

First Nations and resistance of identity:

Chair: Prof. Regna Darnell

### **Trickster Discourse and the Resistance of Presence**

**- Gerald McKinley (Theory and Criticism, University of Western Ontario)**

The ultimate form of resistance to the dominant, in whatever form it takes, is to survive. In Quebec prior to the Quiet Revolution survivance meant a passive cultural survival. Within the trickster discourse of Gerald Vizenor *survivance* takes on an active quality. “Survivance, in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance; the stories of survivance are an active presence” (Fugitive Poses 15). Vizenor is responding to the freezing of Aboriginal peoples in the myths and discourses of the Dominant Western mind as an *indian*. The *indian*, italicized and lowercase because it is not a proper noun, is a simulation in sense of Jean Baudrillard’s simulations. The creation of a hyperreal in the meta-narrative of the taming of the West, the conquering of the land and the savage. Hundreds of distinct cultures are brought together under the one simulation; the noble savage; the murdering savage, the stoic warrior and the passive *indian* at the tree-line. Vizenor, along with authors such as Thomas King, use trickster discourse as their survivance, their resistance. Trickster discourse can be seen as “a form of intellectual engagement, writing and analysis that challenges logical positivism and Cartesian Dualism”(Nelson).

This paper proposes to examine trickster discourse as a form of survivance and resistance through a reading of Gerald Vizenor’s The Heirs of Columbus and Thomas King’s Green Grass Running Water. Both authors save the trickster character from its role as fool and return to it the re-creation powers that it has enjoyed in many Aboriginal cultures. The trickster is used to turn the tables on the “whiteman,” freezing him as the essential fish out of water, too reliant on a reason and science that are flawed in the eyes of many Aboriginal traditions. By juxtaposing the essential *indian* from popular culture with the essential *whiteman* of Vizenor and King, we can see how these authors are using the power of words, a powerful premise in both Western and Aboriginal cultures, to resist and thus survive. The *indian* is the absence of the Aboriginal, it is the other to the west, created without a referent in any Aboriginal language. Vizenor and King create presence by ignoring the *indian*, othering the *whiteman* and using the re-creative powers of the trickster to survive.

### **Multicultural Myths: The (Mis)Recognition of White Mixed Race Peoples in Canada**

**- Mandy Koolen (English, McMaster University)**

This paper examines powerful critiques of the Canadian multicultural ideal that are disseminated through literary depictions of the struggles that white mixed race people living in Canada experience due to their liminality. As Smaro Kamboureli notes, *The*

*Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1988) constructs “ethnicity in collective terms” (112), and thus ethnicity is associated with those who have “ties to a specific community” (103). If affiliation with a single, supposedly coherent, group is necessary in order to “belong” in Canada’s multicultural society, I question what happens to mixed race people who are situated outside of, between, or in multiple, communities. I argue that conflating ethnic “otherness” with group belonging negates the complex ethnicities of many mixed race people who, due to marginalization from their “othered” communities, may choose not to identify with just one, or with any, of these ethnic groups.

My study is intersectional as it examines the similarities and differences between heterosexism and the (mis)recognition of white mixed race people as being solely of white European background, a phenomenon I refer to as “whitecentrism.” I borrow from existing critical analyses of the complex and contradictory nature of heterosexism and the ability to pass as heterosexual in order to develop a theory that accounts for both the privileges and problematics associated with the ability to pass as white. My analysis thus brings femme theorists such as Minnie Bruce Pratt and Joan Nestle into dialogue with Canadian mixed race authors like Fred Wah, Drew Hayden Taylor, and Thomas King. Whereas the detrimental effects of racism are widely documented, whitecentrism is often overlooked, and thus it is vital that this subtle form of discrimination be named and critically analyzed in order to acknowledge and legitimize the specific experiences of mixed race peoples.

## **Colonized in the Flesh: the Aboriginal Body as a Site of Resistance**

**- Jean François Bissonnette (Political Studies, University of Ottawa)**

According to Foucault’s vitalist philosophy, one must move beyond the legalist theory of sovereignty in order to understand the functioning of power in modern societies. Following Nietzsche’s conception of being as will to power, Foucault explained that modern forms of political power are immanent to life itself, which is produced and controlled through innumerable sites of intervention. Sciences such as medicine have thus become crucial to the management of populations and the production of subjectivity. Every power strategy, however, gives rise to reactions of resistance which, though they try to escape from domination, form at the same time the very impetus of power.

Despite its purportedly egalitarian multicultural ideology, the Canadian state remains in essence an imperial endeavor of conquest and expropriation. From coast to coast, its colonial regime has deprived the First Nations of their land and legitimized this Lockean-style appropriation by means of its sovereign monopoly to dictate the law. It is not surprising, therefore, that Aboriginal struggles of decolonization have focused mainly on land-claims and legal action for recognition of ancestral treaties. This should not obscure the fact that besides pure violence, the colonization of America has also been an intellectual enterprise whose object was life itself. Since the first encounter of Europeans and “Indians”, the Aboriginal bodily resistance to the life-sciences’ episteme of the colonizers has nourished a reflexive anguish which has formed the basis of colonizers’ racism toward Natives. Along with its monopoly of violence, however, the colonial regime also established a monopoly on truth, and negated the value of Indian traditional

knowledge. The colonial rule, since then, has left a deep scar on the Aboriginal body, and the rediscovery of traditional medicine now seems to be not only a way of healing this historical wound but also a means of political empowerment of Indian communities. But as I will argue, the very discourse of empowerment corresponds to a new stage of colonial rule, typical of neo-liberal governmentality, and the rather timid recognition of traditional knowledge furthers the intellectual domination of the western episteme.

### **Re:search, Re:Surge, and Re:Sist: Re-defining the Terms of a Jurisprudence of Insurgency: A Case Study of the Water Crises in Walkerton, Ontario and Kashechewan, Ontario**

**- Stacy Douglas (Canadian Studies and Native Studies, Trent University)**

This paper begins with an interrogation of Laureen Snider's definition of 'resistance' employed in her 2004 article entitled "Resisting Neo-Liberalism: The Poisoned Water Disaster in Walkerton, Ontario". I will draw connections between Snider's theory regarding resistance at Walkerton, and Michel Tigar and Madeleine Levy's conception of a 'jurisprudence of insurgency'. In both instances, these socio-legal theorists suggest that when seemingly benign institutions such as law and government who hold cultural capital and a monopoly on naturalized truth claims, are shaken, and their social, historical and economical underpinnings exposed, a temporary opportunity emerges for ameliorative change and transformative politics. What I wish to take up with regards to this theory, are the limitations of understanding how far these truth claims can be unearthed in the popular imaginations of the general public. Specifically, I am interested in how legacies of colonialism that are entrenched in institutionalized governmental discourse and policy always already constitute undeserving racialized citizens. Indeed, it is difficult to transpose Snider's theory of resistance in Walkerton to the subsequent water crisis at Kashechewan First Nation in 2005. Consequently, the following questions remain: How are notions of resistance that privilege neoliberalism as the 'target enemy' limited in their scope? More broadly, how does Snider's work point to a larger trend in legal studies that leaves out important considerations of culture and ideology, and specifically, how they are shaped by race and colonialism?

Through a discursive analysis of Snider's work, juxtaposed with government documents surrounding the water crisis in Kashechewan, I hope to highlight some of the factors that not only defeat Kashechewan as a possibility for a jurisprudence of insurgency, but also bring into question the entire project of a jurisprudence of insurgency and its radical potential.