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Repatriation as Neurotheology: Posthumanistic Approaches to  
Decolonization, Hope, and Cognitive Justice

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in American Indian Studies

by

Jason Timothy Taksony Hewitt

2015

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2015

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Repatriation as Neurotheology: Posthumanistic Approaches to  
Decolonization, Hope, and Cognitive Justice

By

Jason Timothy Taksony Hewitt

Master of Arts in American Indian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Paul V. Kroskrity, Chair

This thesis attempts to rethink the metaethics of repatriation in the context of global cognitive justice, making reference to the specific case of the Omaha power being Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti (the sacred pole or “True Omaha” of the Omaha people) being repatriated by the Peabody Museum. In doing so, the thesis offers a posthumanistic and postvitalist framework for the understanding of human socio-cognitive and semiotic systems with regard to traditional Native American cultural forms. Posthumanism is brought to bear in that the framework allows us to take seriously schemas of humanity, cognition, and/or personhood that are not bound up with Western humanist definitions of the human. Postvitalism makes itself known in that we take seri-

ously forms of agency that various objects may have without reference to a tacit vitalism. This approach allows us to understand the socio-cognitive systems of indigenous communities as being embedded in a general semiosis in which they participate and to which they respond, consistent with the testimony (historical and contemporary) that many of them offer about their own experience. Going further, the thesis makes use of Michael Yellow Bird's theories of "neurodecolonization" to put forward a nonrepresentational political neurotheology as a means of providing for the (semiotic) survivance of indigenous populations. A neurotheological approach to decolonization is seen as a cultural praxis targeted to cultural sustainability through dialogical cultural therapeutics—a praxis comprehensible to Western epistemologies and those of at least some indigenous cultures simultaneously.

The thesis of Jason Timothy Taksony Hewitt is approved.

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Anne Gilliland

Paul V. Kroskrity, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>1. PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. REPATRIATION AND REVITALIZATION AS SEMIOTIC TECHNOLOGY.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3. SEMIOTIC THEOLOGY: YELLOW SMOKE AND UMO<sup>n</sup>HO<sup>n</sup>TI.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>4. HISTORICAL TRAUMA, NEURODECOLONIZATION AND POSTHUMANISM.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>48</b>

## 1. Preliminary Framework

This essay proposes to study a particular case of repatriation to a Native American people, unpacking the relevant ethical issues within the various contexts at play. In doing so, the essay targets three major aims. The first is to show that repatriation is not just a matter of property rights or cultural property, but is in fact also related to processes of cultural healing and positive transformation. The second is to demonstrate an ethical procedure that allows us to take a wider range of issues into account while still retaining flexibility with regard to our response to scenarios that might lead to repatriation and the various priorities that might inform such responses. Finally, the third goal is to understand the ways that dynamics at the scale of planetarity and the long history of modernism can impact on the various priorities and the arguments we use to justify them. The essay will attempt to unify these three themes ultimately under a single perspective, addressing the return of Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti,<sup>1</sup> the “Real Omaha,” to the Omahas.

In most of the discourse on repatriation, we end up discussing both the situation and terms of debate according to the ontologies, cognitive styles, and cultural assumptions of the settler colonial culture’s people. (Kakaliouras, 2012; Silverman, 2015) This can happen for many reasons. In the first case, it is simply a matter of power relationships. This can break down into at least three forms of relationship. It is simply the case that in most historical situations of settler colonialism that by the time the colonial efforts have taken hold, they are usually expressed in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> We use here the orthography used at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. (Ager; Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln)



power over the indigenous population(s) of the area in question. (Wolfe, 2006)

While many such situations have improved in the last few decades, it is still the case that indigenous communities find themselves very often subaltern to settler colonial power, even while various forms of resistance and sovereignty are maintained. It is also the case that because of the consequences of persistent subaltern status, many indigenous communities have internalized this power structure and the ideologies that come with it, as well as the languages and epistemological habits that promote it. (Poupart, 2003) There are limits to such a claim, and those limits will vary from culture to culture, but it is very frequently true to at least some small extent. Moreover, it is the case that there are consequences from the above for ethical understanding. Not only do settler colonial powers control or heavily influence the terms of ethical debate and the formal structures through which they get resolved, but they also will have likely impacted on the indigenous populations' ethical understanding by means of language, ideology, and epistemic habits so that the subaltern people may not have the means to express in persuasive terms why things like repatriation are important in terms that carry the force of Western categories. (Richland, 2008) In all of these cases, the ontologies, cognitive styles, and cultural assumptions of settler colonial powers disproportionately tend to shape the outcome of interaction with regard to specific repatriation efforts. (Poirier, 2011)

As mentioned, there are specific interactions at various scales that have found their way to what would on many accounts be a more just distribution of power. In these cases, the intentional distribution of power, the evocation of traditional socio-cognitive semiosis, and the recognition of bad histories and historical

bad faith have all contributed to more sustainable cultural relations. Yet, even in the best circumstances, we are arriving out of a history where all of these problems have been the norm. (Mignolo, 1989) The interactions happen largely in contexts that still encode the problematic past, including legal systems, intergovernmental processes, and naked prejudice or ignorance. The improvements of the last few decades are specifically improvements on these faulty grounds, and it is out of those same grounds that we must develop means to resolve differences that arise out of them. Despite this intractability, this essay argues that we should nevertheless make progress and improvements where possible, as justice is not absolute in a binary sense, but comes in degrees and at various scales, subject to the various semiotic structures and orders involved.

Contexts in which repatriation is considered are, because of all this, reasoned out more often than not in terms of rights, property, contracts, etc., even if we bring in vocabulary or concepts that introduce a layer of sensitivity. (Riley, 2002) In the case at hand, the system that encompasses these means is the modern Anglophone legal system in its specifically American form. This system carves up the world in ways that may not be compatible with the traditional worldviews of other cultures, and it is only determinant of the situation as an extension of continuities of cultural and material violence, the degrees of which will vary depending on the particular circumstances of any given people. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 1999) In contemporary times, when the dominant culture takes on the mantle of science, the scientific ideological scheme—in which scientific work is understood as specifically *not* cultural, as a system of independent free thought, and as a tool to

upend alternative socio-cognitive systems of the erroneously subjective past—ironically reinforces cognitive injustice by refusing to take up the specifically cultural issues of historical trauma, cognitive sovereignty, and cognitive justice. (Santos, 2002) Even without science in the picture, though, the Anglophone legal system's tendential desire to reduce all things to fixed members of static categories and known operational relations is both intrinsically conservative and contrary to the forms of understanding that might make repatriation self-evidently necessary. In other words, the Anglophone tendency to insist on its own representational objectivity may, in fact, be contrary to objectivity in a more authentic sense of producing knowledge about the world, due to the ideologically managed ways in which it operationalizes its own desired outcomes. (Thrift, 2008)

Because indigenous cultures may not have thought of or related to the items under consideration for repatriation in such terms, using instead traditional and culturally appropriate forms of understanding, the socio-cognitive appeals that would otherwise arise from the peoples in question are likely filtered, translated, or repressed altogether in favor of settler colonial systems. Here we must recognize that repatriation itself, as a process or operation may take the form of an act of colonization, or at least propagate the colonial power structures. This does not mean that it is undesirable to proceed with repatriation efforts, but rather than we must take seriously the redoubled colonialism at play and the possibilities of continued, or even amplified, harm that might be done. Heightened sensitivity is called for, with the goal of avoiding or moderating intractable colonial aggressions wherever and whenever possible. It is an irony of the success of indigenous communities in shap-

ing the politics of these situations through legislation that the formal requirements of that legislation's enactment may often allow for a certain institutional laziness with respect to heightened attention, and that the legal nature of the requirements around repatriation give ideological cover to many who would identify as scientists in the sense that they can display an open *ressentiment* with regard to political manipulation of the conditions for the production of knowledge. This cynical use of science as antisocial framework can and does often mix with uncritical opinion and ideas to reinforce undesirable ethnocentrism and racism under the guise of humanism.

In this essay, I am interested in attempting to think differently, taking the arguments of individuals such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who think that decolonizing efforts must take into account not only historical traumas, social justice, and other standard postcolonial concepts, but also new ideas centered around a rubric of cognitive justice. For Santos, the efforts to improve upon an undesirable past means recognizing historical traumas and their lasting consequences, including the fact that indigenous economic and legal systems may be part of what was lost in the trauma, and that therefore these must be included in any effort to heal historical trauma.

...[T]here is no social justice without cognitive justice. Probably more than ever, global capitalism appears as a civilizational paradigm encompassing all domains of social life. The exclusion, oppression, and discrimination it produces have not only economic, social, and political dimensions but also cultural and epistemological ones. Accordingly, to confront this paradigm in all its dimensions is the challenge facing a new critical theory and new emancipatory practices. Contrary to their prede-

cessors, this theory and these practices must start from the premise that the epistemological diversity of the world is immense, as immense as its cultural diversity and that the recognition of such diversity must be at the core of the global resistance against capitalism and of the formulation of alternative forms of sociability.

Over the last decades, there has been a growing recognition of the cultural diversity of the world, with current controversies focusing on the terms of such recognition. But the same cannot be said of the recognition of the epistemological diversity of the world, that is, of the diversity of knowledge systems underlying practices of different social groups across the globe. However, from an anti-capitalist perspective such recognition is crucial. The epistemological privilege granted to modern science from the seventeenth century onwards, which made possible the technological revolutions that consolidated Western supremacy, was also instrumental in suppressing other, non-scientific forms of knowledges and, at the same time, the subaltern 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. There is, thus, an epistemological foundation to the capitalist and imperial order that the global North has been imposing on the global South.... [T]he reinvention of social emancipation is premised upon replace the “monoculture of scientific knowledge” by an “ecology of knowledges”. The ecology of knowledges is an invitation to the promotion of non-relativistic dialogues among knowledges, granting “equality of opportunities” to the different kinds of knowledge engaged in ever broader epistemological disputes aimed both at maximizing their respective contributions to build a more democratic and just society and at decolonizing knowledge and power.... All social practices involve knowledge. The production of knowledge is, in itself, a social practice and what distinguishes it from other social practices is its self-reflexivity, which productively reshapes the context of practices in motive and engine of actions. (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2008)

Santos' is a restorative justice model in the sense that he does not want to erase the past or deny its lasting impact, but rather undertake a remediation with the goals of decolonization foregrounded among many possible and some equally important goals. The lasting harms are particularly important for indigenous populations in settler colonial situations, who may not recognize themselves as postcolonial so much as in need of decolonization. (Byrd, 2011) Santos takes seriously the ideas of cultural revitalization and cultural sustainability. For him this means that all elements of cultural organization must be liberated to the degree possible from injustice. It is not enough to speak about the various things mentioned unless we include among them cognitive justice, the enactment of personal and collective sovereignties that permit the production of knowledge and the understanding of self, culture, and world in ways that are free of coercion, bad faith, and manipulation. The relationship of cognitive justice to the issues regarding repatriation as described above is self-evident. Of course, it is also important to acknowledge that native communities have seldom, if ever, surrendered entirely to the infliction of cognitive injustice. It is also important to note that there is room here to expand the definition of cognition in ways that are compatible with the alternative epistemologies he would revitalize, including domains Western humanism would cut off from knowledge *stricto sensu*, such as affective states or dream spaces.

For example, if we look at the case of the Omaha, we see that Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti, the “sacred pole” or Real Omaha, is not thought of or related to as an object (ritual, sacred, etc.), but rather as a person. It is in relation to this person that the Omaha peo-

ple understand themselves to be Omaha. A traditional narrative description of his arrival among the Omaha shows this.

"When the Omahas still lived in wooded country near a lake," Yellow Smoke said, "their chiefs met in council to devise some means by which the bands of the tribe might be kept together and the tribe itself saved from extinction." While they were in council, a young man, the son of a chief, was hunting in the woods. At night he lost his way. He stopped to rest and to find the "motionless star" (the pole star) for his guide. Suddenly, he was attracted by a light. When he approached the light he saw that it was "a tree that sent forth light. He went up to it and found that the whole tree, its trunk, branches, and leaves, were alight, yet remained unconsumed." The young man watched the luminous tree "until with the rising of the sun the tree with its foliage resumed its natural appearance." He remained by it throughout the day. "As twilight came on it began to be luminous and continued so until the sun rose again. When the young man returned home he told his father of the wonder." The young man's father told the chiefs of all the tribes:

My son has seen a wonderful tree.  
The Thunder birds come and go upon this tree,  
making a trail of fire that leaves four paths on the burnt  
grass that stretch toward the Four Winds.  
When the Thunder birds alight on the tree,  
it bursts into flame and the fire mounts to the top.  
The tree stands burning, but no one can see the fire ex-  
cept at night.

Then they cut the tree down "and four men, walking in a line, carried it on their shoulders to the village." They made a tent for the tree and set it up within the circle of lodges. "The chiefs worked upon the tree; they trimmed it and called it a human being. They made a basketwork receptacle of twigs and feathers and tied it about the middle." They placed a large scalp lock on top of the pole for hair. "Then they painted the Pole and set it up before the tent, leaning it on a crotched stick which they called imongthe (a staff)." When the people were gathered, the chiefs stood up and said:

You now see before you a mystery.  
Whenever we meet with troubles we shall bring all our  
troubles to Him (The Pole).  
We shall make offerings and requests.  
All our prayers must be accompanied by gifts.  
This (the Pole) belongs to all the people, but it shall be  
in the keeping of one family  
in the Honga clan. (Ridington)

What the legal framework of the United States would see as a static object that needs to be handed back over is, for the Omaha, a person with whom they may have real, important, and quite dynamic relations—relations so important that they can be and are understood to define the very notion of what it means to be Omaha according to tradition. It is the possibility of this defining relationship or set of relationships that is being restored in repatriating Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti, as much as the simple rights, ownership, or entitlement to property. To return Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti is thus, in a real sense, to give back sovereignty and cultural sustainability to the Omaha. Of course, for those who have responsibility for repatriation from the institutional side, the idea that the capture of items like Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti may involve issues of personhood is frequently seen as alien, which is ironic in regard to a dominant culture that allows for the legal concept of corporate personhood to have profound consequences for its own sociodynamics and politics, as well as the planet itself. But what if the Omaha were heard on their own terms? What if we took them seriously?



## 2. Repatriation and Revitalization as Semiotic Technology

It is probably true that some, if not a large number, of claims to repatriation are simply about property rights and the like as understood by those communities either in a traditional way, in Anglo ways, or both. (Riley, 2002) Yet, if we are to take claims seriously that present themselves out of a different socio-cognitive and semiotic order, such as with the Omaha, then we must also situate the arguments about these claims in the contexts that make them intelligible. As indicated, the desire to bring Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti home is about returning him to his people and restoring the kinds of relationships to him—and by extension each other—made available to them in the past through him. This places the claim in the realm of revitalization as much as repatriation, where they are jointly understood as semiotic technologies. It is not always the case that these two will be closely intertwined, but when they are it is important that we recognize and understand the relationship between them due to the necessity of double sensitivity as described above. Revitalization is a complex issue in its own right, and it can take many forms: social, religious, linguistic, cultural, economic, etc. For the purposes at hand, it is important to understand how revitalization movements and the transformation of socio-cognitive and semiotic regimes may hang together. It is in this context that we will be able to understand what motivates both this essay and the important moment that it holds up as example.

In academic literature, Native American revitalization movements have often been treated as religious movements, and this section will explore some of that treatment. While theories of revitalization movements attempt to understand and

explain the various consequences of these movements, the basic fact of them as religious movements goes largely unexplained. This is partly due to the relative paucity of comprehensive study of Native American religion in those who practice *religionswissenschaft* as a discipline. This paper proposes to challenge this basic assumption about revitalization movements, understanding them not as a problem of religious consciousness *per se*, but rather as an information theoretical problem. The perspective taken is useful in that it challenges certain settler colonial assumptions about indigenous consciousness and also in that it allows for a more comprehensive view of revitalization movements that does not take Kantian modes of subjectivization for granted.

Acknowledging the difficulties faced by Native American communities in an era of severe decline, the American sociologist Bernard Barber (1941) discusses revitalization movements among those communities in terms of messianic revival as part of his research into a theory of social systems. The use of a messianic metaphor in discussing what he sees as religious phenomena is not terribly surprising, given the time in which he is writing, as the study of religion, as an academic discipline, was still almost exclusively a form of Biblical Studies. It wasn't until decades later that Mircea Eliade and his ilk transformed the study of religion, taking a broader, more global perspective. On Barber's view, in cases where they are lacking security and the comfort of stable norms, individuals are "predisposed to accept a doctrine of hope," (p. 665) which, in itself is not a productive or generative state of affairs, but rather makes them receptive to messages that are in line with that hope. Such messages can be delivered by a "culture hero" or "Messiah".

At such a time, messianic prophecies are most likely to be accepted and made the basis of action. Messiahs preach the return to the old order, or rather, to a new order in which the old will be revived. Essentially, their function is to proclaim a *stable order*, one which will define the ends of action. (p. 665)

One could argue with his articulation, perhaps saying instead that the function in this case is to speak to the aberrant nature of the present: in general, the order of things is both stable and desirable, and one must take certain actions in order to bring the present back into alignment or harmony with that order.

In more contemporary language, we can say that the messiah figure described here would provide direction for the social system's autotelic functions, guidance for the actions of community members that allow them to undertake actions toward desirable goals that inform a metastable continuity. However, this theory does not take into account the fact that culture heroes often appear in contexts that are foundational for a culture, providing an *origo* for a given community. (Koch, 1986; Cohen, 2007, pp. 63-69) Indeed, Barber needs to explain in these terms why a messianic figure constitutes a revival or revitalization, rather than a renovation. It seems that both theories take for granted the reality of a tipping point, though in one case the system totters back into place (even if it has changed orientation), while in the other it falls over into a whole new state of affairs. In cases where genuinely renovative change does take place, Barber must show that the new somehow revives the old in a way that does not amount to mere survivance and that it does so, at the same time, in a way that provides order for the community. It does seem difficult to reconcile a messianic intervention providing both stabilizing order

and the transformation of circumstances, unless we assume that their failure is immanent and inevitable, so that the communities begin a cycle of perpetual unfulfilled expectation. This structure, familiar to Christians, certain Shi'ite sects, and some Pure Land Buddhists, is difficult, though not impossible, to find among Native American revitalization movements.

This paucity may be explained in part by the availability of social structures grounded in precisely that cycle of perpetual anticipation. Specifically, there is, for many, the possibility of converting to Christianity (completely or syncretically, either by choice or by acceptance of imposition), such that the old and new ways are elided into Christian patterns of existence. We certainly see this at certain scales in the hybridization of Catholicism in colonized areas. In such cases, one expects to find one of two scenarios: either the one just described, wherein a relatively stable order is disrupted only up to a point and the elision is achieved without a wholesale conversion, or a situation in which the disruption is severe enough to require a totalizing conversion.

In a society that may be integrated, but not singular, we might find that parts of the above are true for different segments of the culture. In such cases, the resulting forms should not be seen as causes, but rather as symptoms of the tipping point the culture reached in its instability. In a situation where nativist tendencies were present (see the discussion of Linton below), it is also possible that a mixed conversion and a pure messianic nativist movement might appear. These would likely be at odds, but would need to remain in contact and mutually contestive, as both are responses intended to respond to the situation of the community as a whole. This

emerges in circumstances such as Tenskwatawa (Edmunds, 1983) and Handsome Lake (Wallace, 1972), although it masks as a different kind of scenario.

We also can see the possibility of the formation of a temporal order of this sort established in a chiasmic formation, whereby the Christian temporal structure is transcluded into the originary mythic scheme, while the Christian theopoetic structures remain intact, after a fashion. A prime example of this can be seen in colonial Peru, after the capture of the Tawantinsuyu. The Incan Empire was nothing if not deeply woven together in its semiotic structures. Indeed, there was little, if any, separation between the cosmic, the mythic, and the social, such that the divine world and the world of the Empire's structures of rule were largely one and the same. When the Spanish murdered the Sapa Inca, they did more than commit a regicide in contradiction to their own policy. They destroyed the existing harmony of the world. Sara Castro-Klarén cites Nathan Wachtel in describing this catastrophe:

la derrota se experimenta allí como una catastrophe de amplitud cósmica.... el choque coincide con la muerte del hijo del Sol, el Inca. Este asegura la mediación entre los "Dioses" y los hombres, y es adorado como un "Dios": representa de alguna manera el centro carnal del universo, cuya armonía garantiza. Una vez asesinado ese centro, desaparece el punto de referencia viviente del mundo, y es ese orden universal lo que resulta brutalmente destruido. (Castro-Klarén S., 1989)

Defeat was experienced as a catastrophe of cosmic dimensions.... The clash coincided with the death of the son of the Sun, the Inca. He constituted the mediating point between the gods and men, and he was worshipped as a god. In some way he represented the bodily center of the universe. He was the guarantor of the harmony of the universe. Once that center was murdered, the living point of reference in the world disap-

peared. Universal order is thus brutally destroyed.  
(1993)

This did not result in a complete collapse, however. The Inca pantheon was and is complex, layered, and multifaceted in ways that scholars are still working to unpack. The result was a disaggregation of a previously unifying force, leaving intact much of the traditional structures. Rather than being taken on completely through a process of conversion, the Spanish god, “Dios” as the Incas referred to him using the label as a foreign proper name, stepped into the role of the sun god as an alternate sky god who had come to rule. (1993) This approach alone achieved much of Barber’s ends of establishing continuous order. But the story doesn’t end there.

Wachtel describes a “destructuration” whereby Dios, as solar supplement, also represented loss and destabilization, even in the face of continuity:

la dominación española, al servirse de las instituciones incaicas, acarrea al mismo tiempo su descomposición; sin que esto signifique, sin embargo, el nacimiento de un Nuevo mundo, radicalmente extraño al antiguo. Al contrario, por el término de “deestructuración” entendemos la supervivencia de estructuras antiguas o de elementos parciales de ellas, pero fuera del contexto relativamente coherente en al cual se situaban. (1989)

Spanish domination, while making use of Inca institutions, also caused their demise. This decomposition did not, however, mean the birth of a new universe radically different from the old one. On the contrary, it involved *destructuration*, which we understand as the survival of ancient structures or partial elements of these but displaced from the relatively coherent context in which they used to function. (1993)

The result is a kind of contingent messianic temporality encased in a myth that nevertheless adheres to an abstracted and atemporal Dios as new head divinity of the

sky. The messianic structure adheres, but requires the permission of the traditional order to come to pass.

The demise of the Sun and the subsequent profanation of Cuzco, the sacred center of the cosmos, disarticulated the Andean pantheon. Since the Andean deities were particularly tied to the system of kinship, social structure, and economic production, their demise meant not only the death of God, but the devastation of the visible and invisible worlds alike. For this reason, we can also read the myth of Incarrí as a response to the end of the known social order. Most variants of the myth hold that Incarrí's head was hidden in the underground. There it grows, impervious to decay, so that one day the head and the body will be reunited. On that day, when the mutilated body becomes whole again, Incarrí will be restored to life on the surface of the Pachamama, and if Dios allows it, the son of the Sun will reign again. At the same time, the sacred order—that is, justice as harmony—will be restored to the Andeans. (Castro-Klarén S. , 1993)

The traditional divine figure uses the Christian temporal scheme in order to achieve ends incompatible with traditional structures, but which may be permitted by the Christian deity who now orders and resolves all issues pertaining to that structure. The chiasmus is further complicated by the plays of power using a destructured mythos as gameboard, where both native and colonizer use the others' forms to wield power in the relationship. Barber simply cannot account for either the more-than-religious nature of this scenario, nor its complex phenomenological intermixings.

Linton (1943) addresses this theoretical gap directly. Avoiding the term “messianic” in favor of terminology that allows for greater precision, he refers to *na-tivistic* movements in a move that some might read as prefiguring the contemporary language of post-colonialism. Yet more than simply theorizing resistance to colonial

and/or settler colonial influences, nativistic movements emphasize issues of cultural survivance, thus indicating an assumption in the use of the term of that the community in question may be at risk of losing their cohesion entirely. Tracing the contours of the gap in Barber's description, Linton provides a set of subcategories to classify these movements.

All the phenomena to which the term nativistic has been applied have in common [...] selection of culture elements and deliberate, conscious effort to perpetuate such elements. However, they differ so widely in other respects that they cannot be understood without further analysis. At the outset it is necessary to distinguish between those forms of nativism which involve an attempt to revive extinct or at least moribund elements of culture and those which merely seek to perpetuate the current ones. For convenience we will refer to the first of these forms as *revivalistic nativism*, to the second as *perpetuative nativism*. These two forms are not completely exclusive. Thus a revivalistic nativistic movement will be almost certain to include in its selection of elements some of those which are current in the culture although derived from its past. Conversely a perpetuative nativistic movement may include elements which had been consciously revived at an earlier date. However, the emphases of these two forms are distinct. (Linton, 1943, p. 231)

Going further, Linton expands this bifurcation into a fourfold matrix by fleshing out two other qualifying subcategories of nativistic movements: the *magical* and the *rational*. While the tone of his description of this pattern of difference is somewhat condescending, especially in light of certain important recent critiques of the relationship between "reasoned" discourse and "magical" discourse (Bracken, 2007), the differences encapsulated in his model are worth noting:



There is a further necessity for distinguishing between what we may call *magical nativism* and *rational nativism*. It may well be questioned whether any sort of nativistic movement can be regarded as genuinely rational, since all such movements are, to some extent, unrealistic, but at least the movements of the latter order appear rational by contrast with those of the former.

Magical nativistic movements are often spectacular and always troublesome to administrators, facts which explain why they have received so much attention from anthropologists. Such movements are comparable in many respects to the Messianic movements which have arisen in many societies in times of stress. They usually originate with some individual who assumes the role of prophet and is accepted by the people because they wish to believe. They always lean heavily on the supernatural and usually embody apocalyptic and millennial aspects. In such movements moribund elements of culture are not revived for their own sake or in anticipation of practical advantages from the element themselves. Their revival is part of a magical formula designed to modify the society's environment in ways which will be favorable to it. (Linton, 1943, p. 232)

Linton then proceeds to explain the rational by means of its coordinate position within the matrix as a whole:

What we have chosen to call rational nativistic movements are a phenomenon of a quite different sort. While such movements resemble the magical ones in their conscious effort to revive or perpetuate selected elements of culture, they have different motivations. What these are can be understood more readily if we reintroduce at this point the distinction previously made between revivalistic and perpetuative nativistic movements. Rational revivalistic nativistic movements are, almost without exception, associated with frustrating situations and are primarily attempts to compensate for the frustrations of the society's members. The elements revived become symbols of a period when the society was free or, in retrospect, happy or great. Their usage is not magical but psychological. By keeping the past in mind, such elements help to reestablish and maintain

the self respect of the group's members in the face of adverse conditions. (p. 233)

Here we must note that Linton imposes a culture/nature or individual/environment split in his reading of the movements that may not be consistent with the societies meant to be described by his schema. He naturalizes this split by, ironically, naturalizing it, so that those who revive elements of their culture in order to effect change on their circumstances—their “environment,” which includes a naturalized settler colonial imperial context—are proceeding irrationally, or magically, while those who do so in order to effect change in their mood, outlook, or aspiration, which is to say in their psychic disposition, are rational, even if, perhaps, still foolish after a fashion. This is certainly a melancholy description at best.

Rational perpetuative nativistic movements, on the other hand, find their main function in the maintenance of social solidarity. The elements selected for perpetuation become symbols of the society's existence as a unique entity. They provide the society's members with a fund of common knowledge and experience which is exclusively their own and which sets them off from the members of other societies. In both types of rational nativistic movement the culture elements selected for symbolic use are chosen realistically and with regard to the possibility of perpetuating them under current conditions. (p. 233)

Having laid out this matrix in its entirety, Linton points out that one quadrant of his fourfold system may not actually be applicable in any cases of which he is aware. The Perpetuative-magical nativistic movement “is so rare that the writer has been unable to find any clearly recognizable example of it.”

The reason for this probably lies in the conditions which are usually responsible for magical nativistic

movements. The inception of such movements can be traced almost without exception to conditions of extreme hardship or at least extreme dissatisfaction with the status quo. Since the current culture is associated with such conditions and has failed to ameliorate them, medical efficacy in modifying these conditions can scarcely be ascribed to any of its elements. Nevertheless, a perpetuative-magical movement might very well arise in the case of a society which currently occupies an advantageous position but sees itself threatened with an imminent loss of that position. (p. 234)

While one hesitates to use language that describes nativity to them in the context at hand, the Christian revival movements of the First and Second Great Awakenings do seem somewhat consistent with this category, as does the cultural politics of certain elements of public discourse of the last three decades in the United States. This is especially true of the recent Tea Party and other similar movements. That said, I believe the above described myth of Incarrí may fall squarely into this quadrant of Linton's matrix, though he is unfamiliar with it as it remained uninvestigated in his time.

It is perhaps telling that most of the examples that seem ready to hand of this kind of movement are in the dominant culture of the United States. Linton does argue for a reasonable explanation that incorporates critiques of power differentials into his matrix, but it may also be the case that the particular processes and forms of subjectivization mentioned above that produce the individual subject over and against culture and/or nature are not shared by the societies he attempts to critique. Indeed, this particular construction of consciousness brings to bear a semiotic regime that produces significance and truth in ways that may not be recognizable within a reading such as Linton's. The representationalist assumptions of his sche-

ma perhaps prevent the recognition of scenarios that would be compatible in some way with this empty quadrant, even against the grain of the anticipated role of power differentials. The importance of understanding nonrepresentational forms, the critique of them, and the play of power within and amongst them has been articulated by those concerned with language ideologies and geography. (Thrift, 2008)

Lear (2006) discusses at length the story of Plenty Coups, who led his people across the threshold of transformation from their traditional lifeway into a distinctly new way of being, from a largely traditional continuity with the past to one that is able to accommodate contemporary cultural forms and the realities of the times without compromising authenticity of identity. He spends time analyzing, in particular, the way in which Plenty Coups brought to his people an understanding of the shape of their own future, by taking upon himself the anxieties, confusion, and desperation of the community on aggregate and seeking out a vision that would provide guidance. This certainly has little to do with the forms of practical reason in the rational quadrants above. Indeed, his actions are not limited to the currency of existing forms or even the exchange of these for other, new forms. Rather, what is at stake is an agency that acts in and as semiosis, a magic zone in which semiosis is free to operate on itself and transform the ways in which it conditions itself. In other words, the continuities Plenty Coups works to empower are not representational, but rather exist in the patterns of life choices, of affect, and of bearing that constitute what it means to be a Crow.

Interestingly, Plenty Coups' journey did not start with himself, but rather with a series of dreams and visions that informed him of the transformation he was

about to undertake. The Crow were not naïve in their understanding of dreams. Indeed, they understood there to be several types of dreams:

“No-account dreams,” in which one merely saw some incident.

“Wish-dreams,” which saw some hoped-for circumstance coming true. These did have special spiritual power—“medicine”—but they did not always come true.

“Property dreams,” in which a person would see horses, blankets, or the like, which he would later acquire through actual events.

“Medicine dreams” or visions. These gave powerful insight into the future. (p. 67)

As Lear explains:

One would expect a young chief to seek a vision in order to determine whether this was a good time to go off to battle. One would also expect young men to seek visions to know where one could hunt the buffalo herds. So the Crow, like Freud, thought that dreams were responses to human wishes. They also, like Freud, thought that the deeper meaning of dreams was often not transparent—and thus that important dreams required the interpretation of wiser, older members of the tribe. Within the context of our inquiry, the most important difference between Freud and the Crow is that Freud thought humans were alone in the universe, and the Crow did not and do not. For Freud dreams are simply a human response to human wishes: they provide a disguised gratification. For the Crow, by contrast, humans have a meaningful place in a meaningful world. Not only is the world populated by spirits, but there is a single God, Ah-badt-dadt-deah. Given this worldview, when a Crow had a strong desire or a wish, there was reason for him to hope that his desire or wish had come into being because the world itself was slightly out of kilter. Going off into the mountains to pray to God to “Pity me!” was a way of drawing the spiritual world’s at-

tention to one's plight. In a dream-vision one might be visited by a spirit who would explain just how the order of the world would be adjusted so as to gratify one's wish. (pp. 67-68)

This is not rational in the sense Linton would have it, but it is rational from a Crow perspective, within the Crow order of things. The world is not inanimate, and Plenty Coups does not produce signs in order to transform the world by "magic" in the sense of some resonant forcing of the situation by means of remote manipulation. Yet it is, nonetheless, magical in the sense that it is not grounded in practical reason or in the everyday functional economy of the standard Crow semiotic regime. Indeed, the fact that they had a classification for types of dreams indicates precisely the extraordinary nature of dreaming—it requires interpretation to bring it within the realm of the intelligible. But this translation is not a hermeneutics of desire. It is communication with that which can explain how desire can be fulfilled. Dreams do not represent the world or the objects of our desire *per se*, but rather inform us about our relationship to the world, the living forces within it, and the state of affairs with regard to the unfolding of events in the whole system of relations. Dreams make us people with regard to the entirety of the world, because they give us knowledge and agency about that world in all its depths. The dream Plenty Coups brought back, however, was informative and responsive in this way, but was also nonrepresentational.

What is striking about young Plenty Coup's dream—and the interpretation the tribe gave to it—is that it was used not merely to predict a future event; it was used by the tribe to struggle with the intelligibility of events that lay at the horizon of their ability to understand. Dreams were regularly used by the Crow to predict the future.

People would, for instance, wait for a vision in a dream to tell them it was a propitious time to go into battle. But young Plenty Coup's dream was of a different order. It did not predict any particular event, but the change of the world order. It was prophetic in the sense that the tribe used it to face up to a radically different future. (p. 68)

Plenty Coups' vision was about a new way of having vision, the knowledge he brought back about a new way of knowing. As Lear points out, this pointed to a crisis of consciousness, a disruption in the lifeways that were a systematic expression of an interpretation of relation to the world and what it meant to exist as a person or subject within it. (pp. 42-3) Plenty Coups' dream does not provide him with specific knowledge about the future, but rather with knowledge that the future will be different from the present, and may even require different epistemologies and semiotic regimes if there is to be any survival at all. Thus, in order to keep faith with the world of his ancestors and the ontology to which he is fully committed, to continue to be Crow in the way that he knows how, he will have to cease to be Crow in the way that he knows how. In the gap of this double bind lies the crux of survival:

In an age when secular readers often think that religious commitment breeds arrogant intolerance—as though the believers had a “direct line to God”—it is worth noting that Plenty Coups's form of commitment—at least, as we have imagined him reasoning—would lead him toward humility. He has to admit that he has little idea of what is coming—other than a “tremendous storm” that will knock down all the trees but one. The dream did not even explicitly predict that the Crow will survive—though that is how the elders interpreted it. In this way, Plenty Coups can both bear witness to the end of a traditional way of life and commit himself to a good that transcends these finite ethical forms. Precisely because Plenty Coups sees that a traditional way of life is coming to an end, he is in a position

to embrace a peculiar form of hopefulness. It is basically the hope for *revival*: for coming back to life in a form that is not yet intelligible. (p. 95)

It is important to remember in relating to this scenario that Plenty Coups' dream was not his own. He in fact reached out to the deeper world in order to interact with it on behalf of the community. In doing so, he brought the energy of transformative, generative semiosis into an otherwise stable regime at the time when that energy was most needed and when it could contribute the most. Plenty Coups' vision was itself a double bind, an experience sought by a metastable semiotic regime in order to produce change within itself. This act, being one of social metacognition opens the community to the changes possibly necessary for its own survivance.

This idea of working with metacognitive processes in order to free up patterns of semiotic processing and habituated lifeways is explored in a different context by the decolonization theorist and activist Michael Yellow Bird. For him, resistance results not necessarily in the continuity of a given semiotic ecology, but rather in the capacity of a people to individually and collectively remain (a) people as subjects of their own cognitive and expressive processes. This is consistent with Lear's reading of Plenty Coups' vision. Arguing for an understanding that relates theories of neuroplasticity, decolonization, and "an Indigenous Peoples' mind-brain policy," Yellow Bird argues that a kind of neurocognitive semiotic work must be undertaken by those who want to move past the historical traumas of colonization. For him, the appropriate metacognitive outcomes can be achieved through mindfulness practice(s) understood as neurodecolonization:



...[I]n order for decolonization to be successful it must begin in our minds. We believe that creative, healthy, decolonized thinking, actions, and feelings positively shape and empower important neural circuits in our brain, which in turn provide us with the personal resources, strengths, talents, and abilities we need to overcome the oppressions of colonialism. We believe that a healthy, well-balanced mind and brain are essential to helping one to engage in proactive, creative, and successful decolonization activities. On the other hand, we are convinced that unconstructive, negative thinking, feelings, and behaviors dampen and short-circuit the brain's creativity and optimism networks, and increase our susceptibility to the many stresses that arise in everyday life; we believe that these "regular" stressors are made even worse by the additional traumas of colonialism.... [H]ow our brain changes depends on how we train our minds to engage the world....

There are many ways out of our negativity brain bias. Some of them are as old as Indigenous culture itself: practicing positive thinking, speech, actions, and feelings; engaging in mindfulness meditation; stopping ourselves from ruminating on the hurtful past and uncertain future (this is where the constant thinking about and discussions of *historical trauma*, without effective neurodecolonization strategies, has, in my opinion, become a liability for decolonization); and, finally, engagement in contemplative prayer that is personal loving and extends love to all creatures and sentient beings on the planet. (Yellow Bird, 2012, pp. 58, 60)

Yellow Bird points out quite strongly an element of colonial practice that is usually overlooked or, when noted, is seen as merely an issue of cultural or semiotic change, rather than one that affects peoples' abilities to cope with the realities of their circumstance—the traditional contemplative practices passed down across generations.

There is a part of mindfulness that most mindfulness scholars and practitioners fail to mention or understand: the "politics of mindfulness," which concerns how colonization activities were instrumental in de-

stroying the mindfulness traditions and practices of Indigenous Peoples. For instance, when colonizers outlawed or ridiculed important ceremonial songs and dance, many indigenous Peoples' brain circuits of hope, happiness, and purpose that were associated with these practices were undoubtedly reduced, inactivated, and/or deleted. As these brain networks became inactivated, the importance of ceremonial activities would correspondingly lose their importance and appeal. In place of Indigenous ceremonies and practices, colonizers offered Christian religion and beliefs, stressing their importance since they were received directly from THE CREATOR and indispensable because they "saved" Indigenous Peoples from their primitive beliefs, and the Christian Hell, and enabled them to get to the Christian Heaven or Paradise. (p. 70)

Winkelman (2000, pp. 224-5) seems to make arguments that generally support Yellow Bird's position.

It is perhaps in this light that we should interpret the surprising amount of ceremonial action associated with revitalization movements. Dance, trance, etc., are all major components of such movements in a large number of cases, if they do not constitute them nearly entirely. This is not only true in the well-studied movements of North America, but also in the increasingly well-known *Taqui-Oncoy* ("sick dance") of the Incan realm, which coincided with the articulation of the Incarrí myth discussed above. Indeed, from the works of Guaman Poma, a generation later, we know that there was an ongoing semiotic crisis in the region provoked by, among other things, the violence of the Extirpation, and to which the indigenous peoples of the region responded by looking to traditional models of semiotic authority and transformation.

What all of this seems to suggest is that, despite outward appearances, the revitalization movements we see across the Americas, spanning from the sixteenth

century into the twentieth (and, including Yellow Bird, the twenty-first), may not be entirely about the assertion of land rights, cultural forms, etc., but also about the being and becoming of persons and the reassertion of the means by which the individuals involved know how to produce such subject-agents. As in the case of Plenty Coups, and so many others, the results of revitalization have more to do with simple vitalization than any “re-“ might imply. And if that is the case, we should not find it surprising that demographic research such as that undertaken by Thornton (1986) indicates higher survival rates for those communities who underwent such processes. These individual and social metacognitive practices enable the kinds of socio-cognitive and semiotic transformation that allowed them to adapt to the new realities they encountered under the oppressive systems of invasive settler colonial dominance. It seems, moreover, that interpreted in this light they may point to a wisdom had by those communities that may still be beneficial to people today.

### **3. Semiotic Theology: Yellow Smoke and Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti**

If we look at the history of the Omaha, it is obvious that the absence of Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti is a profoundly important aspect of their experience in the twentieth century. While it is not singularly responsible for the difficulties they have faced by a long stretch, this absence is certainly a contributing factor in the sense that it has damaged their semiotic ecology in such a way as to make it less robust and capable of adaptation. It is obvious that for the Omaha the return of Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti would be of primary concern. It would therefore be natural for them to think of this case as foregrounded in discussing the ethics of repatriation or the importance and challenges of revitalization for cultural survivance. What about for the rest of us? I am not Omaha, nor will be the vast majority of the readers of this essay. What is it about this particular case that motivates our discussion of it?

With regard to repatriation, this is a relatively unique case. The return of Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti to his people occurred in a particular moment that allowed for the process of its return to be very well documented, including video tapes of the individuals involved and of the homecoming ceremony itself. Moreover, this event occurred prior to The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 and all the legal and administrative events that came thereafter. This means that the return of the Real Omaha to his home was undertaken in a context that was specifically ethical, as the negotiated agreement between the Omaha people and the Peabody Museum was not forced by any particular legal requirements—although there was a legal agreement in place that described the Peabody's possession of Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti as a holding in trust. The Peabody Museum honored the arguably difficult

to enforce agreement in largely good faith, though with some hesitation, marking a success for the Omaha consistent with their remarkably successful efforts at repatriating large numbers of human remains from various institutions at around the same time.

The absence of federal requirements means that we are able to consider the ethical scenario in a more immediate sense than we might otherwise, as the interaction of sovereignties and legal structures, as well as legal ideologies and ideological factors with regard to the relationship between religion, science, and government, don't come into play as explicitly complicating factors. Of course, these are present, as the climate at the time was weighted by public discourse on precisely these matters in light of the pending NAGPRA legislation. However, they do not directly complicate the matter in the sense that they do not cause formal procedures to be in place that are not specifically negotiated between the two parties involved, nor do they trigger the involvement of additional parties.

We can see then the multiple vectors that cause this event to be of specific interest. It occurs at a specific moment in time that allows it to be documented well, while remaining prior to mediating complications not directly part of the set of questions we are investigating. It is part of a general movement among the Omaha at the time to undertake repatriation as part of a cultural revitalization, taking place in the context of a public discourse about repatriation and revitalization stimulated by the American Indian Movement and related efforts at cultural revitalization and survivance across the Americas. It is also specifically centered around actions that

make use of traditional constructs as socio-cognitive and semiotic technologies for the purposes of promoting the flourishing of the Omaha people.

For those who are not directly involved in an ethical scenario, particularly one in which the heightened sensitivities we have described are in play, it is important to have an appropriate and well thought out motivation for discussing it. It is, in an ultimate sense, none of my business what occurs between these two parties, except insofar as my way of life or actions impact indirectly on the survivance of the Omaha community or on the successful outcome of the situation. It is very much my business as a citizen of the United States the ways in which First Peoples are treated by my government and by the institutions it supports, particularly as someone invested in human rights discourses and as someone who is aware of and concerned with Native American issues. In taking up this case as an example, I in no way claim to speak on behalf of or, again ultimately, in a deeply knowledgeable way about the Omaha people or its relationship to Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti. As someone who has a stake in the information professions, I am concerned in general about the ethics involved in relating with indigenous communities and I speak about this case out of a motivation to promote anti-racist and appropriately sensitive discourse around these issues among those for whom it is a concern. I naturally and sincerely offer my apologies to any and all communities mentioned or described here if I have in any way spoken out of turn or inappropriately about any matter. It is simply the case that when we speak about ethical issues, it is extremely helpful to speak about specific cases. Here, the return of Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti fits the bill for the kind of scenario we are trying to get at.

I'm sure there are probably other possible ones, but the particular form of documentation around this event made it especially useful.

The return of the Real Omaha and the community ritual enacted upon his arrival is documented extensively, particularly in the public television documentary *Return of the Sacred Pole*. (Nebraska Educational Television Network, 1990) The documentary is helpful in that it incorporates not only footage of the events in question, but also interviews with some of the various individuals involved. In bearing witness to the events as presented in the documentary, one moment stands out to me as particularly moving and important. The scene runs from approximately 19:53 – 21:32. In it, Lawrence Gilpin, a spiritual leader for the community, in initiating the ritual by which the Omaha welcome Umo<sup>n</sup>'ho<sup>n</sup>'ti home, speaks about him and his meaning to the community. As he does so, he becomes overwhelmed by emotion. There are multiple interpretations of this moment that are possible: the healing of personal and collective historical trauma, the overwhelming feeling that comes from being in the presence of a profoundly sacred figure, the fulfillment of a movement that attempts to bring together the community, etc. It is under any reading or combination of readings an important and meaningful moment. Lear (2006) indicates to us that it is such small moments that are often useful for philosophy, and especially philosophical ethics, as they serve to provide us with a constrained view into the intersection of multiple semiotic series and sociocultural dynamics. To the extent that Gilpin can be seen to be experiencing the moment on behalf of those gathered and departed, he can, like Plenty Coups, be seen to be engaging in socio-cognitive and semiotic transformations that contribute to the revitalization of the Omaha. Because

of the particular dynamics at work in the community's relationship to Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti, we can say that the Real Omaha and Gilpin work together to reconstitute and renegotiate the whole structure of relationships among those present.

We are therefore given a specific motivation to look into this case because of its utility, because of its relevance to the range of issues we are addressing, and because of its powerful meaning. For the ethical procedure we will describe, it is naturally important that the issue being considered be foregrounded in our awareness or prioritized in our attention in some way. This is a metaethical assertion: that inquiry into ethics or the critical self-reflection that helps us to determine our acts should be motivated. Without this motivation, our reflections are possibly arbitrary, and, at the very least, lacking a context that allows us to undertake important processes of prioritization that emerge along the pathway of inquiry and decision. As we have indicated, the scene we are looking at is self-evidently important to the Omaha and relevant to the individuals involved from the institutional side. For the purposes of this essay, which engages at a remove, the motivations are understood to be the clarification of an ethical procedure as it pertains to a class of situations. The motivation for taking up the specific case should also be clear at this point.

Regardless of the motivation, in taking up an ethical question, it is important to review the situation carefully and thoroughly, appraising the range of possible understandings and descriptions. The robustness of the final ethical argument or decision will depend on the intensity of the exploration. In other words, no matter what we are trying to accomplish, it is unquestionably favorable to understand what we are engaging with as completely as possible. This is not only intellectual under-



standing, but also affective sympathy and openness to other points of view and frameworks for determining the nature and outcome of the scenario. We must not only hear an ethical call or take up an ethical charge, but must also respond to it vulnerably or else we are never actually in the scene to begin with.

One major difficulty on this front is the relationship between science and universalist humanism as mediated through late modern concepts. For so many of us, the assertion of difference over unity is seen as dangerous and even unethical. (Appiah, 2009, p. 98) The Kantian version of cosmopolitanism in particular requires us to understand humans as a kind of generic matrix of capacities and faculties without specific content, acting rationally among patterns of coequal exchange. It is, however, true that the specific content matters for our histories and identities in ways that are not abrogated by our similarities. For example, the bodies of non-Europeans became forfeit in the eyes of Europeans, resulting in the instantiation of power differentials that are bound up inextricably with the power structures that exist in the global world-system of today. This means that a people who have been intentionally and systematically robbed of power by the instantiated operations of scientific capitalist humanism and its predecessors must, in order to gain power, assimilate fully or assert difference and autonomy from that system. Neither of these extremes is actually possible under the circumstances in a pure form. Assimilation is prevented precisely by that which makes it both desirable and needed, which makes assimilation into a self-denying ascetic act separating humans from what has historically made them such. The assertion of difference and autonomy is, of course, an act of power. Thus assimilation is only possible under the conditions of its own denial,

and autonomy is only ever partial, as it requires some degree of assimilation to take root.

A.K. Appiah (2009) has analyzed repatriation in the context of a cosmopolitan ethics with somewhat mixed results. Appiah makes significant headway in the forms of cosmopolitan arguments that do bear some appeal. For example, his statement that “Our ancestors have been human for a very long time,” goes a long way toward situating ethics within “Big History” (Christian, 2005) and giving credit to the forebears of modern humanity for the real efforts they invested in becoming what we are. Yet it is this becoming in history that is precisely what leads Appiah to certain kinds of problematic statements. For example,

Indeed, a great deal of what people wish to protect as ‘cultural patrimony’ was made before the modern system of nations came into being, by members of societies that no longer exist. People die when their bodies die. Cultures, by contrast, can die without physical extinction.... Perhaps the matter of biological descent is a distraction....

One connection—the one neglected in talk of cultural patrimony—is the connection not *through* identity but *despite* difference. We can respond to art that is not ours; indeed, we can fully respond to ‘our’ art only if we move beyond thinking of it as ours and start to respond to it as art. But equally important is the human connection. My people—human beings—made the Great Wall of China, the Chrysler Building and the Sistine Chapel: these things were made by creatures like me, through the exercise of skill and imagination. I do not have those skills, and my imagination spins different dreams. Nevertheless, that potential is also in me. The connection through a local identity is as imaginary as the connection through humanity. The Nigerian’s link to the Benin bronze, like mine, is a connection made in the imagination; but to say this isn’t to pronounce either of them unreal. They are among the realest connections that we have. (pp. 101, 109)

One barely knows where to begin. Firstly, it is important to note that Appiah swipes away descent and embodiment as relevant concerns, only then to use that irrelevance as part of an argument for a common humanity. This is self-contradictory in the sense of a Big History, which would assume the very real relevance of local history and embodiment as that which has helped to shape us into the very humanity Appiah would lay claim to. Secondly, having swiped away these actual connections to the past, Appiah then argues that such connections are imaginary. Balancing the footing of the argument, Appiah then refers to the humanity appealed to as imaginary, as well, but more important for reasons that aren't entirely clear, except perhaps simply because of the magnitude of humanity as a whole by comparison with the trivial numbers of "small" local concerns. That magnitude is, of course, a biomass that reinstatiates humans within the context of a "glocal" planetarity-embodiment. Regardless, Appiah prioritizes "humanity" over historical difference and embodiment, then locks it in again with this new arrangement by asserting their reality in as vacuous a way as their imaginary nature was asserted.

The argument is bizarre in the reification of the metaphor of death with regard to cultures. This strangeness is specifically in the assertion that becoming different is equivalent to having died. This equivalence is at the core of Appiah's arguments: that difference is death. That formula is one that is as recognizable as the above rhetorical machine. The gesture here is one that is repeated across the globe as the means to produce the "mass man" that is the universal type of contemporary humanity, the mass man possessed of infinite transparency and interchangeability. (Deloria, 2000, p. 178) This is the same gesture that has separated physical anthro-

pology and archaeology from ethnography, that has mythologized the disappearance of the Indian as a cultural trope, and that has ignored contemporary Native Americans in favor of an Romantic, idealized past full of “authentic” Indians, whose lives, bodies, and cultures are available to anyone who sees fit to make use of them. (Crawford, p. 224) The argument also loops on itself, as the swiping away of local continuity and embodiment foregrounds culture, which is then valued for its own sake, and which, in turn, is used as a justification for the expropriation of the traces of that local history and embodiment. Crawford points out that the use of such traces directly contradicts the rhetoric, as the very first area of inquiry under almost any circumstance is to situate the item or body within the context of its particular locality and historical continuity.

Appiah makes an additional argument here about the items in question being “art,” a category which is largely meaningless and/or alien to most traditional societies and which is used as a bucket term for objects that can be sold in the market under terms of valuation specific to the category. One element of such a category is the impossibility within the framework of its construction of construing anything so classified as a person rather than an object, which already takes Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti out of his appropriate framework, for example,<sup>2</sup> if he were to be considered in this context. Using this term, Appiah then makes the trivial argument that many such items were made available to institutions or collectors under frameworks that made such things perfectly within their rights. This may be so, but it ignores the underlying question

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<sup>2</sup> Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti is not so situated as an art object in the minds of either set of stakeholders, but is nonetheless situated in such a way with regard to the various epistemic and power structures that it could be so taken, if the stakeholders were different. It is not uncommon for sacred objects to be taken as art by museums.

of motivation. Why were such objects sold? Under what pressures and sets of options were they given away? Were such rights consistent with traditional understandings or innovations of newer forms of governance adopted under coercion?<sup>3</sup> To ask such questions implies a cultural context relevant beyond mere economy and legal framework for that system of exchange that Appiah cannot allow. If such questions are allowed to become relevant, then there also becomes the possibility that the whole category structure might fail: objects might become persons, the value of things might become that of vital cultural elements, etc. This shows how the economic argument is not only singular and trivial, but also constitutes violence. Without the ability to evaluate Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti on other terms, wouldn't the Omaha be voiceless? Wouldn't the "object" in question be denied the central role he plays in the socio-cognitive and semiotic ecologies in which he properly takes his place? What object is worth the health and well-being of an entire society? If there were such a class of objects, wouldn't they have transcended their role as "art" anyway? If not, who would get to decide? Appiah thinks not, and thinks that the decision is one that can be made under a rubric of what is "reasonable." (Appiah, 2009, p. 107) This whole complex of issues founders on questions of cognitive justice.

Crawford's argument for semiotic sovereignty is extremely important, then, as the struggle over power, rights of exchange, interpretive modes, and the production of knowledge are all bound up with the history of cognitive injustice that is part

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<sup>3</sup> For example, we can think of cases where individuals conducted perfectly legal exchanges of items, but which exchange was not the right of the individual with regard to the item in question in the understanding of the culture that produced the desirable item. Historical legality is not the same as ethical correctness, and Appiah, as someone who would lay claim to critical reason, should recognize the distinction.

and parcel of the world-system of modernism, even as it claims for itself a humanist stance. That world-system is founded on the intentional destruction of cultures, languages, religions, gender systems, and other semiotic and socio-cognitive systems across the globe, and the history of academia is not exempt from this legacy.

(Grosfoguel, 2013) With this in mind, the request for repatriation is an opportunity for the institutional stakeholders to reflect critically on this legacy and the ways in which humanism falls short of its goals with regard to its place as ideology of the modern world-system. (Taksony Hewitt, 2014) To claim the self-discovery of humanity as a goal for expropriative acts is simply to endorse a long history of Eurocentric prejudice that sees the colonial subject as equivalent to a universal ground for meaning and value, as well as the arbiter of aesthetic judgments. It is also to situate oneself in a specific history while denying the act of having done so, removing oneself from the locality of the ethical charge in order to claim an overriding necessity that eliminates personal responsibility for seeking out one's own personal goals. This is an intrinsically colonial gesture, and one that is bound up with the history of cognitive injustice. (Bracken, 2007) Ethical behavior means that we must seek to be in the situation so that we can find voices within the scene that intensify our awareness, and then prioritize those situational others within the range of possible priorities. This latter metaethical problem is the source of many ethical failures. We should work to foreground those issues that call us to our highest level of responsibility.

The move to the highest level of responsibility can be understood as an authentic humanism. Humanism, in this sense, is not an ethics but a metaethics, fo-

cused on the intensification of critical reflection, ethical action, and responsibility among the community of human beings as such. When we take humanism as an ethics, meaning that we work within the given frameworks of humanism as instantiated in the modern world-system, we lose sight of the strengths humanism offers us in the first place with regard to metaethics—the ability to think critically about both our actions and the decisional processes that lead to them, as well as the ability to think critically about the frameworks we use to understand and engage with those processes. It is in this way that humanism requires us to articulate carefully the distinctions between philosophy and metaphilosophy. The encounter with those who would lay claim to different socio-cognitive and semiotic ecologies means that our metaphilosophy must engage with humanism as a metaethics or risk foreclosing in advance on the authenticity of an encounter between cultures, between sovereignties, and/or between institutions and stakeholders. For scientific claims, this means recognizing the history of science and its role in the humanist oppression of non-Western cultures in the name of the modern world-system and taking seriously the metaepistemological insights that recognition provides. This metaepistemology enables a metaphilosophy, which can be emboldened and enacted by means of a metaethics that frames our decisional processes in contextual orders outside their normative engagements. We ought to reflexively critique our engagement, in other words, in order to ensure that we understand the polysemy and multiplicity of semiotic orders impacting on the scenario and participating in it, so that we can then, in turn, negotiate an authentic humanism free of representational bias and seeking cognitive justice through depth of humane encounter.

This is, in simple terms, being honest about our history and our responsibilities with regard to it, giving up defensiveness and the pursuit of our too-interested interests, and sitting vulnerably before the situation asking what can be done to ensure the flourishing of healthy peoples and semiotic ecologies. Michael Yellow Bird's neurodecolonization can be seen as a potential praxis to such ends, a kind of non-representational semiotic theology of care that attends to the well-being of peoples and histories. Here we use semiotic theology as a term parallel to political theology, where we recognize that our superstructures tend to take on forms derived from our patterns of thought about fundamental reality and where we recognize that these are still workable and malleable at their own level. This is the kind of work that was undertaken by Plenty Coups as described previously. Moreover, it is the kind of work the Omaha have done. A rather well known associate of Alice Cunningham Fletcher, Francis La Flesche, proposed to Yellow Smoke, the last keeper of the Pole, in 1888 that Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti be sent eastward to "live in a great brick house" rather than his traditional home of a tent. (Ridington) According to the Omaha, Yellow Smoke faced a situation not unlike Plenty Coups, and agreed to allow the Peabody Museum, in coordination with Francis La Flesche and Alice Cunningham Fletcher, to hold him in trust until such time as certain conditions were met.

The specific terms of the agreement matter here a great deal, as the holding in trust is quite different from a surrender of ownership. In a real sense, Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti was sent to live elsewhere for a while, as opposed to having been property that was exchanged or leant. If the latter had been the case, it is very possible that he would never have been able to return to his people. The Peabody Museum kept the terms



of the agreement honestly and, when the conditions were met, returned him home. Yellow Smoke may have taken a very controversial action, but it was one that cut across cultures, seeking to ensure the survivance and continuity of his own even while negotiating that preservation in terms of the other. His act was not one of surrender or assimilation, nor was it an assertion of absolute difference. Indeed, it was a profoundly humanistic act, a cosmopolitan gesture, much like Plenty Coups' actions. It was an act that understood both cultures for what they were and engaged with each according to the interests of the goals in mind. Whether or not it was the only choice and whether La Flesche and company had the best of intentions in mind is not at issue. The nature and quality of Yellow Smoke's choice, when understood in terms of cognitive justice, semiotic theologies, and the advancement of specific ethical aims should stand out to us as exemplary. It is probably rare that such actions can be met in kind by institutions and governments acting at the same level of subtlety and humanity, particularly as these are often set up to engage with the world in somewhat machinic ways. This machinic approach to institution- and government-building is a result of Kantian cosmopolitan approaches to the enactment of Western political theologies of the mid-seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries as amplified through the industrial era. These constructions are relatively unstable due to their inflexibility, and, as it turns out, their incapacity to deal humanely with the objects of their concern. (Howard, 2014) Yet, for people born to the modern world-system, the political theology and semiotic theology they represent are so pervasive and self-reinforcing that the effort to disengage from their hold can be very difficult. We must unlearn a lifetime of thoughts, actions, and reinforced patterns of behavior

in order to transcend them. In a very real sense, for everyone involved in the cross-cultural encounters in question, Yellow Bird's neurodecolonization must begin at home.

#### 4. Historical Trauma, Neurodecolonization and Posthumanism

We have already discussed the tears of Lawrence Gilpin during the repatriation ceremony and the ways in which this represents his feeling on behalf of the community. Like Plenty Coups, he makes his cognitive process available to the benefit of the community. In the case of Plenty Coups, this makes possible generative insight in communion with the more-than-human world, while in Gilpin is made possible a more-than-personal being-moved that allows the historical trauma of past experience to begin to heal by shifting. This trauma does not disappear all at once, of course, nor does it even get experienced in its entirety. It is unlikely that any consciousness could contain at once such suffering. But Gilpin's consciousness is, of course, not only his own, as through the semiotic and socio-cognitive technology of ritual and communal engagement he serves as the focal point for a reintroduction of (re-)generative processes made available once again. This is not a spiritual power over, but a power-with whereby, in collaboration with Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup>ti, he brings healing and the potential for restoration through restorative justice to and as the community.

Thornton's work on the value of repatriation movements to survival rates in native communities shows us that the importance of these semiotic ecologies cannot be underestimated. For example, we know the realities of a wide range of health effects, from nutrition to addiction to heritable patterns of abuse, that come with the degradation of cultural forms and traditional cognitive patterns. He has also pointed to the work of others as a partial explanation for increased survival rates, looking to

concepts of historical trauma to offer a causal theory for this correlation. (Thornton, 2002) On this theory, semiotic and socio-cognitive systems are integrated fully with the social ecology of humans in such a way that the health of that system is as important as the health of the environment, the health of individual psyches, etc. Semiotic systems can act to self-heal in and through themselves, through the relationships they bear to their environment, and through the effects they have in ordering their substrates. (Thacker, 2004) This take on socio-cognitive/semiotic systems (Thibault, 2004), which we have been calling semiotic ecology, is a postvitalist (Doyle, 2003) understanding of life that engages with semiotic perspectives on biology (Shapiro, 2013), which would take anthroposemiosis as a subclass of a general semiotic process fundamental to the cosmos—a process in which humans participate and which they shape for themselves, but which is not singularly caused by or for them. If Thornton is correct in using the work of Duran and Duran (1995) as grounds for a causal explanation of semiotic survivance,<sup>4</sup> then this undermining of humanism in favor of a posthumanistic perspective is essential. Interestingly, it is an amplification of humanism in that it takes seriously the socio-cognitive and semiotic perspectives on non-Western communities on terms equal to themselves, providing for cognitive justice even in the midst of allowing semiotic sovereignty.

If this posthumanistic context is the one in which we find the various positive

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<sup>4</sup> The idea of “semiotic survivance” here builds on the work of Gerald Vizenor, who uses the term survivance to indicate the ways in which resistance to settler colonialism and survival are intertwined. (Vizenor, 1999) The term semiotic survivance articulates in the terms of this thesis the ways in which survivance can be understood to be specifically bound up with semiotic processes, as in Thornton, and the ways in which the ends of survivance can in turn be seen as continuities of semiotic ecologies across thresholds of representation, non-representation, and unrepresentability.

outcomes that we seek, then repatriation must be rethought in this context. Michael Yellow Bird's neurodecolonization takes on vital importance, as it a rearticulation of the anthroposemiotic process in terms that make a more expansive understanding available across cultural boundaries, so long as one is willing to take on the work involved. Going further, the work of neurodecolonization across the bounded interactions of semiotic ecologies means that we are interacting with the human world, the more-than-human world, the posthuman world, and the prehumanist world simultaneously. This would seem to indicate that the work involved in neurodecolonization needs to actively engage in overcoming the specific representational forms of given systems in favor of nonrepresentational modalities, needs to be targeted towards the development of habituated affective ends that motivate coordinated willingness and mutual vulnerability, and needs to be seen as an intensification of the systems involved such that power-with rather than power-over is the primary mode of engagement. This is a neurotheology (Newberg, 2010) and a semiotic praxis that transcends the forms of humanism instantiated in the modern world-system, gaining access to potentially undifferentiated systems of cognition (Champagne, 2007) without losing track of the insights that historical differentiation has made available in our experience.

All of the above forces a context shift for our ethical and metaethical perspectives, providing for a moral enhancement (Persson & Savulescu, 2012) that can engage with our deepest problems in ways that do not further or worsen systematic injustices, either local or global. In it we discover the Big History of our shared humanity and our ecological planetarity even while finding an increased capacity for

ethical behavior that makes possible epistemogenesis not limited to Western science. Through individual and collective practice, we can find in repatriation an authentic movement to the healing of historical trauma that is in keeping with our best critical understanding. If we look to other forms of restorative justice, for example linguistic revitalization or the restoration of belief expressions to their proper land-based contexts, we can see that environmental justice, racial justice, sexual and gender justice, reproductive justice, and cognitive justice are all part and parcel of a nonrepresentational intensification of humanism that makes possible the survival of communities across the thresholds of their own trauma. In restoring our own capacity to our deepest humanity in this way, we all come home like Umo<sup>n</sup>'ho<sup>n</sup>'ti to his people, returning to a situated ecology of restoratively balanced relations as an outcome of socio-cognitive and semiotic justice practices.

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