

# **Critical Postmodern: the Antenarrative wagering of Native American Indians under Material Conditions of Intercultural Multiplicity**

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## **Abstract**

In this chapter we focus on what is called ‘critical postmodern’ (an intersection of Critical Theory and Postmodern Theory). Critical postmodern is entirely different than social constructionism which has no interest in material conditions, and treats every situation as a simulacra. Baudrillard’s hyper-reality is more real than the real. In Ken Gergen’s (1999) social construction postmodernism, there is only the mindful in the social, but not in any material actuality of act or deed. We look to Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1990, 1993), as an overlooked critical theorist, who anticipates the marriage of discourse and materiality, as well as to Foucault’s (1972) idea of material and discourse, and quantum physics of Karen Bard (2003, 2007) intra-activity of discourse with materiality. It is Bruno Latour (1999, 2005) who provides a piercing critique of social constructionism’s lack of attention to materiality, in the extreme treating the material condition as non-existent. Theories of existence are called ontological, and theories of social construction have stayed within epistemology (knowing, from mindfulness). Latour charges that there is neither a materiality of the ‘social’ nor of ‘construction’ in social constructionism.

Can critical postmodern theory be attentive to materiality? We contend that it can, especially when using “antenarrative” and “living story” (Boje, 2001, 2011) approaches. How does this play out in one of the most profound crosscultural experiences of our times, the encounters of indigenous Native Americans with the European colonists and settlers? We review in this chapter the work of Native American scholars who assert that indigenous storytelling is all about materiality in its orality, in what Vizenor (1994, 1996, 1998, 1999) calls survivance, in what Cajete (2000) calls the relation of native storytelling to the Earth, and finally in what Sarris (1993) imagines as ways people do material storytelling that fills in a ‘gap.’

## **Introduction**

Sarris (1993) says storytelling “can work to oppress or to liberate, to confuse or to enlighten.” Certainly postmodernism is storytelling to confuse. A critical postmodern storytelling is to liberate and enlighten. Whereas in most work narratives are simply representational, retrospective sensemaking acts, it is in the living story that one seeks connection with the Nowness of what Bakhtin (1993) calls the once-occurrent Being-as-event. But there is also that aspect of storytelling, which we call ‘antenarrative’ that is a shaping of the future, by a ‘bet’ (ante) that is ‘before’ (ante to) narrative (Boje, 2001).

Sarris (1993) describes a pedagogical use of storytelling that we would classify as antenarrative. Sarris asks his students to ponder the future of a Native girl in a classroom with

Euro-whites. The girl has been placed by her teacher “in the corner with a coloring pad and crayons while other students worked on computers.” (p. 159). When the teaching assistant asked about this act, the teacher responded, “Oh, she’s not really interested. She’s from out in the bush, you know. She never says much. She’s more creative” (p. 15). Sarris asks his own class, “What is going to happen to that girl?”

This is where what we call the “gap” comes in. In the collective storytelling that is incarnated in Sarris’ classroom, each student tells a part of that corner-sitting student’s antenarrative, but it is born out of Sarris’ student’s own “personal experience” (p. 160). Each student is rehistoricizing by an antenarrative wave (as we call it) from the projected future back to the problem of discrimination by way of “critical reflection and insight” (p. 162). There is a second wave, one that travels from the future-as-ought-to-Be back to the Nowness of the living story incarnation in the web of relationships as each student tells what is going to happen next, and next, and next.

And in this filling in the ‘gap’ there is a talking back to the narrative of that discrimination, to that teacher and all her stereotyping. “Storytelling became a means for critical inquiry, not just about the texts, but simultaneously about the student’s relationship to them” (Sarris, (1993: 162).

There are gaps between the plane of narrative-retrospection, the living story webs of Nowness relationships, and the antenarratives that buildup future potentiality. In the collective storytelling session enacted by Sarris, there is a dialogical sharing of contexts of the students, that are held up to each other and to the narrative of that girl in the corner, coloring while others are working on computers. Sarris (p. 28, 30) is citing Bakhtin, the “inner dialogue” of these interlocutors’ reflexivity on the contexts in which they find themselves. The antenarrative articulates a field of future possibilities (Morson, 1998).

“The transcriptions of American Indian oral literature ... sometimes provide nothing about the context in which the literatures were told and recorded or the manner in which they were translated” (Sarris, 1996: 38).

In this chapter we are interested in the contexts not only of expressed verbal (storytelling) exchange, but the negotiated timespacemattering of materiality in exchange relationships. This is what Karen Barad (2007) calls the intra-penetration of materiality and discourse, not as an “interaction”(which is the term of Newtonian physics) but in the intra-activity of what we call storytelling with the materiality of timespacemattering.

In the worldview of many (if not all) indigenous Americans, the importance of location is one way in which materiality infuses their living stories. Cordova (2007, p.55) cites Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff’s work on the Tukano, whose lives in the Amazon basin are inextricably intertwined with “the specific location of the group” and “based on an intimate, factual knowledge of their environment” (p. 55).

The narrative version oftentimes omits the contextual information, and much of the content of the living story web of relationships to human actors, animal actors, and to material actants (as Latour calls them). The point of Sarris’ storytelling pedagogic exercise (above) is to promote “critical discourse” and “critical thinking” (p. 152). This is to know thyself as an ontological participant, in not only a historical process, but an antenarrative shaping of the future (Boje, 2011; Rosile, 2011).

When social constructionism splits off mindfulness from materiality (timespacemattering), we are left in the gap. Each of us shapes the future via our antenarrating of

our part to play in materiality, as an act/deed in once-occurrent Being-as-event, and the as yet-to-be-oughtness (Bakhtin, 1993). And this in-the-moment Being-Becoming is a prospective sensemaking via an antenarrative spiral or rhizomatic-assemblage that is shot through with a quantum physics materiality (Barad, 2003, 2007). This materiality-discourse intra-activity is what Barad (2007) calls, *timespacemattering* and it allows us to “critically explore intercultural dynamic[s]” (Sarris, 1996: 165) not just as a social constructionist (postmodernism) but as a critical ontology of Being-Becoming, in materiality of what Vizenor (1996, 1998, 1999) calls transmotion of storytelling, as well as survivance.

Indigenous scholars address the “gap” and the absence of materiality which occurs when indigenous oral traditions are captured and pinned like a butterfly to an exhibition board of some abstract-narrative. The life and the movement of living story webs of Nowness, so much the essence of butterfly-ness, is lost in this capturing and fixing and artificially representing what it means to be a butterfly, in narrative.

Vizenor (1999) in *Manifest Manners* says “the natural world is a venue of sound and shadows, and the outcome of the oral tradition is not the silence of discourse, dominance, and written narratives” (p. 72). Narrative is for Vizenor “a colonial reduction of natural sound, heard stories, and the tease of shadows in tribal remembrance” (P. 72). This remembrance goes silent in narrative (backshadows), but is in the living story webs of relationships (sideshadows) and antenarrative (foreshadows) (Morrison, 1999).

Storytelling, from a critical postmodern perspective, is intertwined with nature, and the material conditions of timespacemattering. When we attempt to capture indigenous experiences, these narratives of tribal experience end up becoming “an outright fraud or fictitious self-deception” (p. 76). There is a gap in the passage between the narrative (retrospective sensemaking) and the living story web of the living Nowness world. This gap is a silence that is misrepresented in narrative as a mere simulation. Lyotard is cited in Vizenor (p. 68) for writing of “stories that one tells, that one hears, that one acts out.” The acting out of the living stories carries what Vizenor calls the “hermeneutics of survivance” (p. 68 which is quite material, not at all in the fictitious sense of social constructionism. Vizenor is writing about what we call critical postmodern, citing not only Bakhtin but using Derrida’s “différance” (p. 70) in its connection to hermeneutical dissemblance of living stories by narrative representation. And this is where Bakhtin’s ethical answerability for that act/deed comes into play.

Vizenor (1998) in *Fugitive Poses*, brings up a concept that is quite material, “transmotion” (p. 168). Transmotion is occurring in the hearsay of actual experience, in the dialogical example we started with (above) in Sarris. Transmotion recognizes “the map is not the territory” (p. 170) and the narrative is just that, a map. In transmotion there is in the living story and antenarrative a “virtual sense of presence” of a process of “appropriation and possession: (p. 170). It is the transmotion of narrative absences into an aliveness presence of living stories of survivance, the acts of embodiment, the materiality of storytelling in the sculpting, painting, weaving, dancing, and acting out. The territory becomes un-represented, as the “sense of Native presence in virtual cartography” (p. 174) is incarnated.

Vizenor’s (2008) *Survivance* is “the continuance of [living] stories, not a mere reaction however pertinent” (p 1, bracket addition ours) and “survivance stories are reincarnations of dominance .... and the legacy of victimry” (p. 1). It is a Nietzschean nihilatory victimry that for Vizenor is a cultural treason (p. 4). “The active resistance and repudiation of dominance” and of “victimry” and of “nihilism” (P. 11) is what Vizenor stresses.

Viznor's (2009) *Native Liberty*, is all about survivance and non-survival. This book is more Deleuzian, with the deterritorialization and deterritorialization dynamic of survivance that is being arrested by so-called progress narrative constructions (Deleuze, 1994; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

These Native American scholars (Vizenor-Cajete-Sarris) seek to make visible the shadow of what is absent in what Czarniawska (2004) terms *petrified narratives*: the material condition of timespacemattering. We storytelling scholars attempt the same move as our indigenous colleagues, via antenarrative. We hope that these works by Native American scholars show you as readers, the critical postmodern perspective. We propose that this perspective allows us to deconstruct old narratives and then communicate antenarratively, bridging the in-the-moment materiality gap. In this way we can co-create new stories born of the "intra-activity" (Barad, 2007) of our cultures.

In the next section we work out an example of indigenous practices from a critical postmodern and antenarrative perspective of wagering on the future, in an intercultural context of European colonization and settlement, and all its deterritorializing and reterritorializing. But we have in mind a survivance, a transmotion materiality storytelling that is an overcoming of victimry and domination.

### **Critical Postmodern Indigenous Storytelling**

While postmodernism has been susceptible to the danger of romanticizing the primitive, critical postmodernism calls into question the term "primitive." Critical postmodernism would place the modern and the primitive both in a context more friendly to postcolonial analysis, while at the same time offering insights into colonialism based on understanding the material conditions of the colonial narratives. The way these dynamics have played out in the history of Native American Indians provides our case-in-point for cross-cultural storytelling between indigenous Americans and immigrant Americans.

The tendency of traditional (western and European-type) (Boje and Rosile, 2008) narratives to ignore time-space as material conditions reinforced the view of indigenous Americans as living in some never-land of a timeless primitive culture. This version of primitiveness was decontextualized and romanticized and as somehow more pure than the perceived excesses of English and European societies of the day. At the same time, the primitive was demonized as naked, godless, and savage (Bordewich, 1996). These tendencies combine to produce antenarratives of Native Americans that are linear, simple, cause-and-effect type story structures.

Antenarrative analysis of the history of Native Americans reveals the limitations of the linear form of antenarrative, and how those limitations affect the living stories of the present. Enhancing cross-cultural communication requires stories which incorporate time-space history, context, and the rhizomatic antenarratives. Rhizomatic antenarratives reflect the multiplicity and intertextuality of networked webs of stories. By recognizing not just linear but also cyclical, spiral, and rhizomatic antenarratives, we open the doors to cross-cultural communication.

Our traditional narratives of Native American Indians of both North and South Americas are 1) a-historical, 2) decontextualized, and 3) largely limited to linear cause-effect story formats. These dynamics are overlapping and interrelated and reinforce each other. All three factors contribute to the absence of material conditions in narratives of Native Americans. We offer

instead a version of Native American antenarratives which includes 1) the time-space-mattering of history; contextualizing; and 3) rhizomatic antenarrative structures.

### **History**

First, many traditional narratives portray American Indians as a-historical. There is an implied assumption that indigenous peoples were primitive and underdeveloped. Instead, even into this first decade of the twenty-first century, scientists are discovering new evidence of older and more-developed societies in the Americas than previously believed to exist. Mann's (2005, 2006) book *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* is a thorough as well as entertaining synthesis of more recent findings, along with speculation as to the reasons so much of indigenous history remained hidden for so long.

A key early study was paradoxically both a much-cited foundational case, and at the same time, a tremendous barrier to progress in studying indigenous history. In the early 1940's an intrepid young doctoral student did an exemplary ethnographic study of a small tribe in Bolivia, which became a landmark study and established young Holmberg's career at Cornell University (Mann, 2005, 2006). However, the study had a fatal flaw.

"Holmberg's Mistake" is what Mann (2005, 2006) calls the view that American Indians were, in a sense, frozen in time, and without historical evolution. Once early scholars adopted this belief, it was difficult for subsequent research to refute it. Reconsideration of this accepted "fact" came only when another PhD student flying over areas of Brazil and Bolivia in 1961 (Mann, 2005 and 2006, p. 11) observed huge tracts with the geometric patterns of early agriculture in what had been presumed to be untouched wilderness.

Since the 1960s, subsequent studies showed a culture of up to a million had reached its peak a thousand years ago, leaving these long-lost earthen patterns as the traces of an amazing pre-Columbian culture (Mann, citing Erikson, 2005 and 2006, pp. 1-13). Such new discoveries are in sharp contrast to the "noble savage." This noble stereotype may date back to the mid-1500's ethnography of a reformed Spanish conquistador (Mann, p. 14).

In contrast to the popular image of Native Americans as nomadic hunters ala the *Dances with Wolves* film, most of these early cultures were agrarian. Just as in Europe, the agrarian societies demonstrated a flowering of art and culture facilitated by having a more permanent physical location. As recently as 2002 and 2003, newly-found earthwork remnants of early cultures were still being discovered in Brazil (Mann, p. 28-29).

Mann (2005, 2006) acknowledges that Holmberg was hardly to be blamed for his misinterpretation which misled researchers for decades. The tribe which Holmberg studied truly was:

"among the most culturally impoverished people on earth. But his was not because they were unchanged holdovers from humankind's ancient past but because smallpox and influenza laid waste to their villages in the 1920s. Before the epidemics at least three thousand Siriono, and probably many more, lived in eastern Bolivia. By Holmberg's time fewer than 150 remained—a loss of more than 95 percent in less than a generation" and further,

"the group was fighting the white cattle ranchers....The Bolivian military aided the incursion....(Holmberg) never fully grasped that the people he saw as remnants from the Paleolithic Age were actually the persecuted survivors of a recently shattered culture. It was as if he had come across refugees from a Nazi concentration camp, and concluded that they had always been barefoot and starving" (Mann, 2005-2006, p10).

Mann's fascinating book shows how recent discoveries of life in the Americas before Columbus must change a wide range of assumptions about indigenous American life and culture. He links new evidence of smallpox and hepatitis, along with discoveries only made possible by modern technologies like carbon dating. He concludes with an updated story of the Americas:

“in the current view, a thriving, stunningly diverse place, a tumult of languages, trade, and culture...of tens of millions of people...swept away by disease and subjugation. So thorough was the erasure that within a few generations neither conqueror nor conquered knew that this world had existed” (pp.29-30).

Mann (2005, 2006) brings together important new threads of indigenous investigation to restore to Native American Indians the history which is theirs. From a critical postmodern perspective, this history constitutes the material condition of time-space-mattering that is essential to the living story of indigenous peoples. Only with this understanding of the materiality of the past, can we hope to frame an antenarrative, and thus shape a future, which includes material conditions and not mere projected fantasies of indigenous life.

### **Context**

Now that we have restored time and history to our story, we can turn to the second element of the material conditions of story: context. Context is vividly demonstrated by the following story: A tourist in Florida was admiring the necklace worn by a local Indian. “What is it made of?” she asked. “Alligator's teeth,” the Indian replied. “I suppose,” she said, apparently unaware of her patronizing tone, “that they mean as much to you as pearls do to us.” “Oh no,” the Indian objected. “Anyone can open an oyster.”

New insights into the context of those early encounters between Native Americans and the English and Europeans provide fresh and often disturbing insights into the stories most of us grew up reading in our school textbooks (Braun, 2008; Bordewich, 1996; Mann, 2005; Ordahl Kupperman, 2000; Smith, 2009). The misnamed “Indians” were not the simple, gullible primitives who sold Manhattan Island for a pile of trinkets. Instead, Ordahl Kupperman (2000) (and others) see those early contacts as dangerous and alluring encounters wherein each side had self-serving political motivations which were often hidden from the other side.

Ordahl Kupperman (2000) reports that the English explorers sought riches in the New World both to pay back their merchant investors and to increase their personal wealth and status in the rigid societies of the day. They sought the storied plunder of the Spanish, and failing that, the plentiful resources like furs and tobacco. On the other side, the Native Americans saw the English as providing them an advantage in their own extensive networks of trade. Tribes close to the English settlers could control access to the English knives and similar valued items, giving them an economic edge as sole-source providers of rare and costly goods in dealings with rival tribes.

It was not the English muskets that tipped the balance of power in these wary early encounters. Rather it was the indigenous peoples' immune systems which likely were the fatal flaw, making the natives nearly defenseless against European hepatitis and small pox. Ordahl Kupperman reports that the early settlement of Plymouth was built literally on the homes of tribal groups where up to 90% were wiped out in a three-year period due to the new diseases brought by the invaders.

The first Thanksgiving was actually triggered when English found the Native's hidden stores of food for the winter. We can imagine the scales balanced equally for a bloodbath or a banquet. Caught with their illicit bounty, the newcomers decided to share the food. The Native

Americans saw the English as having little more survival skills than a child, not knowing how to plant and harvest and store food. Helping such a pitiful group by teaching them farming methods and even sharing food with them probably did not seem such a dangerous thing to do. After all, those musket balls made a huge sound but did not travel as far as a well-shot arrow. Further, most colonists were terrible shots. What harm could come from letting, and even helping, these pathetic creatures, who had stumbled pale and sick and weak off those large canoes, to avoid starvation? And some of their goods, especially the knives, could be very useful.

Within a few short years, the colonists were growing stronger and more acclimated while the Native Americans were being decimated by illness. Both sides saw this development as the hand of God at work. Both sides saw the potential for political alliances: tribes enlisted colonists to help them fight their tribal rivals. Neither side wanted more enemies, so alliances seemed prudent. Deceptions and intrigues led to betrayals.

These dynamics continued as the battlegrounds moved west. An often-overlooked aspect of Custer's Last Stand is that this was not purely the white man against the Indian. There were in that battle the Crow (??) who acted as scouts for the army and fought with Custer against their tribal enemies the Sioux, whom they believed had encroached on Crow lands.

We know the plot and we know the end of the story: Indigenous Americans opposed the taking of their lands by the English and Europeans and they were defeated. We are less familiar with the contextual details: Literally decimated by illnesses in several waves over many years, tribes became vulnerable to their tribal enemies, leading to political infighting, which further weakened the tribes. The combination of illness and infighting gave colonists the needed advantage to push tribes farther westward and claim more of America for themselves and for their political and financial backers overseas. This pattern occurred repeatedly in both North and South Americas.

What is the new antenarrative that arises from all this new knowledge about indigenous Americans?

Anyone can open an oyster.

### **Rhizomatics of Story Networks**

Rhizomatic story networks are a form of antenarrative which incorporate linear, cyclic, and spiral antenarratives (Boje, 2001, 2011). If we apply each of these antenarrative types to the history of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, we gain new insights into their stories. Next we examine each of the three forms of antenarrative (linear, cyclic, and spiral) which are all present in the complex network of the rhizomatic form.

First we consider linear antenarrative plotlines. We now see the limitations of the simplified linear narratives, i.e.: superior, developed culture invades primitive society and plunders, defeats and enslaves them for the primitives' own good. At the time of the colonists, when early settlements disappeared before the next ship arrived from England, this antenarrative was not so clearly evident as it might appear to be in hindsight.

Cyclical antenarratives pay attention to the recurring aspects of plot. For example, we tend to adopt cyclical antenarratives when we story the development of cultures, from primitive to developed to degenerating and then destroyed, like the Roman Empire. Early histories of the Aztec and Inka cultures often took the cyclic form, despite unanswered questions about the downfall and demise of several such cultures.

A spiral has a self-reinforcing element which amplifies each loop. Our stories of the development of knowledge and science are spiral antenarratives: research and discoveries lead to ever-increasing stores of knowledge and accelerating rates of development of technologies, with no apparent end in sight. Spirals may also be downward, a dynamic many see in moral degeneration of societies.

Histories of the development of empires typically fit a spiral form, where conquest in one area leads to greater power then greater conquests in an upward spiral. Currently people question whether our own developed Western world is a society which has reached the peak of its upward spiral, and may even now be experiencing a cyclic decline with hunger, poverty, natural disasters, global warming, and other apocalyptic ends. Histories of cultures may also appear as upward spirals of development which reached a peak and are followed by downward spirals of destruction. In addition to upward and downward, spirals may also move inward and outward (Boje, 2011 forthcoming).

Cycles are relatively simple closed systems when compared to the more open and complex spirals. Still more open and complex are rhizomes. Rhizomes may branch out, and branches eventually return to intertwine in new ways. The idea that the Native Americans were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel is a rhizomatic antenarrative.

The material conditions which are embedded in the time-space-mattering of history, and in the context, and in the rhizomatic branches of the web of stories—these material conditions are lost in the a-historical decontextualized linear narrative of conquest. How can members of either group, the conquerors or the conquered, communicate across that kind of cultural gap? If such communication were possible at all, it would be enhanced by first positioning the self in autoethnographic awareness of the self and other in the rhizomatic webs of multiple stories and antenarrative fragments in which we are all embedded.

For Cordova (2007), a necessary first step is to understand the cultural context of the Native Americans. Standard operating procedures of European philosophy and science (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001; Cordova, 2007; Cajete, 2000) is focused on looking for common elements from which to make generalizations, and interpreting artifacts from an indigenous culture in terms of their similarity to European concepts. Instead of expecting to see a mirror of our own European culture in indigenous cultures, the indigenous way of knowing seeks knowledge from contrast and difference (Cordova, 2007, p. 56). From such a position, one can begin to appreciate the cultural context of indigenous peoples. Locating ourselves within that context, we can then attempt to communicate between and among these rhizomatic webs of storied culture.

Cordova, with a Ph.D. in traditional European-style philosophy, says Europeans have studied “concepts of importance to *Europeans*” which are “those relating to religious ideas: *soul, good and evil, God, sin, and the afterlife*” (p. 3) (italics are Cordova’s). She says most of these terms do not exist in Native American languages. With this and other examples, Cordova emphasizes that we cannot hope to understand indigenous cultures without understanding their context and the structures of their languages (not necessarily the languages themselves). It is the terms which have no translations, such as ‘god’, which provide evidence of the contrasting differences in cultures, and thus provide us the most information about another culture.

One of the most profound contrasts between indigenous American cultures and European ones is the static versus dynamic worldview reflected in language. Cordova (2007) cites Whorf’s analysis of the Western/European view of the world “portrayed through a language dependent on static nouns. It is a world of cause and effect” (p. 100). This static language lends itself to linear cause-effect antenarratives, and petrified beginning-middle-end formatted “dead” stories. In

contrast, “the Hopi depict a dynamic world of ceaseless and uncaused motion. To portray this world, the Hopi have developed a language largely dominated by verbs. Other American indigenous languages also are dominated by verbs” (Cordova 2007, p. 100, citing Whorf). Thus indigenous languages lend themselves to the “living story” formats identified by several storytelling scholars (Boje and Rosile, XXXX; OTHERS).

Early Native Americans had sophisticated trading routes with complex protocols for bargaining (Wilmoth, 2006).

### **Conclusions**

We conclude that it is not so important to discover “the” story of Native American Indians to better understand and communicate. Rather, we need to go back before story, to the lifespace of stories a-borning, in Beng-Becoming. From this place of Nowness, we can avoid the trap of limiting ourselves to only rigid linear/cyclic antenarrative structures. From this place, we can avoid the imperialism of imposing our more fossilized narrative forms. From such a place, we can open our future via antenarrative-spirals, and antenarrative-rhizomatic-assemblage structures of our newly co-created living and liberating stories yet-to-be.

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