate in all the questioning, clowning and agony of the human experience on an artistic level. We must be free, not only from the trap of colonial stereotyping, but from limited definitions about the purpose, style, content and direction of "Native art." Native art cannot and should not be narrowly defined. A single description of Native art would lock us into yet another colonial, two-dimensional definition of our very three-dimensional artistic selves.

Artistic self-expression and performance bring social benefits, even if they are not specifically designed to educate, resist or heal. I believe that it is our role as artists to play, to enthusiastically reach for artistic excellence and to experience the world on a level apart from the mundane. But there are many stories to tell, and other artists may approach their work in different ways. The point is not to strive for a single definition of our work, simply because we "happen to be Native." Our lived experience will inform our work, whether we're making horror films, erotic poetry, intellectual/theoretical works, love songs, broken-heart songs, romantic comedy, stand-up comedy or searing social commentaries.

For the record, I argue that culture-based comedy is capable of piercing the numb forgetfulness of the colonial mind, that teasing is a legitimate practice in many Indigenous cultures, and that this humour is capable of producing social change in sneaky, educational ways. From my

experience growing up in a mostly-white family and community, I believe that the colonizer culture can be very insular and resistant to painful truths. There is wisdom, in my opinion, in sharing information through laughter, in a way that might be safe for the colonizer to hear. Allowing the colonial audience to laugh at us directly, as who we are instead of as their fantasy of us, can change our relationship in important ways.

On another level, as a woman who happens to be Native and happens to be an artist, does my work necessarily have to conform to a narrow definition of feminism? It seems to me that the work of a strong woman will always support, and possibly inspire, the work of other strong women. Must all of my work focus on the suffering of women at the hands of men, or could it be a celebration of the strengths of women who survive and thrive? Strong women can, at times, be victimized, but that is not all of who we are. Even those whose lives are ended must be remembered as much for their strength and uniqueness as for their violent ends. I mention this because lately, my attention has been drawn to the disappearance and death of hundreds of Native women. We have been victimized and dehumanized, by white men and colonial institutions, and I cannot neglect those stories. I am simply suggesting that the work of strong female artists can be inspiring and empowering, even if that work does not directly address issues of systemic violence against women.

There are many stories to tell.

Some stories can erase us and make us feel invisible. An adoption story about my identity changed me into a white girl for almost twenty years of my life. Some stories can hurt us, or limit our sense of what is possible. Some stories can make injustices visible that have been ignored or forgotten. Stories can set us up to reach for an imagined Native identity or female standard of beauty. Stories can also inspire and elevate us. Luckily, as Janice Acoose writes, "There is so much more to the Native woman than being unemployed, alcoholic or in an abusive relationship."²

I am a Native woman, so my life story is about being vulnerable. I can be raped and left to die in a ditch. I can be shot. I can be used and abused. I can be desperate. I can envy and imitate the lifestyle of my colonizers. I can live in poverty and have my children stolen. People can believe

that I am less human, and that I deserve to die, because they believe that I am probably an immoral and irresponsible person. My death can be ignored by the rest of humanity. After I am dead, my body can be dismembered. My physical remains can become property of a museum or anthropology department, and my grave can be pushed aside so that Canadian businessmen can play golf.

I am an *Anishinaabe* woman, so my life story is about being strong. I can be loving and hospitable. I can be funny. I can survive all that the colonizers hand me. I can heal, and I can prosper. I can support my sisters, brothers, nieces and nephews. I can be playful, ambitious, intelligent and sly. My life can be a miraculous act of creation. I can choose to experience well-being and happiness. I can celebrate life and my own survival. I can be goofy. I can focus on what I have, and work to gain more of everything that makes my life so marvellous: family, home, love and artistic excellence. Living well in my homeland can be my most scrumptious revenge.

We live in a world of mythologies, as suggested by semiotic theorist Roland Barthes. He stated that "a myth is a story by which a culture explains or understands some aspect of reality or nature."³ Colonial mythology about Indians is shaped by the way in which the colonizers view the world. Based on the way they view the world, their sense of their place in the world is confirmed. In order to maintain the sense of their place in the world, they view Indigenous people from a specific viewpoint. That point of view contains all of the beliefs and stories that constitute their mythology. Looking at a Native person from that very specific point of view, known as the colonial gaze, the colonizer sees what s/he believes about the Indian. This mythology is so strong that a colonizer can walk past thirty Native people on the street, and only see the one who is passed out on the sidewalk, because that one Native person confirms the colonial myth-system. If a Native person happened to go by in a canoe, dressed in buckskin, that one would probably be recognized as well.

The colonial gaze is a lot like the male gaze, in its assumption of maturity and superiority, and in the way that it objectifies and eroticizes that which it captures. In terms of the male gaze, the one who gazes is able to simultaneously confirm his own position of privilege and deny all that he finds

repugnant within himself (by projecting it onto the woman). A similar process happens with the colonial gaze. To some extent, we see ourselves through this gaze; it is institutionalized and entrenched, and we carry it within ourselves. As women, when we look in the mirror or at other women, we see ourselves with eyes that cut, dissect and judge. When we believe that we will feel better about ourselves if we can conform our bodies to the imaginary ideal, we are seeing ourselves through the male gaze. When we feel judgemental about our fellow Native people who live in distress and poverty, we are seeing them through the colonial gaze. When we work extra hard to achieve success, to prove to the colonizer that we're not lazy, or limit our sexuality so that the colonizer will not think we're loose squaws, we're seeing ourselves through the colonial gaze.

The gaze constructs the stories in which we live.

*Conflict is the primary problem or dilemma in a story. There are three kinds, commonly called man vs. man, man vs. nature, and man vs. self.*⁴

Man struggles with his own nature, attempting to defeat that which he despises within himself. Man struggles with other men, for resources, land or women. Man struggles with nature, believing that it is his duty to subdue and conquer that which is terrifying and awesome. Our sons, brothers, husbands and friends engage in a constant struggle with all that men are not supposed to be: irrational, dangerous, savage or weak. Theorists propose that "men have denied their own embodied naturalness, repressed memories of infantile pleasure and dependence on the mother and on nature."⁵ The (rational) mind struggles to control and conquer the (irrational, dangerous) body. Cleanliness, order and health struggle against difference, filth and disease. Patriarchies struggle against matriarchies. Sexually repressed cultures struggle to control or deny all that is natural and fertile. Technology-based cultures struggle against earth-based cultures. Productivity struggles against laziness. Civilized people struggle against savages.

The colonial gaze, like the male gaze, is like a dehumanizing Star Trek transporter. Once fastened upon its object, all the parts of the original

are dispersed and reassembled to fit within the viewer's fantasy. In the process, the transporter filters out levels and layers of authentic human and historical experience. Roland Barthes said that:

...myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History [and of] ...both determinism and freedom. [...] This miraculous evaporation of history is another form of a concept common to most bourgeois myths: the irresponsibility of man.⁶

Barthes' comments about the mythologizing of history are highly relevant when examining colonial culture, and when looking at "the colonial gaze," as I will in this article. Specifically, I will examine the construction of the colonial gaze, its effects, and the ways in which Indigenous women artists resist its entrenched power, through cultural and artistic practices.

THE COLONIAL GAZE AND INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

Indigenous artists are making art within a Canadian culture filled with images and concepts that are distortions of our identity. These stereotypes can distort and block meanings within our creative work, as we try to pre-interpret our work for non-Native audience members. We have a strong cultural tradition of humour, yet we want to avoid triggering colonial myth-systems. Our artistic work is created around an obstacle course of colonial misunderstandings, cultural protocol, ethical concerns, community lateral violence and funding categories which sometimes attempt to determine the "Aboriginalness" of the work.

Stereotypical images of our people are so famously distorted that "there are now few living humans who have not absorbed [them] through one means of communication or another."⁷ These images and concepts also exist within our own communities, where authentic Indigenous identity is a battleground for resources, jobs and housing. Some Indigenous people cling to a constructed image of themselves as "real Indians," while others search for authenticity within culture or lived experience.

The Indian, as seen through the colonial gaze, is accepted as authentic, without question, by many Canadians. Without access to better-quality information, they cannot acknowledge the poor quality of the information they have. This quality of information as a resource is referred to as its "frictionless substitutability."⁸ With access to better-quality information, they might choose to question their assumptions about Indigenous people. Of course, "this act of 'ideological labor' requires real effort,"⁹ and many colonizers find it more pleasurable to repeat and confirm their more familiar ideas. It is possible to read a dominant message from an oppositional position, "either by completely disagreeing with the ideological position embodied in an image, or rejecting it altogether (for example, by ignoring it)."¹⁰

EXAMINING MYTHOLOGIES AND IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING

Roland Barthes studied the creation of meaning systems in which mythology "transforms history into nature." If a colonizer understands a colonized person according to naturalizing myths, the colonized person's attributes and behaviour can be seen as "natural" for their race, instead of being rooted in historical events. A colonizer can see an Indigenous person as being "naturally, biologically prone to alcoholism," forgetting the intentional, historical use of alcohol as a tool of oppression throughout history. S/he can see Indigenous people as being "naturally vulnerable to disease," forgetting the disease-laden blankets which spread those diseases. Barthes explained that mythology is never unmotivated. In fact, as he stated:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. [...] In passing from history to nature, myth [...] organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth [...]. It establishes a blissful clarity: Things appear to mean something by themselves.

(1973)

Visual images are especially vulnerable to this myth-making process. Because photographs, for example, are representations of real human beings, it is possible to believe that we are looking at the truth about an actual person, when in fact we are looking at an image divorced from its history, construction and/or editing process. Photographic images refer to real people and: "...stimulate us to construct the rest of the chain of concepts that constitute a myth....They exploit the 'truth factor' of a natural index [*i.e. a photograph*] and build on it by disguising its indexical nature."¹¹

Assumptions drawn from images of Indigenous people work through a connotative process, in that they "imply [meanings] in addition to the literal or primary meaning."¹² However, in a system of mythology, photographic images are read as though their connotative meanings are denotative, or, literally, the truth. Attributes perceived through such photographic evidence can be seen as "natural" for Indigenous people. The meanings attached to the image of the Indian are accessible for viewers with the required ideological positioning to read them. "According to theorists of textual positioning, understanding the meaning of a text involves taking on an appropriate ideological identity,"¹³ or "subject position."

The term "subject" needs some initial explanation. In "theories of subjectivity" a distinction is made between "the subject" and "the individual." As Fiske puts it, "the individual is produced by nature; the subject by culture...The subject...is a social construction, not a natural one."¹⁴ Whilst the individual is an actual person, the subject is a set of roles constructed by dominant cultural and ideological values (e.g., in terms of class, age, gender and ethnicity). Ideology turns individuals into subjects.

The notion that the human subject is "constituted" (constructed) by pre-given structures is a general feature of structuralism.[...] The French neo-Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) was the first ideological theorist to give prominence to the notion of the subject. For him, ideology was a system of representations of reality offering

individuals certain subject positions which they could occupy.¹⁵

Althusser described ideological positioning and interpellation as follows:

Ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all) or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!"

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was really him who was hailed" (and not someone else).¹⁶

Extending "the Althusserian concept of interpellation [...] to explain the political function of mass media texts," we can understand the process by which the colonizer is interpellated by images or texts about colonized people. A colonizer, who accepts the mythology of Indigenous people as mystical, for example, finds pleasure in viewing images which support and confirm that mythology.

Studying ideological systems within film and photography, theorist Bill Nicholls said that:

The familiarity of the codes in "realist" texts (especially photographic and filmic texts) leads us to routinely "suspend our disbelief." Recognition of the familiar (in the guise of the "natural") repeatedly confirms our conventional ways of seeing and thus reinforces our sense of self, whilst at the same time invisibly contributing to its construction.¹⁷ "When we say 'I see (what the image means),' this act simultaneously installs us in a place of knowledge and slips us into place as

subject to this meaning...All the viewer need do is fall into place as subject."¹⁸

An image also "excludes, as well as includes, certain readers. Those who share the code are members of the same 'interpretative community.'¹⁹ "In order to make sense of the signs in a text, the reader is obliged to adopt a 'subject-position' in relation to it."²⁰ Thus, the viewer of the image, or the reader of the text, is ideologically defined by the position s/he takes in viewing the image. The meanings attached to the images, or texts, construct the identity of the colonizer, as much as they distort the identity of the colonized.

The connection between ideology, stereotyping and real-life violence was confirmed in *The Report of the Aboriginal Inquiry of Manitoba*, which concluded that murder victim Helen Betty Osborne:

...fell victim to vicious stereotypes born of ignorance and aggression when she was picked up by four drunken men looking for sex. Her attackers seemed to be operating on the assumption that Aboriginal women were promiscuous and open to enticement through alcohol or violence. It is evident that the men who abducted Osborne believed that young Aboriginal women were objects with no human value beyond sexual gratification...²¹

THE CANADIAN COLONIAL GAZE

Racism is commonly understood in Canada as the process of "judging people based on the colour of their skin." Canadians are taught that it is wrong to make value judgements based on hair colour and texture, eye shape, nose size and shape, or skin colour. Nonetheless, information sources within dominant media systems and social institutions have applied a huge number of stereotypes to us, through centuries of colonization. At any given moment, we are assumed to be drunk, poor, warlike, promiscuous, wise, stupid, savage, humourless, childlike, politically corrupt, irresponsible, lazy, sneaky, victims, villains,

magical, spiritual, problematic, mascots, and/or privileged with special rights.

Our names and images sell millions of products. "Native American" identity was a central theme for patriotic leaders in pre-revolutionary America,²² and the ritual of assuming Native identity continues to be part of North American family life to this day. The recent Grammy performance by a rap artist, involving fake "Indians," and the cheerful response to these images by audience members, demonstrate the ease with which North Americans continue to accept and celebrate stereotypes about us.

Individual human beings carry stereotypes about other human beings based on a huge number of variables, from profession to family structure or age. We have absorbed culturally-embedded stereotypes about "cops eating doughnuts" and "single mothers on welfare." Not surprisingly, the tendency to stereotype also applies to physical appearance. The process of assigning blame can impede members of the dominant culture from recognizing and accepting their own part in the process. The implication, when using the term "racism," is that racists are monstrous "others" motivated by hatred or malice. Ask a Canadian if they are hateful, racist monsters, and s/he'll say no, effectively ending any process of accountability or acknowledgement.

However, we can consider these stereotypes within the context of colonization, as opposed to individual, inter-personal racism. Indian Studies researcher Margaret DeCorby has proposed that "the image of the Indian began with the initial historical colonial moment of contact."²³ In order to make it possible to kill and dispossess millions of members of Indigenous nations, colonizers had to find reasons to believe that they were doing the right thing. Competition for resources created the need for a mythology which dehumanized members of Indigenous nations. Wade Churchill has stated that, "...Native inhabitants were consigned to the mythical realm so that they would pose no threat to the established order."²⁴ Colonial mythology also allows colonizers to feel that they are more intelligent, deserving, hard-working, loving, enlightened and civilized than any other group of people on the planet. It is not surprising that colonizers find it pleasurable to ritualize and repeat

these mythologies, with such an emotional and financial payoff.

These stereotypes attach to people who look "Indian," but they impact even those of us whose physical appearance is ambiguous. I have fair skin and I am not always recognized as an "Indian," by Native or non-Native people. I certainly have not grown up experiencing racism based on skin colour. Yet I am also impacted by these stereotypes, and carry an awareness of them within myself.

THE WORK OF THE MYTH-MAKERS

Early colonial theorists and academics attempted to use a "scientific process" in studying Indigenous people. Anthropometrists arranged Indigenous people against a grid-patterned background, photographed and measured them,²⁵ in an effort to explain racial differences on a natural, or scientific/biological level. As well, "early anthropologists [...] used photographs as a record of peoples' physical characteristics, their built environment, rituals and artefacts, within a 'scientific' framework."²⁶ These photographs were accepted at face value. "...Even the most acute of nineteenth-century minds accepted uncritically the photograph as evidence."²⁷ However, critics point out that:

Early anthropologists were often armchair theorists. Sir James Frazer, for example, an eminent eighteenth-century British anthropologist, never conducted field work himself, yet was able to produce studies, based on notes and images brought back by travellers, that were viewed positively by academics of the time.²⁸

The photographs themselves were manipulated within the production process. Cultural anthropologist Maureen Schwarz noted that in one example, a photographer "under contract to the military, intentionally staged [...] photographs in such a way as to fit Navajo women and girls into then-current notions of what 'so-called primitive' people were like,"²⁹ by dressing them in "primitive" clothing. The photographer also:

...dramatically manipulated the attire of the women and young girls - exposing necks and baring shoulders - and positioned their bodies into seductive postures - having the women drape their arms around each other and lean suggestively toward the camera's eye, thereby portraying them as sexual objects. On one level these images constitute photographic pornography - pictures intended to arouse sexual desires - on an even more insidious level, they served as a means of affirming the status of these Navajo women and girls as Other. That is, as all that "proper" Euro-American women of the day were not - less than human, overtly sensual and promiscuous.

Schwarz, studying a series of mid-nineteenth-century images, said that the images were "propaganda - a contrived record of a conquered Indigenous people." Photographs were also used to show that the colonizers were having a positive effect through their efforts to "civilize" The Indian. As DeCorby pointed out, this was "mostly shown by pictures of Native children dressed in European clothes. These images implied how easily Native people could adapt to the colonial order." She said that the images have created "static interpretations of the Native inhabitants, on top of being inaccurate portrayals." Churchill said that photographs of that nature were used to reassure colonizers that "Native people were still subjugated, and disempowered enough not to challenge the colonial order."

Images also use "modes of address"³⁰ which approximate human interaction. Certain types of eye contact, which violate "socially regulated" codes of looking, lead to "depersonalization of the victim..."³¹ "When photographs simulate this kind of social violation, through "apparent proximity,"³² a similar dehumanization occurs. Jonathan Schroeder, who studies constructions of gender in advertising, said that "to gaze implies more than to look at - it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze."³³ By manipulating the production process to emphasize the power of the viewer, photographs once again construct the colonizer's self-image of superiority.

The visual image of "the Indian" has been used to support any number of colonial objectives. In advertising, Indian princesses dangled out of their canoes to sell everything from government policy to margarine.³⁴ "Chief Wahoo" is used as a mascot for colonizers' sports teams. North American colonizer culture is very possessive of its appropriated images and artifacts, and does not give them up easily. Colonial mythology is needed to support the colonizer's sense of identity. Users of these images imply that they intend to convey respect for Indigenous people. However, the stereotypes ultimately deflect viewers from any understanding of us as real human beings. Ward Churchill, in his book *Indians Are Us*, has provided "a compelling comparison of the abused Native American 'logos' of various sports groups and the Jewish caricatures that decorated several walls and newspapers earlier this [20th] century."³⁵

THE DEEP ROOTS OF THE GAZE

Colonization has been studied using a number of methods. One theory proposes that human beings project our inner darkness onto "Imaginary others."³⁶ In one example, colonizers, who are unable to handle their own feelings of guilt, find ways to blame and scapegoat "Indians" for tragic historical events. In another example, the colonizer, living within a "civilized," sexually-repressed culture, projects his or her own sexuality onto the colonized. This is particularly important when dealing with Indigenous women, as it is the "loose, sexually-available squaw" image which most often leads to our sexualized and violent victimization.

Other theories, based on the work of Jacques Lacan, propose that the relationship between the colonizer and colonized is that of a parent and child, with the colonized person providing resources: feeding, nurturing and supporting the dependent colonizer.³⁷ Paradoxically, the colonizer inverts this relationship, and creates stories in which s/he is a parental figure, who saves, rescues, civilizes, educates and supports the colonized person.

Michel Foucault theorized that Europeans began classifying and separating "others" through models originally developed to deal with illness. In his study of the panoptic model of surveillance, he

traced the roots of modern institutions through the late 17th-century plague model (quarantine) and response to leprosy (banishment).³⁸ According to Foucault, documentation, surveillance and other institutional systems were originally used in prisons, spreading into hospitals, government and schools, so that, as he said, "at the heart of all disciplinary systems functions a small penal mechanism."³⁹ As European science and technology began to develop, it seemed possible to classify, diagnose and cure anything from mental illness to poverty or race; photographs were used to "prove" that possibility. Photographs were manipulated within advertising, as in the case where people born with physical deformities were presented as others, or less-human freaks. After surgery, dressed in middle-class clothing and posed to appear dignified and respectable, they appeared identifiably human.⁴⁰ It was within this context that Indigenous people were seen and photographed as exotic "others."

Colonizers created "a figure for emergencies: exoticism. The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown."⁴¹ Exoticism was a coping method for colonizers who were constantly out of place and away from home. It reduced Indigenous peoples' cultures, with their power and integrity, to something small, silly and less frightening. "Early European commentators sought to categorize savage behaviour within the European worldview, to surround it with a familiar frame that would make it safe exotic, but no longer dangerous."⁴² The colonial gaze is addressed in writings about the cultural dance practice of tango:

The gaze is not aloof and static; rather it is expectant, engaged in that particular detachment that creators have towards the objects of their imagination. [...] The gaze with the power to exoticize is the colonial gaze, and this is the lens through which local admirers would see. [...] Perhaps exoticism is one of the most pervasive imperialist maneuvers. [...] Exoticism creates the need for Identity and assures that it cannot be attained: It is the imperialist hook that cannot be unhooked."⁴³

MODES OF RESISTANCE

The consent of the subordinate to the dominant system is never finally won; always elements of [...] resistance remain. [...] Hegemony theory allows for less traditional, more rebellious meanings [...] to challenge, and possibly even modify, the dominant ones.⁴⁴

Colonial meaning systems are not easily changed through guilt-inducing and/or educational efforts. However, it may be possible to shift the ideological position of the colonial viewer through trickier means. Accepting the dominant view of Indigenous people brings an emotional reward for colonizers, but a new set of rewards may be possible by giving the colonial viewer a chance to identify him/herself in alternate ways. By interpellating the viewer differently (i.e., inviting the viewer to occupy the subject position of "friend"), artists can create a situation in which colonizers can identify with the colonized. The colonizer can feel pleurably rewarded for identifying with the experience of Indigenous people as fellow human beings. This, in turn, could construct the viewer's identity differently, and might allow him/her to acknowledge the colonization process from a new perspective.

HUMOUR, SEX AND WHITE PEOPLE LAUGHING

Native artists, using humour in their work, find that it is an effort to maintain a balance between the freedom to entertain and the need to avoid colonial ideological traps. Creating work for our own communities, artists work within a culture that emphasizes playfulness and teasing. We might scrutinize, or satirize, our own communities and leaders. The sudden awareness of a "predominantly white crowd laugh[ing] at Natives"⁴⁵ can be jarring, leading to a concern that our comedic work might be perceived as a Native minstrelsy,⁴⁶ with an audience of colonizers wanting to see "dumb Indians"⁴⁷ onstage. While some artists attempt to educate or enlighten through humour, it is a delicate process. Tom King, the creator of CBC's "The Dead Dog Café," addressed the comedic boundaries in an interview, with the following: "[T]here remain

forbidden zones, limits of Canadian restraint. King knows his humour can jab, but it had better not punch. [...] 'We're a circus that comes to town and sets up next to the white community. [...] As long as you don't let the lions and tigers out of the cage, it's okay.'⁴⁸

Another member of the "Dead Dog Café" group, Edna Rain, calls her work "educational humour. [...] At first, I thought I was ridiculing my own people, but then I realized what we were saying was true."⁴⁹

In her work at the University of Victoria, cultural and visual anthropology professor Andrea Walsh studies visual artifacts in new ways. Walsh considers the images created by First Nations subjects as empowering artistic endeavours. "These pictures give us an idea of children as active agents in culture, not just as the recipients of culture. [...] By creating art, artists are involved in creating identity and placing themselves in history."⁵⁰

Many Native visual artists actively resist dominant meaning systems through various means. Stereotypes in visual images are constructed through production practices like camera angles, distance from subject, pose, cropping and clothing. Therefore, visual artists can reverse the trend towards stereotyping by using production techniques which emphasize the humanity, individuality and authenticity of the Native people portrayed. By using close-ups, viewer/subjects are invited to identify more closely with the object, or the person, in the image. However, close-ups which intrude beyond a socially-comfortable level simulate social intrusiveness and reduce the level of identification between subject and object. Artists can therefore use apparent proximity which keeps a respectful distance.

Visual artists also challenge the content of historical images, re-investing them with history. Jane Ash Poitras has used art and satire to question challenge colonial expectations:

Several years ago, Poitras was asked to create paintings about the community where she was born. In response, she created vibrant works that challenged the curator's stereotypic ideals, satiric works with titles like "Fort Chipewyan Breakfast Club." By doing so, she rebelled against the expectations the curator had that her

work ought to be thoughtful, serene and ideal.⁵¹

Artists use clothing, posture and the attitude of the photographic subject to challenge stereotypical views of Indians as sad victims or noble savages. As visual artist and film-maker Shelley Niro has said, "I get so tired of the 'Native image'. You have this idea already in your head: a simply-dressed person with a kind of sad look on their face: sort of a poster child."⁵² In her "Mohawks in Beehives" series, Niro:

...took the photographs at the end of March 1991. It was after Oka and the invasion of Kuwait, and all those terrible, depressing things happening in the world. [...] So I [said to] my three sisters "let's get rid of our kids and just have a fun day of it - let's put on make-up and do up our hair, let's go downtown [Brantford] and have lunch and be really loud and obnoxious. [...] I think that in a way we were sort of taking control."⁵³

Niro's approach, in this case, specifically worked to re-invest the female Native photographic subjects with a three-dimensional and playfully sexy humanity. Rather than facing a rigid stereotyping process with an equally rigid, solemn confrontation, she used playfulness and humour to free herself from its grasp.

Appropriation of our stories in print, and misinformation taught through history books, has long contributed to systemic and violent racism towards our people. Writer Janice Acoose has argued that "Canadian literature is an ideological instrument [...] a powerful and very political tool."⁵⁴ Examining the works of W.P. Kinsella and other Canadian authors, Acoose found parallels between their limited constructions of female Native characters, and real violence towards Native women, especially Helen Betty Osborne. Acoose has celebrated the emergence of Native women writers, who claim their voices from a strong cultural base, and suggests that "for many Indigenous writers, the act of writing thus becomes an act of resistance, an act of re-empowerment." Native literary artists are claiming our power as

story-tellers, to create a space in which healthier stories and mythologies are created and heard.

Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, who recently released a book of Indigenous erotica, has noted that shame and silence around sexuality are after-effects of the residential school experience. She pointed out that, "when [...] your erotic voice, that creativity is suppressed and then repressed, it signifies a break, a shift []it's a deadening kind of thing."⁵⁵ Akiwenzie-Damm's book is an important step towards decolonizing our sexuality. She has written, "I wanted [...] images of Indigenous people loving each other, because I was seeing a lot of images that weren't loving. Or those Harlequin romances of the studly aboriginal warrior dude who kidnaps the white woman, or all that crap."

Akiwenzie-Damm also acknowledged the reality of violence against Native women, saying:

I think it's a lot riskier for Indigenous women, because we have had that stereotype where we are either the virginal Mother Earth type or the slutty free-for-all, open to everyone, that has led to all kinds of abuse and deaths of Indigenous women. So it is a lot riskier for Indigenous women to talk about their sexuality. I do think that these positive images are important for young people and people outside of the Indigenous community; it is important for them to see us as whole people, not as stereotypes; to realize that, yes, we are sexual beings, loving people and [...] we are not one-dimensional stereotypes.⁵⁶

In *Breasting the Waves*,⁵⁷ poet Joanne Arnett described her own close call with violence, and the insensitivity with which authorities heard her story. She went on to describe a moment in which the murders of Native women were again brought into her consciousness: "My attention was immediately taken by a small white poster with sketches of two Aboriginal women, taped to the counter. [...] The remains of these two young women had been found in the country outside one of Saskatchewan's larger centres. [...] A kind of cold, quite separate from the prairie winter, invaded me." The reality of the danger towards us as Native women is never very far from our consciousness. However, Arnett recently launched her new book,

which celebrates love through poetry. With great courage, she has insisted on claiming the fullness of her human and artistic experience; re-investing herself as a writer and as a Native woman, with inter-personal love and the love of words.

Colonial culture, with its emphasis on individuality, tends to see racism, and its cure, within the inter-personal realm, detached from history. By examining racism as a system of colonial ideology, we can move out of the inter-personal to a level of awareness in which the colonizer is re-invested with his/her own history, thus providing a context for colonial racism and allowing the colonizer to own his/her own mythologies. Once there, it is possible to move back to the realm of the personal, free from the mixed levels of mythologies and stereotyping and claiming

our authentic stories and images.

Native artists in all disciplines most often take an oppositional position towards colonial stereotypes, either by challenging the stereotypes directly, or by ignoring them altogether. In the moment that the "transporter beam" begins to take hold, it is still possible to squirm out of its grasp and resist. With great care, and awareness, we can transform the colonial gaze, with nudges or tickles, into another kind of gaze; one which sees us as we really are. Funny, angry, intelligent, oppressed, sexual, liberated, empowered, ridiculous or serious, we claim our power as story-tellers and climb out of the myth to reveal ourselves as whole human beings.

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