

Working a Third Space: Indigenous Knowledge in the Post/Colonial University

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What are the role and responsibility of the professor of European ancestry, who has also battled for legitimizing Indigenous epistemologies and educational considerations in academe, in working with students who take up the challenges involved in this scholarship? This article focuses on an analysis of some of the articulated responses to a panel presented at a graduate conference in a faculty and university committed to equity and social justice. It creates space to address such questions as What does it mean to take Indigenous thought seriously in an educational institution? How can the relational and traditional/historic aspects of these knowledges, with their commitment to spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical dimensions, move beyond acceptance to being seen as normal? How to ensure that intellectual space is open to this turn to the re-creation of such knowledges in the context of the post/colonial university? The article interrogates the roles, limits, and possibilities of education in addressing persistent epistemological inequities as certain knowledges are valued in the university whereas others are relegated to secondary status when they are acknowledged at all. Guswenthla and Homi Bhabha's notion of third space provide analytic moments to investigate the tensions and contestations as knowledges collide, interact, and reform in confined discursive spaces.

Far from irrelevant in the modern world, traditional indigenous social, political and cosmological ontologies are profoundly important to the development of transformative alternative frameworks for global order and new ways of being. (Makere Stewart-Harawira, 2005)

The other point I am trying to make is not only that the history of colonialism is the history of the West but also that the history of colonialism is a counter-history to the normative, traditional history of the West. (Homi Bhabha, 1990, p. 218)

Epistemological racism comes from or emerges out of what we have labeled the civilizational level-the deepest, most primary level of a culture of people. (James Scheurich & Michelle Young, 1997)

Background to the Story

This is a Canadian story, but it could be a story from any colonized country where Indigenous people struggle for the rightful recognition of land and knowledge rights. It is a rocky story of seeking and finding, even momentarily, spaces that allow for intellectual interactions in peace, friendship, and respect for differences. In this article I argue that there is a long way to go before the enunciation of Indigenous knowledges in academic contexts is engaged at all seriously by most scholars. There is a long way to go before students and faculty working with Indigenous

thought are fully respected in the university and the relevance of Indigenous thought to the university's projects is acknowledged. Readers must judge the significance and transferability of these claims for themselves, perhaps seeing this account as a hypothesis for another context.

The numbers of First Nations/Aboriginal students in postsecondary education in Canada has increased dramatically in the last 30 years. Although the figures look good, when percentages are considered in relation to the rest of the population, the gains are much less significant (Malatest & Associates, 2002). Could it be that the observation made by Cree educator Verna Kirkness and her collaborator Ray Barnhardt (1991) over 15 years ago holds true, that "universities continue to perpetuate policies and practices that historically have produced abysmal results for First Nations students"? In their landmark article on Aboriginal students and higher education, Kirkness and Barnhardt call for universities capable of respecting Aboriginal students for who they are; engaging knowledge relevant to their world views; fostering reciprocal learning and teaching relationships; and assuming responsibility for their own lives. They gesture to the institutions' self-imposed limitations in the pursuit of knowledge with their probing question, "Why are universities so impervious to the existence of de facto forms of institutionalized discrimination that they are unable to recognize the threat that some of their accustomed practices pose to their own existence?" (p. 2). Clearly the institutions of the time lagged in their ability to respond appropriately to Aboriginal students and Indigenous knowledges, asking instead that students "check their own cultural predispositions at the university's gate" (p. 3). Based on the experiences of the graduate student panel detailed below, I argue that much remains to be done. Could it be that discrimination continues to function in relation to Aboriginal students, but now especially if they come with questions arising out of Indigenous knowledges?

Underlying the discussion is the understanding that Canada continues to be a country whose roots lie in colonization (Ng, 1993; Loomba, 1998) with much unfinished business in this regard. Events across Canada at the time of this writing from the lack of settlement of the Six Nations land claim near Caledonia; ongoing treaty negotiations in British Columbia; responses to the publication of the results of the inquiry into the death of Dudley George at Ipperwash; to the protection of traditional land from clear-cut logging at Grassy Narrows; and vivid memories of Kahnsetake's efforts in 1990 to defend a traditional burial ground from golf course development all serve to remind us that in 2008 the struggles continue for respectful and responsible relations between Indigenous peoples and those of other ancestry. Working for respect for land and recognition of Indigenous rights are the physical manifestations of deeper troubles arising out of fundamental distinctions in concepts of ownership and other equally significant epistemological tenets.

I argued elsewhere (Haig-Brown & Nock, 2006) that one productive way to take up consideration of relations between and among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is to acknowledge our interleaved histories even as we engage with one another in the creation of sometimes distinct and sometimes overlapping new knowledges that arise from these histories. Sartre reminds us that we exist only in the present as we face into the future carrying our histories with us. Anishinaabe author Louise Erdrich (2004) writes, "Even a people who ... were saved for thousands of generations by a practical philosophy, even such people as we, the Anishinaabeg, can sometimes die, or change, or change and become" (p. 210). Sites of education provide places where we all have the opportunity to live and become through working to decolonize our lives by recognizing (in the sense of coming to know again) what we consider our (hi)stories to be and what meanings we make of these assumptions. Decolonizing work, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) tells us, is work with a purpose: to improve people's lives through demystifying knowledge production by taking current and historical colonial relations seriously and situating Indigenous knowledges in their rightful place as foundational and contesting views to those arising directly out of Enlightenment Europe. In this work we as scholars not only regenerate new forms of old knowledges, hybrid forms in Bhabha's (1994) terms, but also have the potential to generate new ways of thinking through our relations with one another. As this article unfolds, the notions of hybridity and Guswentha, the two-row wampum, become central.

The Story Begins

Who are the people involved in this story? All are graduate students at York University in Toronto. (Ahnungoonhs) Brent Debassige, an Anishinaabe (Ojibw[e][ay]) of the Caribou clan from M'Chigeeng First Nation, focuses on Anishinaabe cultural sustainability and academic resilience for First Nation students. Arshi Dewan is doing research on Indigenous language maintenance; she was born in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of what is now called Bangladesh and speaks her native Chakma language. Deb O'Rourke is a non-Native person whose European ancestors settled in Ontario, North Dakota, and Saskatchewan shortly after the traumatic displacement of Indigenous populations from these locations. Her area of expertise is democratic education. Adam Pulpan is not Inuit and does not claim to be an expert on traditional knowledge, yet he hopes that the work he puts into his research in Nunavut may have a positive influence on continuing efforts to improve education there and elsewhere. John Hodson grew up in Anishinaabe territory and now lives in Rotinohshonni territory where he explores the "culture of his blood." He is the Research Director of the Tecumseh Research Centre at Brock University in southern Ontario, working to advance conditions in tertiary and secondary education for Aboriginal students.

The invitation to the five members of the panel to open the annual graduate conference was a first. It might be read as a long overdue recognition that all knowledge in Canada (and other colonial contexts) is constructed in relation to land and Indigenous peoples. Such is the legacy of colonization in the nations wrought from this set of relations. It could be seen as an effort to address what James Scheurich and Michelle Young (1997) a number of years ago called epistemological racism. Arguing that epistemologies arise out of specific social histories, they show that the current range of research approaches "logically reflect and reinforce" the social history of the dominant White race "while excluding the epistemologies of other races/cultures" (p. 8).¹ For the people involved, the invitation could be seen as an honor given its primacy of place as a keynote panel, replacing for the first time the more conventional single speaker.² Pragmatically, it served as a public opportunity for each person to enunciate his or her current thinking on research topics. The presentations varied: approaches were divergent, even disparate, and yet there was an undercurrent of unity. In Bhabha's (1990) words,

What [was] at issue is a historical moment in which these multiple identities do actually articulate in challenging ways, either positively or negatively, either in progressive or regressive ways, often conflictually, sometimes even incommensurably-not some flowering of individual talents and capacities. (p. 208)

All the students carefully articulated the current state of their research, demonstrating respect for their teachers and acknowledging the deep learning in which they are engaging through Indigenous approaches and/or a focus on issues of significance to Indigenous people. Philosophy, language, spirituality, history, their relation to schools and education more broadly defined: Indigenous knowledges related to these considerations were fundamental to the panel's presentations.

By Indigenous Knowledge, I Mean ...

For a working definition of Indigenous Knowledge, I draw on the writing of Maori scholar Makere Stewart-Harawira (2005). While resisting any essentialized, fixed notion, she focuses on enunciating a contemporary global Indigenous ontology or way of being. Attributes that she ascribes to a global Indigenous knowledge arise from "broadly shared beliefs about the meaning of meaning and the nature of interrelationships" (p. 35). These include beliefs that interrelationships between and among all things are fundamental to sense-making; that knowledge is sacred; that it cannot be found in a "codified canon," but in life itself; and that it is holistic in that it always already acknowledges four dimensions—the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. In sum, a refusal to divide and compartmentalize in any reductionist way is accompanied by adherence to recognizing all things existing in relation to one another. Practically speaking, the work the panel presented engaged Stewart-Harawira's claim in her recent response to globalization that, "far from irrelevant in the modern world,

traditional indigenous social, political and cosmological ontologies are profoundly important to the development of transformative alternative frameworks for global order and new ways of being" (p. xiv). At the same time, she (and I) resist naive notions of unchanging and unchanged Indigenous knowledges (read epistemologies and ontologies). As with Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of third space, which is discussed in more detail below,

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (p. 37)

Knowledge is in flux, reciprocally influencing and influenced by its context—land, spirit, mind, and emotion. We concur with Métis scholar Carl Urion (1999 cited in Stewart-Harawira) who articulates in response to those who see Indigenous knowledge as frozen in some ideal of long ago traditions, "Traditional knowledge is living knowledge."

Subjugated Knowledges

Returning to the panel under scrutiny: as chair and facilitator, I found myself appealing to a favorite moment in Foucault's (1979) writing as a bridge to what was to come. It could serve as an enticing entry point for those who were listening, most of whom had never engaged in any scholarly way with Indigenous thought. Although not explicitly acknowledging colonial relations, Foucault³ writes of subjugated knowledges as:

A whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity ... it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges, these unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledges (such as that of the psychiatric patient, of the ill person, of the nurse, of the doctor-parallel and marginal as they are to the knowledge of medicine—that of the delinquent, etc.) and which involve what I would call popular knowledges (*le savoir de gens*) though it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge, but is on the contrary, a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differentiated knowledge, incapable of unanimity and owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it—that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local, popular knowledges [into a third space, let me add for the purposes of this paper] that criticism performs its work. (p. 82)

Claiming the graduate conference panel as space for articulating subjugated Indigenous knowledges, I introduced the five students, who spoke in turn of their efforts to work in varied and specific contexts. The immediate response of the audience and their questions were moderate, supportive, and tentative. Clearly not wishing to be disrespectful (or worse, to be seen as racist) and yet somewhat dubious perhaps, their hesitation might be read as an expression of respect for the unfamiliar or as an inability or even refusal to engage with what is strange or secondary

in a hierarchy of knowledges. As always in such venues, time for discussion was limited.

Only in the aftermath, in hallway rants and dinner-table battles with me did some of the visceral responses come to the surface: *he sounds like a born-again; why is the seemingly hopeless task of preserving an obscure (to "us") language still seen as a legitimate project in these times of globalization and transnationalism; it looks like tourist ethnography down to the use of photographs in the presentation. Where is the theory? These presentations are too emotion-based, too focused on spirituality and some romantic and essentialist notion of an inviolable past.* I paraphrase. Perhaps I exaggerate, perhaps I am too quick to feel defensive, but the tenor of the comments is real and familiar to most people working in similar spaces. Rather than engaging with the presentations as a productive space of criticism, which Foucault argues subjugated knowledge gives us and which I had hoped to highlight in the introductory comments, responses took the form of harsh opposition, efforts to contain social difference (Bhabha, 1990). There seemed to be a desire to stop such work, to re-form so that it more closely resembled a conventional intellectualized⁴ academic discourse. I found myself descending to turmoil, wondering what to do with the comments, how to broach with the students what seemed like one more set of disrespectful responses to Indigenous knowledge and topics still arising out of notions of Western European superiority brought to the shores of the Americas by Enlightenment mentalities.⁵

What are the role and responsibility of the professor of European ancestry who has also battled for legitimizing Indigenous epistemologies⁶ and educational considerations in academe in working with students who take up the challenges of this scholarship? What does it mean to take Indigenous thought seriously in an educational institution? How can the relational and traditional/historic aspects of this knowledge, with its commitment to spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical dimensions move beyond acceptance to a place of being seen as "normal," as part of the progression of knowledge, as everyday engagement in scholarship rather than the exotic or archaic?⁷ How to ensure that the intellectual space is open to this turn to the re-creation of such knowledges in the context of the contemporary (post/colonial) university?⁸

With these questions burning in my heart and mind, I gently raised the responses to the panel with the students, and after moving for a moment toward despair, we remembered the fundamental project—let's call it a decolonizing one—and returned to the work at hand. The challenge was obvious. We know each other's work: we know that we share a commitment to addressing the continuing disrespect and the resultant hardships faced by too many Aboriginal people in educational institutions and a commitment to using Indigenous thought to guide our work. This article represents one way of moving past this experience while not forgetting,

using a commitment to story and to spirituality to continue to work for justice and respect in education and theorizing. We use our anger to hone our wits and once again return to the battle of creating a long overdue space for Indigenous Knowledges to perform their critical work, for epistemologies outside the conventional in academe to be respected for their integrity, resilience,⁹ and adaptability.

Enter Theory: Third Space and Guswentha, the Two-Row Wampum

When pushed to the wall in community-based work (and I consider our graduate program something of a community in the making and sometimes unmaking and remaking), I turn to theory seeking a way to think differently about what is going on (for another example of this turn to theory in tight circumstances, see Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002). I am drawn to Homi Bhabha's words in this regard (Mitchell, 1995).

I think a theory should go beyond illuminating the deep structure of an event, object, or text, should do more than establish or embellish the framing discourse within which this object of analysis is placed. What the theory does first of all is respond to a problem. (n.p.)

Gesturing to the title of one of Paul De Man's works—incidentally, in direct contrast to Bhabha's Commitment to Theory—I often claim a resistance to theory (which De Man points out is theory in itself) feeling that too frequently theorizing allows people to reduce, simplify, or obscure the complex realities that interactions with other human beings tend to bring. But Bhabha's articulation allows for something with which I can identify strongly: seeing theory as a way to respond to a problem rather than simply searching for a way to categorize it, placing it in an established (still ever-changing) discourse. Arguably consistent with Bhabha, I often think of theory in play in a specific situation as a hypothesis that may allow us to reposition ourselves in response to a seemingly irreconcilable problem, to move on thoughtfully and to hone the theory that we are continually developing. Deepening understandings, shifting ground, repositioning ourselves to see things in another light: theory in flux is assumed.

Specifically in this article, I posit and play/work with loose interpretations of two theories: Bhabha's (1994) notions of hybridity and third space, now often employed in a range of contexts, and Guswentha, the two-row wampum, a treaty made between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch in the 17th century, as ways to grapple with, name, and exemplify the problem that faced us following the graduate panel.

Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition. (p. 34)

Guswentha recognizes the "coexistence of power in a context of respect for the autonomy and distinctive nature of each [treaty] partner" (Alfred, 1999, p. 52). The panel and its presentation of denied Indigenous knowledges served to interrupt the authority of colonial knowledges and

assumed a legitimacy for the former. The students demanded engagement with something unfamiliar to most. They insisted on the existence of differences foundational to what was being said. A doctoral student reflecting on the presentations recognized the significance of the panel's work as she articulated a relation between third space and Native intellectuals.

For [Bhabha] the third space is the borderline of historical and epistemological agonism¹⁰ which binds two languages together even while they co-exist in direct competition. The native intellectual lives in this space as she begins to try to do justice to native culture even while she is constrained by the dominance of dominant culture. (Aparna Mishra Tarc, personal communication)

Guswentha and third space allow me to continue to interrogate this specific site of emerging Indigenous knowledge in the academy, a place where contesting ontologies and epistemologies¹¹ collide, interrupt, and transform one another in a way that has the potential to allow both to compete, flourish, and evolve¹² always in new ways.¹³ Indeed they are bound together even as they coexist in direct competition.

I was introduced to Guswentha and the theory/teaching and wisdom it holds by John Borrows, an Anishinaabe professor of law at the University of Victoria. He focused on this treaty in an eloquent lecture at York University in the late 1990s. Guswentha is a belt more than a meter long with two bands of purple beads made of quahog shells separated and bordered by bands of white beads. The theory embedded in this representation is that the two nations involved in the treaty represented by the belt, like two vessels traveling on a flowing river, will continue to exist in lasting peace and friendship as they maintain their separateness and integrity following parallel trajectories.¹⁴ Parallel lines never meet. In a move to consider third space, one that engages competing knowledges, I posit the possibility that as the canoe and the boat move on the river, there is a chance for people in them to see what happens across the differences, across the space between the vessels. In each exists a potential for¹⁵ unpredictable, sporadic, and complex encounters of knowledges, of contestation and of constant tension, a space for learning and changing. If we, for the moment and for the sake of argument, reduce knowledges to Western European and Indigenous traditions (both in all their diversities) and place each in one of the vessels, the places in the graduate conference that members of the panel and the audience occupied that day might be said to exemplify two great epistemologies, two vessels of thought on a moving river, two knowledges. Across the space between them, everything and nothing is possible. Any sighting across that space has the potential to inform and/or affect the knowledge in each vessel, to shift understandings, but not the direction or the separation of the canoes' paths, which travel always with space between. Sometimes in these contests, nothing changes: the people involved simply maintain their established ways,

feeling or seeming unaffected, unaltered. But over time, through history, when people inescapably encounter one another in those third spaces, and even when they try to avoid them, these interventions shift the living knowledge held in each canoe and hybridization results.

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 35, 112).

In other words, these interventions are reciprocal; they subvert in both directions. Discourses *change and become* even as they maintain a separateness. And this is not to say that they or the knowledges become one. If this should happen, the purpose of the two rows is annihilated, parallelism is lost, the treaty is broken. Something decent, respectful, and human disappears in the space between as one knowledge insists on dominating the other. Like third space, a treaty is a living entity, bringing colonial and Indigenous powers into endless and inescapable relation to one another.

Third Space or Active Hostility?

In his writing on hybridization and third space, Bhabha (1994) clearly differentiates between agonism as contestation, leading to the production of hybridization of languages in third space and antagonism as active hostility or opposition, an attempt to annihilate difference. How can his conceptions help us to think through what happened with the panel presentations? What was it that so disturbed the scholars gathered for a graduate program conference that day, those who chose to articulate a response? The five presentations may have disrupted the expectations of the audience in several ways. First, spirituality was both explicit and integral, underpinning all that was articulated. Several made reference to traditional knowledge. There was passion, that is, emotion, in each presentation: about the need for schools that can respond to threatened languages and cultures and the frightening suicide rates of Aboriginal youth; about the dangers for a people who have not yet seen the need for preserving language at the current stage of encroachment on land and language use; about persisting injustices ironically and hurtfully embedded in efforts to redress historical injustice; and about loss and epiphany. Each presenter focused on a specific immediate issue with various connections to Indigenous thought, a different kind of knowledge than most education graduate students and faculty engage with every day. Perhaps because each dealt with *real* problems, the theorymongers left unsatisfied. Perhaps it was the realization that, in Bhabha's (1990) words, "The difference of cultures cannot be something that can be accommodated within a universalist framework" (p. 209). At least some of the people there simply could

not place what they had heard in any of their existing understandings of scholarship and so had to find ways to be dismissive.

As time passes, the responses focus me on a number of questions arising out of an increasing distrust with certain dimensions of appropriated¹⁶ theory as it reveals itself in educational scholarship. Has a fundamental lack of understanding in some of the interpretations of post/colonial scholars led North American academics to an ever more "comfortable" space from which to conduct their research and thinking? First, the idea that there is no immutable past with which people can identify, that is, that cultures shift, change, and evolve, seems for some to have been translated into an idea that precludes and even disdains the re-creation of Indigenous traditional knowledges in contemporary context. When people appeal to the theories of John Dewey, Immanuel Kant, or Plato, no one goes into turmoil thinking that such reference is an effort to return to the golden days of the past. Why do the words *Chukma language* or *Anishinaabe ceremonies* imply that the people uttering them are naïvely trying to hold onto or return to the good old days? Why are they not recognized (or known for the first time) as Indigenous theory? Maybe the dismissal serves the interests of people living—for all the endless reasons for global movement—in formerly colonized, post/colonial, and currently colonized countries. As Clifford has told us, if "everyone is on the move and always has been,"¹⁷ then why do we academics have to engage with Indigenous epistemologies, historical injustices, current treaty violations, and whose traditional lands we are occupying at what cost to the original peoples? Perhaps in a rational move (where rationalism is seen to be ideology),¹⁸ it allows those involved to return to places where "informed" intellectualized discussions, appreciations, and analyses of transnational contexts, art forms, and global popular culture replace the need for locating ourselves and our interests as researchers and even for methodological analysis especially as it relates to reflexivity, our own story about our relation to our research, the lands and peoples where we live and work. Rather, we can return to that place of expertise, of objective knowing beyond context, and avoid the messiness of the everyday injustices of the world. Perhaps being faced with five soon-to-be-credentialed scholars, all articulating a connection to Indigenous knowledge and/or a persistent history of relations between Indigenous peoples and colonization, was more than the audience could accept. Was this a moment of "timid traditionalism" in academia that could be seen as "always trying to read a new situation in terms of some pre-given model or paradigm, which is reactionary reflex, a conservative 'mindset'" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 216)? Perhaps it was a moment when the colonial presence moved to reassert its diminishing authority, when the competition became harshly oppositional rather than contesting: "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its

articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 32). I admit that I was disappointed in the responses of some of my colleagues to what they had heard that day. I am trying to make sense of it: I have great respect for the work that some of them do. And again I must be clear. There were also some positive responses: the doctoral student quoted above conceived of the panel and found it provocative. Some faculty members indicated their interest in knowing more. Some graduate students identified with the positions the panel articulated, and others found their curiosity piqued.

However, a conservative, persistent, and perhaps revitalized trend in academe seems to react to any sense of diminishing authority of existing narratives, still wishing to allow only European reinventions and appropriations of *other* people's knowledges into the hallowed halls—increasingly more likely to be modern concrete than traditionally ivied. Perhaps scholars occupying academic space and engaging with Indigenous epistemology are seen as a distraction from the real business at hand: getting on with current clever iterations and repetitions of theory always already based in Western European traditions in all their variations. Perhaps—and I draw here on Freire's metaphor of "the ballet of the concepts"—a creeping form of limited and limiting intellectualism dominates certain corners of university contexts. This new or reestablished *ism* perhaps sees Indigenous knowledge, particularly its desire to engage epistemologically with notions beyond the intellectual, in Foucault's (1979) terms as one of "a whole set of knowledges that have been [and should be] disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" and dismisses them. Sometimes this intellectualism manifests as fervent recommitment to one, or in a postmodern turn more than one, master narrative, but only when their European roots and routes (from their origins) are articulated; sometimes it manifests in dismissal or refusal to engage with what are considered real problems: everyday problems, political problems, problems of inequity and injustice. The question becomes: Is the contemporary university even approaching a third space where knowledges in context interact and critique one another? Or is it still confined to the old oppositional model that refuses to engage or even recognize the hybridization that Indigenous knowledges have brought and now more explicitly and forcefully bring? What position does the *post* in post/colonial occupy at this stage of our thinking?

Ephemeral, Fleeting, Ever-Present Third Space

Paulo Freire, Herbert Blumer, John Berger, and Thomas Luckmann in a variety of ways taught us that knowledge is created and re-created in social interaction. I had the privilege of studying with Paulo Freire one summer in Vancouver. As we moved deeper into the course, a friend who was studying with me became more and more upset. One morning she appeared in class agitated and asked that I come with her to the emergen-

cy department of the nearby hospital. As we walked, she kept repeating, "I always knew that I could *know* and now he [Freire] tells me I can't." Although she was not then speaking of Indigenous knowledges, her reaction arose from her shifting understandings of what counts as knowledge in the academy. Could the increasing presence of Indigenous epistemologies in the university be similarly shaking the foundations of the place to the point where those who always knew that they could know are seeing and feeling that knowledge grounds are shifting differently now, and that there are places where it will be increasingly difficult for them to know? Is it possible that the investment in particular epistemologies limits scholars' ability to enter third space knowingly and willingly? Long ago Spivak wrote of critical philosophy as one that is aware of the limits of knowing. When we dismiss the unfamiliar, we dismiss a form of criticism and its concomitant opportunities to see the limitations of specific ways of knowing, specific epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies and to move to new ways of thinking.

Was the panel and its reception an example of working a third space? I would argue that it was at least a step in the direction: a place of contestation, but a space that allowed for the enunciation of epistemologies that were then available to those who chose to listen and be moved and that may well have affected even those who protested most strongly. We cannot fully read the silence of some. The space is fragile, the work is complex and fraught with the difficulties that new /old knowledges bring. For each person involved, as a culturally and socially located person, the work can only be what all thoughtful work demands: slow and rigorous, never yielding, and yet always open to learning. On the other hand, one of the presenters read the situation this way:

Although it may be posited that the grad conference was a third space for some, for others who tried to dismiss our contributions, it was a space where our ideas were attacked and ridiculed. The space turned out to be a shooting gallery. In other words, it became an opportunity to subversively reinforce hierarchical supremacy. Further, the de-legitimization of indigenous knowledge was reinforced and strengthened. One might suggest that the audience members who dismissed the work have more evidence of the need to civilize/colonize the people (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and the knowledge.

He sees it leading to "a continual (possibly reciprocal) dialogue of aggression and defence." Instead he seeks a space where there is enough respectful understanding of Indigenous world view that "This third space would then be like the two-row wampum where conversations would always begin with peace and friendship and involve sincere and respectful interactions." My firm belief is that the work the panel did that day takes us one step closer to a place where such conversations can be possible. At the same time, there will always be the tensions that third space brings—productive and disruptive tensions of things in flux, shifting commitments in ever-moving contexts.

We—the group that composed the panel—continue our conversations. We have found a (third) space in which to engage with each other. In the words of the panel member quoted above, “This is not about agreeing with one another but it is certainly a place (space) of peace, friendship and respect for one another.” We move slowly to the place of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility that Kirkness and Barnhardt called for. It is challenging work. For those who listen and for those who speak, for those who embrace the learning and for those who resist.

Notes

¹Interestingly in the 2005 *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, the editors in their Epilogue seem to differentiate Indigenous social science, designed and executed “more or less independent of Western or colonial and postcolonial influences” from the work with which a new interpretive community of social science is engaged. This separation relegates Indigenous thought once more to a peripheral place in social science and could appear to excuse many social scientists, other than Indigenous, from serious engagement with the work of Indigenous social science. However, the editors do include two important Maori scholars in the text although there are no Native American works.

²This event could be unpacked in many ways. Inviting a panel rather than individuals could also be seen as a gesture of recognition of the importance of group well-being being placed above a more competitive and individualistic desire to dominate and outdo others. It also allowed several perspectives and works to be presented rather than isolating one as the “star turn” (Ania Loomba, 1998, on the American academic starmaking “machine” as part of colonial mentality).

³It is important to note that Bhabha faults Foucault for not addressing colonial relations and at the same time acknowledges that his conceptualization of power has proven useful in thinking through colonization in his own work. Scheurich and Young draw on Foucault while pointing out he—and the use of his work—does not escape the race-based traditions of academe.

⁴I wish to make clear that I differentiate intellectual work from intellectualized work. Far from assuming an anti-intellectual stance, this observation refers to those who use obscure language not to present complex and difficult ideas, but to limit access to those ideas to an exclusive membership group. In direct contrast to this elitism, Bhabha writes, “I take the question of accessibility very seriously. That a book should be impaired by a lack of clarity, so that people cannot respond to it and meditate on it and use it, must be a major indictment of anybody who wants to do serious work. But I also feel that the more difficult bits of my work are in many cases the places where I am trying to think hardest, and in a futuristic kind of way—not always, I’m afraid, there may be many examples of simple stylistic failure, but generally I find that the passages pointed out to me as difficult are places where I am trying to fight a battle with myself” (Mitchell, 1995). The serious intellectual work done in universities in both Indigenous knowledges and European knowledges is integral to thoughtfulness and timely preservation in and of an ever-changing world. I concur in Bhabha’s (1990) disagreement with “a sense that people felt that unless theoretical ideas immediately translated into political action, they were in some way valueless” (p. 220).

⁵Bhabha (1990) says, “the sign of the ‘cultured’ or the ‘civilized’ attitude is the ability to appreciate cultures in a kind of *musée imaginaire*; as though one should be able to collect and appreciate them ... [a form of] Western connoisseurship” (p. 208).

⁶My last major research grant from the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canada focused on relations between universities and Aboriginal communities “especially around the knowledge which cannot be written.”

⁷Bhabha (1990), in his discussion of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, points out that the demands related to the text being made by so-called fundamentalists are too simply characterized as archaic when they are actually constituted "now, out of a particular political state that is functioning very much in our time, if not in an immediately recognizable intellectual space" (p. 215).

⁸Niggling away in all this lies another question: How far can/should a university move without losing its reason for being? When is it legitimate for orality to rule? How to reconcile the contradiction of those who want to write but not cite others who have written?

⁹Thank you, Brent Debassige, for keeping this word in the forefront of my consciousness.

¹⁰Bhabha distinguishes between agonism (competition) and antagonism (active hostility or opposition). Interestingly in current usage in biochemistry, an agonist is a substance that initiates a response whereas an antagonist inhibits response.

¹¹While focusing on epistemological racism in their article, Sheurich and Young acknowledge that epistemology, ontology, and axiology ("the disputational contours of ... morality and values" are "strongly interdependent."

¹²Nothing linear about evolution: see Stephen Jay Gould's (1989) *Wonderful Life* for a convincing argument that evolution is filled with complex twists and occasional dead ends.

¹³Brent Debassige, reading an earlier version of this article, said that he "would think it has equally as much potential for nothing to happen or the reproduction of knowledge supremacy among others. The dismissive positions of the specific individuals 'in the boat' could not only subdue what they themselves have glimpsed, but also seek to force the gaze of others away from the 'tourist ethnography' and back to the gaze of knowledge supremacy. It could also be that these dismissive individuals also later see and recognize what is coming (future encounters with indigenous knowledges) and attempt to proactively subvert the possible collision, interruption and transformation for others ... it then becomes (or transforms into) a kind of insidious colonial project" (personal communication).

¹⁴I am grateful to John Hodson of the Tecumseh Centre, Brock University, for his lesson on Guswentha and for his help with thinking through how to consider third space in relation to Guswentha. Sandra Styres also gave advice. Two Web sites <http://hometown.aol.com/miketben/miketben.htm> and http://www.degiyahoh.net/guswenta_two_row.htm provided additional information and the specific wording of the treaty.

¹⁵I want to be sure that readers recognize that having potential for something does not necessarily mean that the event happens. See note 12 above for another take on what this situation may create: a reactionary stance leading to the reinscription of "an insidious colonial project."

¹⁶I see educational theory for the most part using theoretical innovations from other fields and then translating them, often with considerable disregard for their roots and/or full implications (*postmodern quotation* Peter Shand calls it in quite another context). I am never sure if this sloppiness is due to naïveté, time pressure, a sense of entitlement, or laziness. Of course, some scholars do this work of translation with great skill and credibility, making important contributions to thinking about education.

¹⁷I use this phrase from Clifford's work not to detract from his thoughtful engagement with many knowledges, but to make a point about the cavalier developments as scholars theorize recent migrations and (fail to consider) their effect on Indigenous peoples and epistemologies.

¹⁸Bhabha (1990) says, "However rational you are, or 'rationalist' you are (because rationalism is an ideology, not just a way of being sensible), it is actually very difficult, even impossible and counterproductive, to try and fit together different forms of culture and to pretend that they can easily coexist" (p. 209).

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