

Toward an Indigenist Ecology of Knowledges for Canadian Literary Studies

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Article abstract

Critics such as Marie Battiste, Lee Maracle, Sákéj Henderson, and Lewis Gordon have called attention to how knowledge was and is a central target of colonial domination, as well as to how the other side of genocide is epistemicide. With this troubling history of “cognitive imperialism” (Gordon) in mind, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, João Arriscado Nunes, and Maria Paula Meneses insist that “there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice” and the “monoculture of [Western] scientific knowledge” must be replaced with an “ecology of knowledges.” For such a critical approach to be developed in a way that would be relevant for Canadian literary criticism, and to contribute to an ethical space of study, the genealogies underpinning Eurocentric knowledge systems must be questioned, and the kinds of Indigenous knowledge that have been suppressed and dismissed through them must be reconsidered.

Toward an Indigenist Ecology of Knowledges for Canadian Literary Studies

DANIEL COLEMAN

“**N**OW THE INDIAN GUIDES are dead asleep,” writes Duncan Campbell Scott in “The Height of Land,” a poem that features the poet’s encounter with a powerful, unnameable presence in the northern landscape:

Something comes by flashes
Deeper than peace, — a spell
Golden and inappellable. (95)

Whatever it is that Scott senses in the land — he calls it variously “the ancient disturber of solitude” and the “region-spirit” — he will not learn about it from the somnolent guides, whose knowledge of the region has led Scott and his party to this place. With the poet-critics Stan Dragland and Don McKay, we should distrust this image of the sleeping guides. “Dead asleep,” Dragland writes, “is actually rather ominous, a way of sweeping the Indians off the stage of the poem, a way that resonates uncomfortably with the cultural pattern of, in Leslie Monkman’s phrase, ‘Death of the Indian’” (Dragland 252). In the aftermath of publications in the 1980s by Monkman, Terry Goldie, and Thomas King, Cheryl Calver, and Helen Hoy, which examined the (mis)representation of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian literatures, and, with the upsurge of Indigenous literary writing in Canada¹ that attended a period of critical interventions by Indigenous people in such signal political events as the Oka standoff of 1989-1990 and the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords of 1987 and 1992, it became impossible to dismiss those guides as easily as the famous poet and infamous deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs did in 1906 when he was on his way to negotiate Treaty Nine with the Cree and Ojibway of northern Ontario. Indeed, McKay places Scott’s dismissal at the head of his recent introduction to *Open Wide a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poems*

because he sees it as iconographic: “As the poet . . . sits by the campfire in the poem, he embodies a contradiction pervasive in colonial experience — spiritual acuity and sensitivity to the landscape, coupled with a deafness to the voices already there. He is not really alone. The Indians are not really asleep” (6).

There is a much stronger way to say this: for the exclusion of Indigenous guides from consultation is an instance of colonial epistemicide. As Portuguese sociologists and World Social Forum activists Boaventura de Sousa Santos, João Arriscado Nunes, and Maria Paula Meneses put it, Western knowledge systems have been “instrumental in suppressing other . . . forms of knowledges and, at the same time, the subaltern social groups whose social practices were informed by such knowledges. In the case of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and of the African slaves, this suppression of knowledge, a form of epistemicide, . . . was the other side of genocide” (xix).² The meditating figure on the Pic River is not “a poet who has ventured into wilderness to seek an encounter with the sublime,” McKay reminds us. He is “a bureaucrat charged with inducing (a.k.a. bribing) native peoples — the Ojibway and Cree of northern Ontario — to sign a treaty surrendering their land to the government and accepting reduced status as wards of the state” (2). A major element in this colonial strategy is to dispatch Indigenous knowledge: the guides must be rendered “dead asleep.”

Knowledge was and is a central target of colonial domination. Consider African-American philosopher Lewis Gordon’s discussion of the efforts in Black Studies to escape the confines of what he calls “epistemological colonization” (xi) or Mi’kmaq theorist Marie Battiste’s identification of the way in which “the prevailing authority of Eurocentric discourses” (xx) constitutes a “cognitive imperialism” (xvii); recall Gayatri Spivak’s formulation of the operations of “sanctioned ignorance” (9, 31) or Chickasaw scholar Eber Hampton’s identification of “motivated ignorance” (36) — all of these concepts indicate that people who have been historically brutalized by Eurocentrism do not see it as a matter of their own knowledge traditions having passively fallen asleep. “A central concept behind Eurocentrism,” Battiste and Chickasaw legal scholar Sákéj Henderson explain, “is the idea of diffusionism”:

Diffusionism is based on two assumptions: (1) most human communities are uninventive, and (2) a few human communities . . . are inventive and are thus the permanent centers of cultural change

or “progress.” On a global scale, this results in a world with a single center — Europe — and a surrounding periphery. Europe, at the center (Inside), is historical, invents, and progresses, and non-Europe, at the periphery (Outside), is ahistorical, stagnant, and unchanging. . . . The diffusion of great civilizing ideas from Europe to non-Europe was thought to be compensation enough for the European confiscation of material wealth from non-Europeans. (22)

We could quibble with Battiste and Henderson about the influence of corn, canoes, or quinine in transculturating Western knowledges with Indigenous ones in what Mary Louise Pratt calls the contact zone, but if you think of how these innovations were readily incorporated and transformed into commodities that supported rather than resisted the colonial-capitalist spread of empire, you can see how diffusionism operates (see Pratt 6-7 for definitions of “transculturation” and “contact zone”). With this troubling history in mind, Santos, Nunes, and Meneses insist that “there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice” (xix) and that a broad-based “reinvention of social emancipation” must replace the “monoculture of [Western] scientific knowledge” with an “ecology of knowledges” (xx).

This, then, is the purpose of this essay: to offer some reflections on the development of an ecology of knowledges that would be relevant for Canadian literary criticism. I should say, right from the start, that this topic puts me well outside of my comfort zone. First, my theme requires a method that I am not accustomed to; usually, I root my analyses in close readings of literary or cultural texts. But the present topic is broad and philosophical, and given the shortness of space, plus the complexity of the theme, rather than root my comments in close readings, I will only gesture to literary works such as Scott’s “The Height of Land” to illustrate how reflexive awareness of the epistemologies that inform our thinking is crucial to the ways in which we read literary works. Second, any engagement with ecological thinking is overwhelming because of the volume of knowledge it requires. Third, and most profoundly, the effort to think beyond the confines of one’s own intellectual paradigm, outside the diffusionist monoculture described by Battiste and Henderson, is a very uncertain endeavour right from the start. For, if French theorists from Foucault to Althusser were right that we inhabit epistemes like fish inhabit water, how will “we know that we don’t know what we don’t know”? (Allen).³ Despite my discomforts, however, I

think it is important for those of us who work on the various literatures written in Canada to reconsider the intellectual underpinnings of the knowledge systems on which our work is based. We must think critically about the genealogies of these systems and learn to listen to the kinds of knowledge that have been squashed and pushed aside by the bulldozer of diffusionism. Coast Salish Stó:lo writer Lee Maracle has written that “from a Salish perspective, study ought to move us beyond the relentless reproduction of our cultural bias and remove the filters binding our ability to see beyond this bias. . . . The spiritual objective of study is to transform the way we see, to broaden the field of vision” (70). I am hoping my reflections here can contribute to this process of transformation and broadening.

Readers of this essay may wonder if this isn’t exactly what the various schools of diversification have already done — pluralize the monoculture of Western knowledge? Isn’t this what postmodern, postcolonial, feminist, multicultural, and queer theorists set out to do — decentre and diversify the internally reinforcing grand narratives of imperial, hetero-patriarchal power and knowledge? I readily acknowledge that my thinking toward an ecology of knowledges has been shaped by these schools of thought, but I also want to register that, as many have noted before me, the institutions that produce and disseminate knowledge remain tightly bound to the old diffusionist model. As Walter Mignolo notes, 95 percent of all scholarship between 1850 and 1914 originated in five countries: Great Britain, France, the USA, and the several states that now constitute Germany and Italy (37) and that the three languages of high modernity — English, French, and German — remain the dominant languages of scholarship and world literature (40).⁴ Not only are the major publishers of scholarly work still operating in these languages and from Euro-American locations, but so also are the world’s major institutions of education and research. More devastatingly, even within what we might call the rebel disciplines listed above — postmodern, postcolonial, feminist, multicultural, and queer studies — what Miranda Fricker calls “the economy of credibility” continues to privilege white, Euro-American, Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinking and venues of publication (1). Lewis Gordon states the case unflinchingly: “In most academic institutions, including some, unfortunately, in regions dominated by people of color, the following formula holds: Colored folks offer experience that white folks interpret. In other

words, formulating theory is a white affair . . . theory is white as experience is black" (33).⁵ In such an economy of scholarly citation, the Indian guides are represented, again, as dead asleep.

In this context, it is germane to rethink the critical cultures in Canada by considering them as participating in an ecology of knowledges. The Canadian context is amenable to ecological thinking for (at least) three reasons. First, land and landscape have long been primary considerations in the literatures of what is now called Canada, from Indigenous creation stories to narratives of exploration and settlement to contemporary urban and diasporic fiction. There is no getting away from physical environment in Canadian literary cultures and, as a result, the ecological model has ready elements already manifest.⁶ Second, as many have noted, Canadian history has consistently challenged the imperial strategy of homogenization: from trying to legitimize itself by means of treaties with many different First Nations and brokering a political settlement between French and English empires and their colonial subjects, to trying to exploit the impossibly disparate bioregions of this huge landmass by recruiting immigrant labour from around the globe, the Canadian nation-state has encountered diversity as a blessing, an irritant, and a managerial challenge. Third, and most important, there are some remarkable resources and models for thinking ecologically that are already circulating within the world of Canadian scholarship and publication. There is the growing field of ecocriticism evident in works by Pamela Banting, Laurie Ricou, Nancy Holmes, Don McKay, W.H. New, D.M.R. Bentley, Susie O'Brien, Catriona Sandilands, Jenny Kerber, Rita Wong, and many others, formalized by the establishment of the Association for Literature, the Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC) in 2005. Even more significant for my purposes, as I will presently show, is the growing literature by Indigenous thinkers on Indigenous knowledges and their ecological bases.

By this point, readers may be wondering how much I mean *ecology* as a metaphor for the interaction of knowledge systems and how much I mean it more literally as natural habitat. Following Santos, Nunes, and Meneses' discussion of epistemological diversity, I do use the term metaphorically, as a way of thinking about the interactions within a system of distinct and diverse epistemologies. But I also mean it literally, as physically located, and referring to the natural environment and the interdependence of its life forms. I take inspiration here from

York University professor of feminist philosophy Lorraine Code, and her 2006 book *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*. Code uses the term *ecology* to identify “a study of habitats both physical and social where people endeavor to live well together; of ways of knowing that foster or thwart such living; and thus of the ethos and habitus enacted in the knowledge and actions, customs, social structures, and creative-regulative principles by which people strive or fail to achieve this multiply realizable end” (25). For Code, ecological thinking takes ecology’s relational and locational focus to its logical conclusion by embedding knowledge itself in the system it is trying to know.⁷ Thus, ecological thinking has two priorities: to situate the knowledges it investigates in particular habitats (35) and to negotiate differences between and within bioregions (36). Code offers the following explanation:

Ecological thinking works against the imaginary God-given human dominion over the earth and, more precisely, of dominion arrogated to certain chosen members of the human race, not just over the earth but over human Others as well. . . . Thus it conceives of human interventions throughout the world, both physical and social, as requiring sensitivity to, and responsibility in relation to, specificities of diversity and detail, placing respect above mastery, preservation before control. (32)

Code’s model of ecological thinking has many attributes that can be helpful in rethinking and remapping Canadian literary and cultural studies. First, it reconfigures European thought by moving Enlightenment “man” from the centre of the philosophical-conceptual universe (Code 3) and increasing attention to the energies and lives of human and non-human others within that universe.⁸ Borrowing Donna Haraway’s term “situated knowledges,” Code explains that situation is not just a “*place from which to know*, as the language of perspectives might imply. . . . Situation is itself *a place to know* whose intricacies have to be examined for how they shape both knowing subjects and the objects of knowledge” (40). Accounting for the specificities of location has long been a preoccupation and struggle in the Canadian literatures — from Cartier’s early ship logs to Dennis Lee’s attempt to identify a Canadian “cadence” and onwards to Dionne Brand’s many renderings of Toronto — but it seems to me that while thinking ecologically can help us attend to the specificities of place, it can do so without assuming and re-emphasizing political categories such as the “nation” or “coloni-

alism” as the primary or sole categories within which to consider the relationships between living beings and cultures. Thinking ecologically also helps us to inflect the old discussions of regionalism with awareness of bioregion, and thus to keep in view both the global and the local, since considerations of fundamental ecological systems — such as watersheds, wind currents, bison or bird migrations, and fish stocks — must take into account the complex interactions of very clearly located life forms, even as we realize that every living thing lives upstream or downstream from other beings in a completely interrelated and interdependent planetary web.⁹ This network of bioregional interdependency is clearly as important to understanding Canadian literary culture as are the tariffs of the Canadian Pacific Railway or the quest for a Northwest Passage. Finally, thinking ecologically can suggest ways to think across and between stubborn binaries such as nature and culture, essentialism and constructionism, authentic purity and evolutionary cosmopolitanism, or differentiation and universalism that can be stumbling blocks to our understanding.

There are many ways to think of the diverse ecologies of knowledges and culture that co-exist and contend within the overwhelmingly complex geographical and social landscape of Canada: from French and English colonial inheritances to federal and provincial legislative bodies and their public and separate school systems; from the asymmetry of multiculturalism on a bilingual framework, and regionalisms with their sub-regional rivalries, to racial and ethnic struggles and solidarities; and onward to the tensions between urban and rural constituencies. One could go on. But I am going to argue, in the remainder of this essay, that in order to develop a functional ecology of knowledges in Canada, Indigenous knowledges must play a crucial, guiding role. To do this, I will perform what James Cox, writing in the context of American literary criticism, has called a “red reading,” meaning a critical practice that takes its conceptual lead from the work of Indigenous thinkers and writers (203). I will do this for several reasons. First, the formation of Canada as a geo-political entity depends, fundamentally, upon its interactions with and dislocation of Indigenous peoples. At the heart of the establishment of Canada is an old and unresolved conflict with Indigenous conceptions of land, ecology, and human relations with environment.¹⁰ Not only are many of the categories of diversity that I have briefly signalled above premised upon the alienation of Indigenous

peoples from their original lands, they are also founded upon the delegitimation and suppression of Indigenous ecological thinking. As Lee Maracle put it, First Nations presence is “the rock upon which the place and privilege of each member of the Diaspora rests” (59), and when she says “Diaspora,” she means all those who have settled on Turtle Island from the first colonial settlers to contemporary immigrants from around the world. As James Clifford notes in his early discussion of diaspora, the Indigenous “sense of rootedness in the land is precisely what diasporic peoples have lost” (289), so there is a lingering relation between Indigeneity and diaspora that needs to be explored beyond the over-simplification of diametrical opposition.¹¹ Remarkably, despite this history of alienation and delegitimation, Indigenous peoples have not only maintained a great deal of their knowledges about specific environments, but they have been willing to share significantly from those knowledges in what some have called the “Indigenous renaissance” or “resonance” (see Henderson 432), represented by the prolific scholarship, fine arts production, and publishing of the past thirty years. The number of exhibitions, publications, and performances by Indigenous artists, writers, and scholars in Canada and abroad during this period has been remarkable, with the result that we live in a time when the chance to reverse the exclusion of Indigenous thought from the “economy of credibility” and to learn from Indigenous thinkers and cultural producers is unprecedented. We are compelled, then, not only by historical justice to turn to Indigenous guidance on how to think toward an ecology of knowledges, but also by Indigenous people providing excellent resources for doing so at the present time. Furthermore, the growing public awareness about ecological concerns stimulated by oil spills in the Caribbean or on the coast of Alaska, debates about climate change, or the fate of waterfowl landing on the tailings ponds at the massive tar sands development near Fort McMurray, Alberta, has created an appetite for ecological thinking and analysis that presents the potential for a new openness toward the kind of alternative epistemological traditions that inform Indigenous ecological knowledges.

Most compellingly, though, Indigenous ecological thinking derives from a very different intellectual genealogy than the scientistic-technological diffusionism that has produced the ecological crises of our times. Because Indigenous knowledges are, precisely, the ways of thinking suppressed and dismissed by Eurocentric diffusionism, they have the

potential to reveal what has been missing in Western knowledge systems about how to live cooperatively in a more-than-human world. For, as Indigenous writers have insisted over and over again, the conflict they have endured throughout the entire history of colonialism boils down to a disagreement over land and how to live in it. Anishinabe publisher, writer, and critic Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm puts it about as baldly as it can be put:

The Native peoples of this land *are fundamentally different . . . from Canadians. The basis of the difference is the land, our passion for it and our understanding of our relationship with it. We belong to this land. The land does not belong to us; we belong to this land. We believe that this land recognizes us and knows us. . . .* It is our connection to this land that makes us who we are, that shapes our thinking, our cultural practices, our spiritual, emotional, physical, and social lives. (84)

From Okanagan author Jeanette Armstrong, Cree writer and artist Neal McLeod, and Mohawk political philosopher Taiaiake Alfred, to Chickasaw scholar Eber Hampton and Cherokee literary critic Daniel Heath Justice, we find the repeated insistence that Indigenous knowledges differ from Euro-American epistemologies because they were formulated explicitly through intimate contact with specific lands. In the words of Marie Battiste and James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, despite the great diversity among Indigenous peoples, “perhaps the closest one can get to describing unity in Indigenous knowledge is that knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and the other living beings and spirits that share their lands” (42).

Battiste and Henderson’s foundational book, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage* (2000), provides a powerful overview of some of the central premises of Indigenous knowledges derived from their work at the United Nations with Indigenous people around the world. Having noted that it would be impossible to speak of a single or universal Indigenous knowledge, since Indigenous peoples have developed their ways of thought out of long and close observation of manifold landscapes, Battiste and Henderson do observe some broad characteristics that are common to many Indigenous epistemologies. First, Battiste and Henderson suggest that, because they are place-specific, Indigenous ways of thought do not attempt to generate what we might call uni-

versal, travelling theory that can be transferred and applied anywhere. The neighbourhood of animals, plants, and minerals is unique to each place, and they produce distinct relations between themselves and with humans that are not readily abstracted to universal concepts (9, 31).¹² Second, Battiste and Henderson indicate that everything — human and non-human — has spirit and knowledge (56, 90). The elements of the environment, therefore, are “intelligible essences” (25) and not background against which the mind operates (23), not objects that can be exploited or used without consultation. Since all of nature is animated by spirit, by energy and flux, it demands participation and ceremonial renewal (10, 27, 254). The human is not separated from or arrogated over the mineral, plant, or animal. Just as physics suggests that all matter is energy, so Indigenous thought is attuned to the energy that is the life in all things (76). They say that Indigenous languages reflect this attunement by being strongly oriented toward the verb (73). The motion, energy, and interaction of all things remain central, therefore, to Indigenous communication. Fixity, definition, and completion or totalization are foreign to languages and epistemologies oriented toward ongoing movement and flux (76). Oral forms of communication, therefore, receive particular emphasis, since spoken words are unfixed and living, and they must be exchanged directly between people who inhabit the same location. This understanding places a particular emphasis on education as person-to-person mentorship between an elder and an apprentice, whose character and capacity, not just for learning but also more especially for responsibility, must be assessed (41, 67).

Third, because humans are participants in an animate, spiritually vital web of relations, Battiste and Henderson note that Indigenous knowledges do not separate the human from the non-human; do not distinguish between nature’s culture and human culture, or among science, art, religion, or philosophy (43). Objectivism, the notion that a phenomenon is best known from a distance, uncontaminated by human subjectivity — a central premise of Enlightenment rationality — flies in the face of Indigenous conceptions of the interdependent kinship of all beings, not just human ones (93-94; see also Justice “*Go Away*”). Since all members of an ecological community are relatives, humans must not distance themselves in this way from the responsibilities all share for the maintenance of harmony and sustenance. Fourth, Battiste and Henderson comment that all members of an ecosystem are responsible

for fulfilling their covenants to the other members of the ecosystem. This is to say, borrowing from the Australian Aboriginal philosopher Mary Graham, that “the Land is the Law” (qtd. in Rose 186). The legal codes and jurisprudence of Indigenous ecologies do not separate what Western thinkers might call the laws of nature (i.e., thermodynamics, gravity, etc.) from the legal codes for human behaviour.¹³ Law, therefore, is not seen as something humans create and apply to one another, but rather as derived from the responsibilities all creatures have to maintain the harmony and balance of the ecosystem. Battiste and Henderson explain that, according to this line of thinking, “the present structure of the local ecosystem is the cumulative result of a large number of historical contracts, which create reciprocal obligations of kinship and solidarity among all the species and forces which co-exist in that place. . . . It is a moral and legal space characterized by a negotiated order, rather than by mere chance” (45). Thus, “knowledge of the ecosystem is, to this extent, legal knowledge” (67). Though this sense of ecology as law is central to Indigenous thinking, it is not limited to Indigenous perspective or belief. To turn to literary examples, it reveals itself as inexorably in Matthew Pit’s death from bone cancer years after he buried barrels of pesticide in the Miramichi watershed in David Adams Richards’ *Mercy Among the Children* (2000) as it does in the way the barrels of biohazardous waste Elvin buries beside the Shield River in Thomas King’s *Truth and Bright Water* (1999) refuse to stay hidden underground.

Perhaps considering the participation of humans within an ecological system in terms of legality can help counter the way in which Indigenous people’s espousal of a spiritual or sacred landscape has often been dismissed as superstitious mysticism by Euro-Canadian thinking. Battiste and Henderson do not shy away at all from the language of spirit when they describe Indigenous knowledges, but they help us to see how Indigenous concepts of spirituality, when translated into Western terms, involve strong elements of what English speakers might call jurisprudence. For example, they outline five major legal corollaries of thinking of the land as “sacred ecology” that I have condensed into the following summary statements:

1. Every human and non-human bears reciprocal responsibilities to maintain their relationships;

2. Because of the weightiness of these responsibilities, human youth need personal apprenticeships in order to be spiritually prepared to bear the power of knowledge with humility;
3. Usually, these mentorships take place within kinship or clan systems, so that different clans develop particular affinities with particular components of their unique ecosystem and they have ceremonial and practical responsibilities to them;
4. Knowledge may be shared with visitors so they can travel safely within the territory, though it cannot be alienated from the bioregion;
5. Misuse of knowledge can be catastrophic, not only for the abuser but for everything in the region and even beyond; indeed, misuse is tantamount to warfare against other species, breaking their covenants, and reducing the land to a pre-moral, pre-legal vacuum. (see 67)

It is not hard to see why land-based Indigenous knowledge traditions such as these were seen as hostile by incoming colonial powers. The notion of ecology as sentient, as having spirit and knowledge of its own, as being kin but not subservient to humans, not only flew in the face of Christian and scientific dogma of the time, but also posed a threat to the very notion of European law and civilization. For, in the eighteenth-century formulations of John Locke, the fundamental difference between the savage American's "state of nature" and "the Civiliz'd part of Mankind" is that the latter "have multiplied positive laws to determine Property" and "the possession of land is determined by positive constitutions" (72). What constitutes legality for Locke — and would have as well for the incoming waves of European settlers — is not responsibility to the species of an integrated ecology, but the transformation of ecology into property and the rules for owning and trading it. We in Canada live in the ongoing contestation between these radically different views. No wonder Akiwenzie-Damm asserts that "The Native peoples of this land *are . . . fundamentally different from Canadians. The basis of the difference is the land*" (84).

I want to make a case for this emphasis on difference. I realize that, with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that followed the 2008 apology for the residential schools, there exists a strong impetus in Canada for coming together and emphasizing what we all have in

common. In the context of our present discussion, this impetus might entail showing how Indigenous ways of knowing are not so different from Euro-American ways of knowing, to observe that Western science is developing important understandings of ecology, that some elements of Christianity resist the idea that humans must dominate the earth, that not all settlers considered the land as devoid of spirit and as simply an exploitable commodity. I see, too, how emphasizing differences can require the kind of “radical distinctiveness” that Native American literary critic Chad Allen warns against, that it could produce what Sarah Ahmed has called “stranger fetishism,” whereby exotic others become objects of desire, frozen in history, and removed from the ongoing processes of exchange and adaptation that are part of everyday, social, and inter-cultural life (5).

I also recognize that not all scholars of the literatures in Canada are positioned toward these tensions in the same way. For those who have grown up within alternative intellectual traditions to the Euro-American canon, the distinctness of various knowledge systems within a larger ecology of knowledges hardly needs emphasis. The differences are stark and often unyielding, especially when school and university curricula consistently exclude your culture’s experts and achievements, when you are constantly asked to translate your rich and complex tradition into a language that is not neutral, but even hostile to, the values of that tradition. But for those of us who do operate within the existing Euro-American canons of thought, who have imbibed those canons from the nursery onward — as well as for those who have lost their languages and ancestral knowledges through migration, residential schools, or immersion in mass culture, it is crucial to make distinctions, to recognize ways of thinking as different and even challenging, so that we can see not only their uniqueness, but also how they question the self-evidence of our own premises. “Self-reflexivity is the same as the discovery of hetero-referentiality,” write Santos, Nunes, and Meneses. “It is the first step towards the recognition of the epistemological diversity of the world” (xlvi).

It is this kind of hetero-referentiality that Cree philosopher Willie Ermine calls for in his 2007 article “The Ethical Space of Engagement.” Observing that the Canadian government’s efforts to assimilate Indigenous people have produced “socio-political entanglement, an irritable bond . . . and trans-cultural confusion at its worst,” Ermine says

that “our knowledge bases are so entangled and enmeshed . . . that we now find it compelling to decipher Indigenous thought from European thought” (197). To do this, he proposes what he calls “ethical space,” opened up between these worlds of thinking by the

unwavering construction of difference and diversity between human communities. These are the differences that highlight uniqueness because each entity is moulded from a distinct history, knowledge tradition, philosophy, and social and political reality. With the calculated disconnection through the contrasting of their identities, and the subsequent creation of two solitudes with each claiming their own distinct and autonomous view of the world, a theoretical space between them is opened. (194)¹⁴

Ermine is not proposing intellectual or cultural apartheid. Rather, he realizes that active attention to differences is crucial if hetero-referentiality is to introduce the kind of self-reflexivity that can transform monologue into dialogue. He suggests that attention to difference can reveal “how hidden values and intentions can control our behaviour, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring. Attentive work on these issues has not occurred in Indigenous-West relations, nor has there been a framework that enables this discussion to happen” (202-03).¹⁵ The key here, then, and it *is* a challenge, is to attend to difference, even to elaborate differences within a living, mobile ecology of knowledges, without freezing them either in a pre-contact Aboriginal past or in a fixed, unchanging, and impossible authentic purity.

This is where Ahmed’s work on encountering strangeness can be helpful. Warning that absorption with the differences of others can become “stranger fetishism,” Ahmed makes the Levinasian point that difference and strangeness are not properties of the other, but are, in fact, generated by encounter itself — wherein the differences of the other are perceived by contrast with the prior structures of thought brought to the encounter by the subject. In other words, each encounter is structured by previous encounters that shape the way in which the parties perceive one another. Arguing that we need to find ways of “re-encountering these encounters so that they no longer hold other others in place” (17), Ahmed suggests that we attend to the modes of encounter through which the other is faced. Rather than isolating difference in the particularity of the other (in the “real” of her body), Ahmed urges

us “to describe, not the other, but the mode of encounter in which I am faced with the other” (145). To translate Ahmed’s procedure to our present concerns, then, we can keep from essentializing a frozen image of the Indigene as “noble savage” in a “state of nature” by describing the mode of encounter — Mary Louise Pratt might call it a “contact zone” — between Indigenous thinking and diffusionist Western thinking.¹⁶

There are many ways to do this kind of work, but in the remainder of this essay, I would like to pose in the interrogative mode a number of challenges that bedevil the scene of encounter between Indigenous knowledges and currents of thought that are common within Canadian literary criticism. Perhaps by addressing these challenges in the mobile form of questions, we can not only guard against reifying Indigenous difference but also provoke ourselves to consider how to create something along the lines of Ermine’s ethical space.

A first challenging question about the mode of encounter with Indigenous thought is this: How can participants in the encounter affirm the radical difference of Indigenous thought without demanding essentialist authenticity? The danger in Ermine’s “unwavering construction of difference” is that it puts enormous pressure on Indigenous cultures to produce an essential, unchanging, idealized “Aboriginalism” that can be traced back to a pre-contact authentic tradition. This pressure is both internal and external, as can be seen in Oglala critic Elizabeth Cook-Lynn’s questioning the place that mixed-blood writers such as Louise Erdrich, Thomas King, or Gerald Vizenor hold in the emerging canons of Native American literature (see Womack, “A Single Decade” 74-76; Justice, “Go Away” 162-63) or in Canadian Chief Justice Antonio Lamer’s ruling in *Regina v. Van der Peet* (1996) that Aboriginal tradition can only stand as legal precedent if it can be proven to have pre-existed European arrival (see Borrows 60-74). Creek-Cherokee literary critic Craig Womack points out that claims for Indigenous authenticity tend to produce impossible generalizations: asserting that “virtually all Indian writing is based on oral tradition and ceremony,” for example, Native American literary critics neglected to observe “how oral tradition itself had a literary history and had changed over time.” This focus on orality then produced “superficial generalizations about ‘the Indian mind,’ whatever that might be (‘it’ was always described as ‘nonlinear’). Indian writing became circular, non-Aristotelian, lacking a beginning, a middle, and end since oral

stories, supposedly, do not have linear plots” (“A Single Decade” 18-19). Because Indigenous cultures were based on ceremonial recognition of a sacred created order, they supposedly did not see economic, social, or political elements as central. “Tell that,” quips Womack, “to the tribal treasurer writing the annual budget report” (“A Single Decade” 25). So the first challenge in the mode of encounter with Indigenous knowledges is that of keeping a living tension and balance between the recognition of Indigenous thought as having emerged from very different epistemological roots as compared to Euro-Enlightenment thinking, and not freezing Indigeneity in a pre-contact, racially essentialized past. This tension is what generates anti-stereotypical humour in the work of Drew Hayden Taylor, Thomas King, Shelly Niro, and Kent Monkman, to name only a few. As the satirical modes in these artists’ writings and art indicates, and as Indigenous scholars from John Borrows to Neal McLeod, Daniel Heath Justice, and Craig Womack have shown, Indigenous cultures exist in flux and change, importing and exporting cultural forms and practices as frequently as any other cultures do. It is important to remind ourselves, then, that Willie Ermine’s call for “calculated disconnection” during the moment of encounter is aimed at producing healthy dialogue, not frozen essentialism. As in all ecologies, the resilience of the life system depends upon both integrity and change, upon maintaining the distinct behaviours and practices of its living (not dead or quarantined) members, even as they adapt and evolve.¹⁷

A second question about the mode of encounter relates closely to the tension between frozen authenticity and fluid cosmopolitanism, and this is the question of cultural appropriation. How can outsiders to Indigenous thought inform themselves sufficiently about Indigenous ways of knowing without appropriating forms of knowledge and experience that should legitimately remain the provenance of Indigenous peoples? The seminar organized in Toronto in 1989 by Lenore Keeshig-Tobias and Daniel David Moses entitled “Whose Story Is it Anyway?” raised deep concerns about the use of Indigenous stories and knowledge by non-Indigenous writers who were outsiders to the original contexts for many of the story forms and ritual objects in Indigenous ceremonial practice and spiritual belief (see Battiste and Henderson 164-65). This debate raged through the 1990s, generating important reconsiderations of the provenance of Indigenous knowledges and objects, so that the practices of repatriation of aesthetic and anthropological objects

in museums and new rules on research ethics have been implemented over the last twenty years.¹⁸ Because Indigenous knowledges have been damaged as much by misuse and misinterpretation as by outright suppression, the concerns of cultural appropriation are as urgent today as they were in 1989.¹⁹ However, many Indigenous scholars and writers also agree with Marie Battiste when she observes that “domination and oppression cannot be altered without the dominated and the dominators confronting the knowledge and thought process that frame their thinking” (“Unfolding,” xxiv). Such a confrontation requires a dialogical engagement by Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants alike. If we are ecological neighbours, and an ecology involves legal responsibilities, as Battiste and Henderson say, then the work of restoring balance and justice cannot be left to Indigenous people alone. It requires all sides to create ethical space. The question then remains: How can outsiders study and learn from Indigenous knowledges without appropriating them?

My third question is how can we generate productive ethical space in the encounter between Indigenous and Euro-American thought without perpetually recycling the trope of first encounters? In a plenary paper delivered at the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (CACLALS) conference at the University of Waterloo in May 2012, Maori literary scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville argued for comparative study of horizontal, Indigenous-to-Indigenous encounters. Her example was Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm’s book of poetry, *My Heart is a Stray Bullet*, which relates her experiences travelling from Canada to New Zealand and her encounters as an Anishinabe woman with Maori people in Maori territory. Somerville suggested that, second to the myth of the dying Indian of the vanishing race (recall Scott’s sleeping guides), the narrative of first encounter between settlers and Indigenous peoples is the most repeated trope of ongoing settler colonialism. By constantly imagining that we are encountering Indigenous people, thought, and culture for the first time, she said, we occlude the fact that we are no longer in a moment of first encounter. To use Ahmed’s terms, we dehistoricize the ongoing and repeated encounters that have taken place over the last five hundred years. We also occlude and ignore the large body of theory and criticism that Indigenous scholars and philosophers have produced, reciting instead the story of first encounter with its old binaries of civilized and savage, modern and trad-

itional, advanced and primitive. To focus so intensively and repeatedly upon first encounter marginalizes and ignores the dialogues and debates among Indigenous peoples, which emphasize differences and similarities between various First Nations. Again in Ahmed's phrasing, returning to first encounter re-homogenizes "other others." But here is the troubling problem: How do we attend to tribal distinctiveness and differences and still account for the ongoing domination of the larger field of discourse by the Indigenous/settler relation? On the one hand, Indigenous knowledges must have tribal-centred and intertribal economies of circulation and relevance, independent of white, Euro-American systems and institutions. This is absolutely crucial because without autonomous venues for dialogue and debate, there is little room for ongoing development of systems of thought not beholden to Western epistemologies. On the other hand, if horizontal, Indigenous-to-Indigenous discussions don't engage directly with settler-European ways of thought, how can the self-replicating, self-reinforcing dominance of colonial epistemologies be disturbed and interrupted? "In the long run," writes Taiaiake Alfred, "radical education and transformation of the fundamental beliefs and attitudes of the Settler society is the objective. . . . This can only be achieved through the steady challenging of the intellectual and cultural foundations of Settler society in the media, schools, popular culture, and the arts" (*Wasáse* 64). If non-Indigenous settlers are the targets of this campaign, far from being marginal to Indigenous-to-Indigenous dialogue between autonomous communities, they need to be imagined, at some point, as its intended pupils. But how can productive "new dialogues" be generated between horizontally flourishing Indigenous epistemologies and Euro-American ones without replicating the old paradigm of first encounter and its vertical hierarchies of domination? Can it be enough to name these times and kinds of encounter, to engage in a politics of citation that conscientiously cites the generations of Indigenous scholarship and debate that prove the present encounter not to be a first one? To return to Ahmed's terminology, can insisting on a history of encounters, situating any attempts at twenty-first-century encounters within a history of multiple and asymmetrical previous encounters keep us from imagining Ermine's ethical space as a return to first encounter?

There are many other important questions that could be posed, but my fourth and final one is an especially difficult challenge to the mode

of encounter: How do we develop an adequate language for engaging in productive dialogue regarding spirituality? "The first standard of Indian education," writes Eber Hampton, "is spirituality. At its centre is respect for the spiritual relationships that exist between all things" (19). Battiste and Henderson insist that "the core belief of Indigenous spirituality is that everything is alive, and Indigenous peoples seek spirituality through intimate connection with ecological biodiversity. . . . Such beliefs deny the distinction between the sacred and the profane, since all life processes are sacred" (100). Insisting that "spiritual matters are paramount for Indian people themselves and no discussion of art or politics can proceed without referencing them" ("A Single Decade" 9), Craig Womack says that the challenge is to formulate

a materialist approach to culture [that] can include Native religious perspectives regarding the effects of spirits on physical existence. Much of materialist criticism — in this regard true to its Marxist roots — has shown a strong rationalist bias. Critics have yet to demonstrate how epistemic categories such as race, gender, and class are mediated by spiritual forces. Materialist critics have been resistant to definitions of religion in any other terms besides human mediation and the social construction of religious beliefs. ("A Single Decade" 84)

Thinking beyond the domain of literary studies to political and social relations more generally, Alfred calls for spiritual, rather than legal or political, revolution:

The quintessential revolution is that of the spirit, born of an intellectual conviction of the need for change in those mental attitudes and values which shape the course of a nation's development. A revolution which aims merely at changing official policies and institutions with a view to an improvement in material conditions has little chance of genuine success. Without a revolution of the spirit, the forces which produced the inequities of the old order would continue to be operative, posing a constant threat to the process of reform and regeneration. (*Wasáse* 202)

It seems to me that, for the descendants of settlers and immigrants to cooperate in a productive way with such a spiritual revolution, considerable work needs to be done to establish protocols, conceptual tools, and vocabulary for a productive mode of encounter with Indigenous under-

standings of a spiritually animated ecology. The widespread, and historically understandable, allergy in the secular academy to any talk of the spiritual mismatches the huge popular market for New Age spirituality and sweat lodge tourism. Both obscure the ways in which the kinds of knowledge described by Battiste and Henderson emerge out of a people's eco-legal responsibilities within a particular bioregion. These knowledges develop over centuries and are passed on intimately between the generations and in languages that have grown out of the relationships within that landscape. So, for people who do not know these languages and the understandings embedded in them, who have not been mentored by elders in the region and attended the ceremonies, and whose history is one of diasporic migration and therefore are relatively new to the ecosystem (I am describing myself here), it requires more than a matter of several months, perhaps years, of placed-based learning and listening to become even remotely familiar with these things.

Nonetheless, it must be possible to develop respect for traditions and values one does not know from the inside.²⁰ Awareness of ethical space, of emphasizing the distinctness of those involved in the moment of encounter, is important to developing and maintaining this respect. Alfred writes that

traditional teachings speak of the various human families: they consider each one to be gifted and powerful in its own way, each with something different to contribute to the achievement of peace and harmony. Far from condemning different cultures, this position challenges each one to discover its gift in itself and realize it fully, to the benefit of humanity as a whole. It is just as important for Europeans as it is for Native people to cultivate the values that promote peace and harmony. (*Peace* 21)

If spirituality is about ultimate values, about the interactions between all living beings in ecologies to which we are legally and socially responsible, then a major challenge for developing an awareness of an ecology of knowledges in the domain of Canadian literary criticism will require us to develop a language for a respectful dialogue regarding spirituality. The need for a robust critical language in this domain is already a pressing concern in the Canadian literatures. Think of the ways in which well-known novels by Eden Robinson, Lee Maracle, Richard Wagamese, or Joseph Boyden present spiritual beings as literal presences. Expanding beyond Indigenous writers, think of M.G. Vassanji, Dionne Brand, or

Rohinton Mistry, and then of Margaret Laurence, Sheila Watson, or Rudy Wiebe, and the ways in which spirituality features as fundamental in many of their works, and you will see that our critical accounting for spiritual dynamics is anemic, to say the least.²¹

I opened this article with Scott's image of Indian guides dead asleep as an example of literary epistemicide. I then suggested that one way to displace the grip upon our minds of a self-recirculating, Eurocentric economy of credibility is to replace it with an "ecology of knowledges." While there are many knowledge forms that would circulate and contend within such an ecology, I have turned to the encounter of settler Canadians with Indigenous knowledges as a key Canadian site for thinking through the potential for the development of ecologically sensitive and ethically located epistemologies. Finally, in an effort to guard against the dangers of fetishizing Indigenous difference, I have posed some challenging questions about the mode of encounter between Indigenous knowledges and current conventions of Canadian critical thought. My hope is to contribute to the development of ethical space. I have tried to work in the interrogative mode here, admitting candidly that I do not have ready answers to these difficult questions. I do hope, however, that these questions serve as provocations to the development in the field of productive encounters between Indigenous and settler-Canadian modes of thinking that would lay the groundwork for ethical space in which an ecology of knowledges could thrive.

NOTES

¹ Many of the most renowned Indigenous Canadian writers began their publishing careers in this same period. Consider the following list of first published works: Maria Campbell's *Half-Breed* (1973), Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: An Indian Rebel* (1975), Jeanette Armstrong's *Enwhistekwual/Walk in Water* (1982), Beatrice (Culleton) Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983), Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* (1986), Thomas King's *Medicine River* (1990).

² In her influential study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel writing and its colonial implications, *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt discusses the ways in which Linnaeus's system of classification generated the science of botany or "natural history," which she says "extracted specimens not only from their organic or ecological relations with each other, but also from their places in other peoples' economies, histories, social and symbolic systems" (31). The universal, disinterested template of classification, she notes, provided the model for the managerial systematization that led not only to industrialism, but also to the taxonomy of races that enabled slavery's plantation economy (36).

³ I quote the Jamaican-Canadian dub poet Lillian Allen, who was riffing on Donald

Rumsfeld's infamous speech defending the American invasion of Iraq in search of elusive weapons of mass destruction (see Rumsfeld's speech at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtkUO8NpI84>). I have cited Allen's recitation, because she is well known for her work in the genre of dub poetry to transculture and creolize the authority of the English language and thus resist its epistemological superstructure.

⁴ This would suggest that the cultures where these three languages originated continue to colonize the minds of people who use them, but, in a gesture that recalls Pratt's transculturating contact zone, Mignolo insists that the current stage of globalization means that the King's English, for example, does not carry the same weight it once did and that these global languages of scholarship are being taken up by people who were once considered the "barbarians" in that language: "Thus, if English is becoming the universal language of scholarship, English is not carrying with it the conceptual weight and value of Western scholarship. My contention is that something similar to what happens in literature is happening in cultures of scholarship: a border gnoseology is emerging at the intersection of Western epistemology and non-Western knowledge" (43).

⁵ Gordon continues: "We see this from even colored theorists who prefer to examine the world of color through Martin Heidegger, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, or Michel Foucault instead of through the resources of thought offered by Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Frantz Fanon, V.Y. Mudimbe, James Cone, Sylvia Wynter, George Lamming, Elsa Goveia, Angela Y. Davis, and Paget Henry, to name but several, in addition to the resources of thought offered by the full spectrum of the human species" (31).

⁶ Think, for example, of the cognitive mappings of the Canadian landscape that have shaped literary conceptualizations of Canada, from Donald Creighton's Laurentian thesis and E.J. Pratt's "Towards the Last Spike" to expeditions to survey Palliser's Triangle and W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*, or from John Richardson's *Wacousta* to Northrop Frye's garrison mentality. I am grateful to an anonymous reader for encouraging me to specify these critical landscape-based theses.

⁷ I owe this insight and wording to Susie O'Brien.

⁸ Note this recentring in operation in Indigenous-focused novels that open the narration with a non-human point of view: for example, Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water*, Rudy Wiebe's *The Discovery of Strangers*, or Drew Hayden Taylor's *Motorcycles and Sweet Grass*.

⁹ See Heise's espousal of Gayatri Spivak's term "planetarity" for a globally aware ecocriticism (214-15, n. 28). Heise's book criticizes the parochialism of place-first ecocriticism, which she says can tend toward a dangerous, even fascist, essentialism if it loses sight of the globe as an interdependent, supraregional biosystem (42-43, 46-47). See also Henderson's use of the concept of "planetary imagination" but in the context of the global movement towards Indigenous decolonization (432).

¹⁰ "In the (human) beginning was the Indigene," writes Len Findlay in his manifesto "Always Indigenize!" (2000), in which he urges a "new beginning for Englishes as the redrawing of the academic map and redistribution of cultural legitimacy and territoriality under Indigenous educational leadership" (322). Along similar lines, John Ralston Saul, in *A Fair Country* (2008), argues that Canadians are "a people of Aboriginal inspiration organized around a concept of peace, fairness, and good government" (xii), but that our awareness of that four-centuries-old Aboriginal inspiration has been suppressed by the colonial mindset of imperialist racism that emerged in the nineteenth century (thus, in a four-hundred-year history, relatively late in the evolution of Canada). I admire the aims of Saul's Indigenizing project, but his optimistic narrative of Indigenous-derived Canadian values soft-pedals the violent suppression of Indigenous knowledge in Canada. He mentions residential schools but remarkably, for a text heavily invested in reinterpreting Canadian

legislative history, never once mentions that most draconian of Canadian legal texts, the Indian Act.

¹¹ See Kim et al. and Coleman et al. for two recent and early efforts to generate "cultural grammars" on which to begin such a dialogue.

¹² This bioregional specificity is a philosophical basis for the large body of Native American criticism arguing against a pan-Indian and for a "tribal-specific" criticism that focuses on the literatures of particular Indigenous groups (see Justice; Womack; Weaver, Womack, and Warrior. See also Fagan et al.).

¹³ Onondaga teacher and SUNY Buffalo professor Oren Lyons writes, "The one thing you want to understand about nature and its laws is that there is no place for mercy, no compromising. It is absolute. If you don't wear enough clothes when you go hunting, you will freeze to death. The natural law prevails, regardless of what any international tribunal may decide. The natural law, in its most basic form, is simply that if you do not eat food, you will die; if you do not drink water, you will die. So will a dog, a deer, and anything that lives. We are all bound by this law. There is no way that you can violate this law and get away with it. It is basic, it is simple, and it is eternal. That is why it is important to understand that when a government develops laws to rule the people, it must develop those laws in accordance with the natural law; otherwise, the laws will fail" (12).

¹⁴ "Space must be created — intellectually and socially," agrees Taiaiake Alfred, "for peace to be achieved. In the Rotinoshonni Great Law of Peace, the Kaianerekowa, there are references to the 'clearing,' the space between the village and the woods, between home, family, safety, and the dangerous space of freedom. Before any agreement or reconciliation can happen, there must be a connection made between people, there must be a demonstration of respect, and love must be generated. . . . The notion of a universal relation among autonomous elements of Creation is embedded throughout indigenous cultures, for example, in the *Tekani Tēioha:te*, known as the Two Row Wampum, or the widely used Four Directions teaching. The idea of recognizing our universal connection and at the same time respecting our differences is the fundamental theme in these teachings" (*Wasáse* 266). Lee Maracle also espouses the importance of space between traditions when she writes of the importance in Salish thinking of "respecting the distance and reproductive rights of other beings, and ensuring the greatest freedom of beings to be as they are and always will be. This requires that we study the life of beings and phenomena in our world from their perspective, and not from the perspective of our needs. . . . In the course of study, we deliberately engage people with different kinds of knowledge, points of view, and different understandings, people whose journeys are dissimilar to ours, who may have witnessed the phenomena under study from their own perspective" (60-61). In "Epistemological Cross-Talk," I discuss the value of a reading practice that reads "away from" rather than "toward" the self.

¹⁵ It is on this point that I feel discomfort with John Ralston Saul's effort to embed Indigenous knowledge in the foundation of Canadian cultural values. As much as I admire his effort to convince Canadians of our debt to Indigenous peoples for Canadian understandings of peace, fairness, and good government, I think Ermine's concept of "calculated disconnection" alerts us to the way in which Saul's celebration of Canada's assumption of the Indigenous "inclusive circle" can easily become a pretext for ongoing intellectual and cultural assimilation.

¹⁶ Ahmed's method offers productive ways to read scenes of encounter depicted throughout Canadian literature, from early narratives of exploration writers such as Samuel Hearne and David Thompson and settlers such as Traill and Moodie to recent re-descriptions of early encounter such as John Steffler's *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* (1992), Rudy Wiebe's *The Discovery of Strangers* (1994), or Michael Crummey's *River Thieves* (2001). Her attention to the mode of encounter is equally generative for engaging with

texts of contemporary encounter such as Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell's *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* (1989) or Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson's *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman* (1998).

¹⁷ I am grateful to Susie O'Brien for these thoughts on resilience. See also Rose 48-50 and 174-75. In a more philosophical vein, Canadian poet and translator of Haida epic narratives Robert Bringhurst writes that "when you take the other's otherness away, the other's sameness and humanity go too" (22). Bringhurst's paradox emphasizes the way in which distinction and universality depend upon one another. If my own sense of myself as a human relies on my uniqueness, then refusal to engulf the uniqueness of the other is a recognition of our common claim to distinctness. Bringhurst goes on to insist, then, that "Meaning . . . is a relationship. It is, in other words, a difference — between or among things perceived, or between the perceived and the perceiver. . . . Meaning is a relationship in every case: a difference rather than a rupture or disjunction" (202).

¹⁸ See Thomas King's parodic engagement with the politics of repatriation in the figure of Monroe Swimmer in *Truth and Bright Water*.

¹⁹ Battiste and Henderson comment on an increased pressure and desire for Indigenous knowledges, even since the 1990s: "As the twenty-first century dawns, industrialized societies are demanding that Indigenous peoples share their knowledge, their hearts, bodies, and souls so that Eurocentric society can solve the various problems that its worldview has created. In view of the history of relations between the colonizers and the colonized, this is an extraordinarily bold request. The colonizing people have done nothing to create trust or to build relationships with our ecologies or with our knowledge. They have contaminated the land, and they have refused to have respectful relations with the forces of the ecologies. Indeed, they have competed with those forces. Now they are beginning to suffer the consequences implicit in their actions, and they look toward Indigenous peoples for help. . . . The erosion of Indigenous knowledge concerns both the Indigenous people to whom this knowledge belongs and the non-Indigenous people who seek to know more about it" (11).

²⁰ In the words of Battiste and Henderson, "Eurocentric thought must allow Indigenous knowledge to remain outside itself, outside its representation, and outside its disciplines" (38).

²¹ See Jacqui Alexander's strong argument for the serious (re)investigation of spirituality for Black Atlantic feminism.

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