

Beyond Philology No. 15/4, 2018  
ISSN 1732-1220, eISSN 2451-1498

**American Indian epistemology  
in Deborah A. Miranda's  
*Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir***

GRZEGORZ WELIZAROWICZ

*Received 31.01.2018,  
accepted 30.11.2018.*

**Abstract**

The essay proposes that Deborah A. Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013) is a work animated by the principles of American Indian epistemology. First, a model of Native philosophy is outlined after Native philosopher Thomas Norton-Smith. Secondly, four dimensions of Miranda's work – its ethical and procedural purpose, generic location, metalinguistic strategy, narrative as a vehicle of knowledge – are analyzed in the light of Norton-Smith, Roland Barthes, California historians, American Indian literary studies, decolonial theory, and auto-ethnography. In conclusion, it is posited that Miranda's story is an animated entity enacting ontological, intersubjective, historical difference, and that it intervenes into the genre of memoir/autobiography.

**Keywords**

Deborah A. Miranda, California Indians, American Indian epistemology, California missions, memoir, Roland Barthes

## **Epistemologia Indian amerykańskich w *Bad Indians*: A Tribal Memoir Deborah A. Mirandy**

### **Abstrakt**

Zamiarem autora jest dowiedzenie, że pamiętnik Deborah A. Mirandy zatytułowany *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013) motywowany jest zasadami epistemologii Indian amerykańskich. Analiza przebiega następująco: najpierw zarysowany jest model rdzennej epistemologii; potem, analizie w świetle propozycji filozofa indiańskiego Thomasa Nortona-Smitha, a także Rolanda Barthesa, historyków Kalifornii, literaturoznawstwa indiańskiego, teorii dekolonialnej, a także, elementów auto-etnograficznych poddane są cztery aspekty dzieła Mirandy: etyczny i proceduralny cel, lokalizacja gatunkowe, strategia metalingwistyczna i narracja jako przekaźnik wiedzy. W konkluzjach autor argumentuje, że opowieść Mirandy jest potencjalnym bytem ożywionym uosabiającym ontologiczną, intersubiektywną i historyczną różnicę oraz, że Miranda realizuje ten byt między innymi poprzez interwencję w gatunek autobiografii.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

Deborah A. Miranda, Indianie kalifornijscy, epistemologia Indian, misje kalifornijskie, pamiętnik, Roland Barthes

Even dead Indians are never  
good enough.

(Miranda 2013: 99)

Deborah A. Miranda (Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen, Chumash, Jewish) is a contemporary American Indian writer.<sup>1</sup> In this es-

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<sup>1</sup> The term “American Indian”, albeit used interchangeably with “Native American”, “Native”, and “Indigenous”, is the preferred one in the essay. I am aware of the many controversial connotations the term invokes; however, the choice is deliberate. I follow Thomas Norton-Smith, whose account of American Indian philosophy provides me with the main theoretical framework in this essay. Norton-Smith insists on using the term “American Indian” and his argument is worth citing at length: “What is the appropriate way

say, I interpret Miranda's work, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013) as a vehicle for the American Indian epistemology. To do this, I first outline a model of Native philosophy adopted here mostly, but not only, after Shawnee philosopher Thomas Norton-Smith. Secondly, drawing insights from Norton-Smith, as well as a number of other sources, i.e. Roland Barthes, California historians, American Indian literary studies and decolonial theory, I offer four areas of interpretation of *Bad Indians*: its ethical and procedural purpose, its generic location, its metalinguistic strategy, and narrative as a vehicle of Native knowledge. To better illustrate the contrast between the "Western" thinking and Miranda's perspective I use elements of auto-ethnography. In conclusion, I posit that Miranda is the writ-

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to refer to the indigenous people called *Indians*? Of course, it is currently trendy, especially within the academy, to use 'Native American,' but I reject the label—perhaps shockingly—in favor of 'American Indian,' despite the fact that 'Indian' is a name imposed by colonial powers that recalls the disease, depredations, and dispossessions Native peoples have suffered at their hands. However, I know of no Indian who really appreciates being called a 'Native American.' First, the name 'Native American,' fashioned after 'African American' and similar labels, suggests that Indians are American citizens who just happen to be of Native descent. However, unlike African or Asian Americans, who *are* American citizens of African or Asian descent, Indians are also proud citizens of *sovereign* Indian nations—Cherokee, Choctaw, and Shawnee among them—so the 'politically' appropriate label misconstrues and inaccurately portrays the actual political situation. Unlike her Asian American neighbor, who is an American and state citizen, an enrolled Cherokee woman is a citizen of a third sovereign entity: The Cherokee Nation. I once heard an Indian voicing a second perhaps more compelling reason for rejecting the label 'Native American.' He argued that the approximately 390 treaties struck between the federal government and various tribes refer to indigenous nations by name or to 'Indians.' In fact, Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution empowers the Congress '[t]o regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes' (Mount 2007). 'If we begin calling ourselves 'Native Americans' and not 'Indians,'" he argued, "then that will just give the federal government another way to abrogate the old treaties, because the treaties were made with Indians, but all of the Indians will be gone—*replaced by Native Americans*.' Anyway, Indians call themselves 'Indians,' both formally and informally, as the National Congress of American Indians and the American Indian Philosophical Association illustrate. So, rather than adopt some monstrous invention like 'Amerindian,' or some overbroad and imprecise labels like 'indigenous' or 'aboriginal people,' I'll stick with 'American Indians' (and sometimes 'Indians' or 'Natives'). This usage has the additional virtue that folks who *are* Indian will know that I'm talking about them" (2010: 2-3).

ing storyteller whose tale is an origin story which by provoking the reader to its active co-creation turns into an animated entity that enacts an area of ontological, intersubjective, historical difference. It is also argued that Miranda's work is part of the American Indian life writing tradition and represents an intervention into the genre of memoir/autobiography.

## **1. Four principles of American Indian epistemology**

Building on Nelson Goodman's constructivist theory, Norton-Smith's *Dance of Person and Place: American Indian Philosophy* (2010) offers "one possible interpretation of American Indian philosophy as *a dance of person and place*" (Norton-Smith 2010: 3-4). The philosopher identifies four "common themes" which, "seem to recur across American Indian traditions" and hence form the basis of the "American Indian world version" (Norton-Smith 2010: 1) which the metaphor of the "dance of person and place" serves to express. These four notions are: "two world-ordering principles, relatedness and circularity, the expansive conception of persons, and the semantic potency of performance" (Norton-Smith 2010: 1). They name the "ways of regarding" and ordering the Indian world (Norton-Smith 2010: 3). In other words, they encapsulate Native ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

### **1.1. Relatedness**

In the Western world, "the individual human subject is the fundamental "unit" of knowing" says Norton-Smith (2010: 57) and the Cartesian dogma of "I think therefore I am" confirms this. However, this is not the case in the American Indian world version which, Norton-Smith holds, constructs "a universe that is interconnected and dynamic" (Norton-Smith 2010: 75), ontologically plural and unfolding in intersubjectivi-

ty.<sup>2</sup> *Relatedness* names this version of reality as a network where “[a]ll beings [...] are related and interconnected” (2010: 58). American Indian languages, says Norton-Smith, following Goodman’s assertion that “linguistic versions of the world [...] make worlds by identifying, categorizing, and ordering sense experiences” (Norton-Smith 2010: 116), construct and encapsulate this in their syntax and semantics.<sup>3</sup>

In such a world version, humans are obligated to partake in social and moral relationships with other humans – James Axtell says “that in native society, an unattached person was *persona non grata*. To be accepted as a full member of a tribe or band was to be related [...] to other members” (1991: 20) – as well as with other types of ontologies: ancestors, spirits, animals, plants, and places (Norton-Smith 2010: 92). It is by virtue of recognizing and sustaining these (ontologically expansive) kinship ties that entities “are raised to the ontological and moral status of *person*” (2010: 11) – I will expand on this assertion shortly. Hence, it is imperative to sustain relationships and the values of “*respect for others*” and “*equality*” of beings undergird these processes (Norton-Smith 2010: 92). As Norton-Smith puts it: “everything is related and we are all rela-

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<sup>2</sup> The principle of relatedness is found in the concept of the Great Spirit which denotes a reality as an all-encompassing network. The Maya scientific/religious concept of “IN LAK’ECH: *Tú Eres Mi Otro Yo*” (Valdez 1994: 173) means essentially the same: that, as Maya scholar Hunbatz Men says, “each individual [is] one with every other being – the same entity”. For the Maya “‘you’ was declared non-existent, leaving the notion that ‘you are me’ and ‘I am you’” (Men 1990: 25). Building on research in Indigenous California and New Mexican songs Herbert Joseph Spinden argues that American Indians are driven by “directive mentality” the aim of which is to “fit into a universal scheme” (1993: 7), to integrate with the World, to actively participate in this higher reality of mutuality. A Yokut (California Indian) song expresses this interconnection this way: “My words are tied in one / With the great mountains, / With the great rocks, / With the great trees, / In one with my body / And my heart” (in Spinden 1993: 7).

<sup>3</sup> Pointing to European languages’ syntactic distinction into genders Norton-Smith asserts that Native languages construct a different world version by linguistic means: “Many American Indian languages like Shawnee use a syntactic device to mark a different sort of category, namely, the *animate*, recognizing and reinforcing the fundamental distinction between animate and inanimate entities in their worlds” (2010: 7).

tives, so all entities and beings are interconnected, valuable by virtue of those interconnections, and due *respect*" (2010: 59). Thus the core of the American Indian world version can be summarized as: "I relate therefore I am".

In epistemic terms, this translates into "visualizing or constructing relationships or connections between entities" (Norton-Smith 2010: 9), a cognitive method of ordering and "creating patterns of relatedness in sense experience" (Norton-Smith 2010: 58) or, as Vine Deloria says, "looking for relationships between various things" (1999: 34). Norton-Smith talks of a "holistic perception" (2010: 59) which "actively seek[s] out newly emerging connections between experiences" (2010: 58) and incorporates contradictions into a larger whole. What is called for is one's *active relationship* to the world and an epistemic apparatus which rejects any strict separation between branches of knowledge (2010: 4) and in which "categorization cannot be static and projection must be cautious, necessitating an ongoing process of verification" (Norton-Smith 2010: 75). Thus the most important question one can ask is "*how*" to proceed through life "in a web of normative relations" (Norton-Smith 2010: 64; my emphasis). If the most important human goal is, to quote Deloria, "to find the *proper* road along which [...] individuals were supposed to walk" (1999: 46; my emphasis) the first injunction is one of mindfulness. In other words, Native epistemology emphasizes procedural (as opposed to propositional) knowledge, for in the world conceived as a network, our every action and thought counts; it has a "moral content" (2010: 65), and thus is subject to moral qualification.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2. Circularity

Drawing on Donald Fixico's assertion that "Indian Thinking" is "seeing" things from a perspective emphasizing that circles and

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<sup>4</sup> As Vine Deloria says, "there is a proper way to live in the universe: there is a content to every action, behavior, and belief" (1999: 46). Norton-Smith adds that, in a world teeming with relations one "must be constantly mindful of [one's] actions and their consequences" (2010: 137).

cycles are central to the world” (in Norton-Smith 2010: 9), Norton-Smith proposes that the principle of *Circularity* marks another important difference between American Indian philosophy and the Western linear mind.<sup>5</sup> In the Native world circularity unites and “orders both temporal and spatial sense experiences” (Norton-Smith 2010: 125).<sup>6</sup> It is responsible for the prioritization of place and the interpretation of the present through the past which explains the Native moral obligation to perform particular ceremonies periodically at specific sacred sites where people reconnect with spirits. These sites may be considered centers of power and hence the “center of the circle—or the sphere” is the central Native symbol standing for “the place of peace, balance and equilibrium” (Norton-Smith 2010: 133). Norton-Smith holds that circularity “patterns all [...] facets of American Indian life, especially social life and practice” (2010: 127) but also the verification and transmission of knowledge.

### 1.3. Expansive conception of persons

Connected with the above principles is the already-mentioned assertion that we *become persons* by virtue of heeding the rules of conduct relatedness as the ultimate reality demands.

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<sup>5</sup> Deloria famously polarized Indigenous and European cultures by suggesting that for American Indians lands and their sacred places hold “the highest possible meaning and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind” (1992: 62) while the Western Europeans privilege time and history in their identity. Norton-Smith however, suggesting that circularity orders both spatial and temporal reasoning of American Indians, argues that the proper binary opposition between the Indigenous Americans is that between circularity and linearity (2010: 125).

<sup>6</sup> Temporal circular patterning is based on observation of the natural world and its cycles as well as on intergenerational understanding of reality as “the experience of the moment coupled with the interpretive scheme that had been woven together over the generations” (Deloria in Norton-Smith 2010: 38). Circular patterning of space is based on a belief “that the powers of the cardinal directions are associated with the powers of the seasons or parts of the day—*temporal* orderings” (2010: 125). Each of the directions, then, is also associated with a circadian or seasonal cyclical or circular event or occurrence.

This reflects what Norton-Smith calls the *Expansive Conception of Persons*. It is based on two convictions: 1. human beings are not the only entities included in the category of a person; our “siblings” are “powerful spirit persons embodied as places, physical forces and cardinal directions, ancestors, nonhuman animals and plants—even the Earth itself” (Norton-Smith 2010: 91, 137) and, in general, one may say that, “[p]ersons are animate ‘spirit beings’” and that “being animate is a necessary condition for personhood” (Norton-Smith 2010: 94); 2. human personhood has a deontological dimension, that is, humans *become persons* by *properly* fulfilling certain responsibilities, like “participation in certain forms of social practices and performances” which sustain “relationships with and obligations to other persons” (2010: 90). Only when humans cyclically address “this actual, concrete nexus of moral relationships and obligations” (Norton-Smith 2010: 91) do they become “*real persons*” (Norton-Smith 2010: 94). In other words, personhood is conditioned on participating in the spirit world, that is on becoming one, the same entity, with all animate beings. This explains why when during the first encounters between the whites and the Indigenous Americans the former “displayed behavior that was less than ‘divine’”, the latter called them “human” (Axtell 1991: 17).

#### **1.4. Semantic potency of performance**

The emphasis on procedures and obligations indicates the central role of, what Norton-Smith calls the *Semantic Potency of Performance*, a principle which holds that: 1. ceremonies, symbolic acts or performances with symbols (i.e. words, objects) such as speech acts, gifting, dance, naming, etc. are the “principal [vehicles] of meaning” (Norton-Smith 2010: 11) which “[empower] the symbol, [transform] the participants, [categorize] and [order] experiences, and [help] construct the American Indian world” (2010: 95); 2. a performance is “in all its aspects [...] an animated entity with a spirit created by the participants” (Norton-Smith 2010: 101). In other words, it is

not only language that orders sense experience according to the reality of relatedness but, most importantly, the performance serves this purpose.

The central role of performances in American Indian cultures was recognized, for example, by the seventeenth-century evangelizers of New England, Thomas Mayhew, Jr. and John Eliot. Eliot called the powwows the “guardians of the traditional native order” (in Cogley 1999: 172) and Mayhew referred to them as “the strongest cord” tying Indians “to their own way” (in Cogley 1999: 173). Eliot specifically acknowledged the healing power of the powwows, calling them an effective type of native medicine (Cogley 1999: 175). In 1647 he wondered: “if they leave off powwowing, and pray unto God, what shall they do when they are sick?” (in Cogley 1999: 175).

Examples of such cultural and healing performances are many. Norton-Smith points to Shawnee dances (2010: 101). Fixico speaks of speech acts (prayers, storytellings, counselings, sacred songs, etc.) asserting that, “each account is an entity of power” (2003: 22) where the “power” is “both the Powers and the People”, establishing ties to other spirit entities and conveying “knowledge and values across generations” (Norton-Smith 2010: 100). Naming is one such performance. For example, among the Shawnee names belong to name groups (*um’soaki*) represented by animals (Norton-Smith 2010: 102). Names as animate entities care for their bearers and the latter, by way of what C. F. Voegelin calls an “emotional rapport” (in Norton-Smith 2010: 104), are said to develop characteristics associated with these animals. It is in this way, that naming as a performance establishes kinship ties within an expansive ontology and creates a deontological relationality between humans and their *um’soma* (Norton-Smith 2010: 104). And gifting – the primary means of exchange and sustaining relationships (Norton-Smith 2010: 93) in the American Indian axiology – is also a world-ordering performance with

a deontological dimension: to give, to accept, to reciprocate.<sup>7</sup> A gift, like a name, is believed to be an “animate being that is enlivened or ensouled” (Norton-Smith 2010: 110) and conveys a part of the giver onto the recipient, creating “the core *moral* obligation” (Norton-Smith 2010: 110) to reciprocate.<sup>8</sup> That is why gifting practices are not only, as Axtell says, “at once ‘words’ in the rich metaphorical language of political councils and sureties for one’s word” (1991: 33) but also, following Deloria, express “gratitude [...] on behalf of all forms of life”, acting “to complete and renew the entire cosmos” (1999: 332).<sup>9</sup>

It is this higher obligation of world-ordering and world-renewing by *doing* on behalf of all beings that captures the goal of human life in the Native world version: “persons participating in their required dances [or other performances] at specified times and places return balance to and gratefully reaffirm their place and the place of all other human and nunhuman persons – in that world” (2010: 136). This is why Norton-Smith uses the metaphor of “the dance of person and place” to render the Native way of *mindful* and *proper* doing in and on behalf of relatedness. It is this practice – cyclical, moral, ontologically expansive, intersubjective – that transforms/heals humans into *Real Persons*. Jace Weaver says that Native religious traditions are best understood not in terms of “ethics, or dogma, or theology” but as religions which “permeate every aspect of daily life and existence”, are based on “ritual practice”, and are “inexorably tied to the land” (2001: 179).

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<sup>7</sup> The obligations involved in gifting are: 1. to *Give* - grounded in the obligation *to care for* and *to be generous to* relations, an extended family, kinfolk (Norton-Smith 2010: 113); 2. to *Accept* – refusing either to give or accept is a rejection of relatedness, of “alliance and commonality” and as such is “tantamount to declaring war” (Norton-Smith 2010: 109); 3. to *Reciprocate* – one has to give back “because to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul” (Norton-Smith 2010: 109). Gifting is thus one specific, transformative and empowering, “performance with a symbol” (Norton-Smith 2010: 105).

<sup>8</sup> The gift is endowed with the power to “punish transgressions of the moral obligations” (Norton-Smith 2010: 110).

<sup>9</sup> As Deloria explains: “Tribal people have a moral responsibility to perform these ceremonies on behalf of other peoples in the world” (1999: 331) in order to recreate the world and maintain its equilibrium.

Having outlined the key concepts and the axiological and procedural guidelines of the American Indian philosophy derived from them, let me inquire about their function in *Bad Indians*. Do the notions of relatedness, circularity, expansive conception of persons and the semantic potency of performance and injunctions for mindful conduct play out in the work? What is Miranda's ethical purpose? How does she advance it in structural, generic, linguistic, and situational descriptive means? How does that build the American Indian world version?

## **2. American Indian worldview in *Bad Indians***

### **2.1. *Bad Indians*' ethical and procedural goals**

Miranda calls herself a descendant of survivors of “a great holocaust” (2013: 76) thinking of California American Indian history. *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* is simultaneously a personal confession and an attempt to understand her own story as “a mixed-blood ‘Mission Indian’” (2013: xiv). These people are the products of two processes. The first was what Benjamin Madley calls “an American Genocide” (when Spanish missions and American settlers almost completely wiped out the state's Native population).<sup>10</sup> The second is the legacy of “enduring and/or celebrating mixed-race unions for about two hundred years in one form or another” (Miranda 2013: xiv).

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<sup>10</sup> To be fair, in his *An American Genocide* (2016) Madley concentrates on the American era (post-1848) because it is during this period that, he argues, events occur which fall unequivocally under the definition of “genocide” as adopted in the 1948 United Nations' *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. Madley sees the mission era, however, as a directly contributing factor: “[b]y declaring baptized California Indians the legal wards of the Franciscans, Spanish authorities made them second-class subjects, and established precedents on which Mexican and US authorities would later build”. The Spanish attitudes to Indian humanity, says Madley, “would later cross-pollinate with preexisting Anglo-American practices and policies toward American Indians to create some of the conditions for genocide in California between 1846 and 1873” (Madley 2016: 27, 26).

In short, Miranda deals here with the consequences of the catastrophe and the price of survival.

The book begins with an “Introduction: California is a Story” in which Miranda reveals her mixed-race background – her mom was Jewish, her dad Chumash (Santa Barbara/Santa Ynez Mission Indians) and Esselen (Carmel Mission Indian). Recounting the shock her parents’ marriage brought to her mother’s white parents, Miranda underscores one of the goals of her book – to probe the legacy of mixing as a survival strategy: “Those who will not change do not survive; but who are we when we have survived?” (2014: xiv). Although Miranda identifies in herself “two separate streams of human history and story” (2013: xiv) she makes explicitly clear that for her it is the Indian side that is important for its “history and story” were doomed to extinction and oblivion; it was this side that she had always been challenged about “in large part because I do not have the language of my ancestors” (2013: xiv). To this she counters: culture does not disappear when the language is absent but “when we stop telling stories of who we are, where we have been, how we arrived here, what we once knew, when we stop [...] the long, long task of inventing an identity” (Miranda 2013: xiv). Stories, the body of knowledge of a people, hold the keys, the epistemic coordinates to the world version, hence they are “the most powerful force in the world” (2013: xvi). More dangerous than the loss of language is thus the loss of stories people recount to and about themselves. In these assertions we find the directive intentionality of the work – a commitment to (re)tell (produce, do) for the purpose of cultural/communal (re)affirmation.

But Miranda also knows what she is up against – stories told by others. In the history of the American West these others’ stories about the Indians often amounted to proverbs like that attributed to General Philip Sheridan (Mieder 1993: 38), that “the only good Indian is a dead Indian”. Bad Indians are then those who survived and Miranda as their descendant makes them her subjects. But the term “bad Indians” resona-

tes also with another popular stereotype rooted, Miranda says, in “the only one story about the California Indians”, a story so dominant that “even other Indians” believed it, the most oppressive story of all, that of “missionnization of California” (2013: xvi). This Story, buttressed by architectural styles, splendid landscaping, and the educational system, cleanses the state’s inaugural moment by celebrating the “benevolent” mission padres and, as a reverse of that saintly image, by denigrating Indian victims’ humanity as “diggers” (Miranda 2013: 51-53), “primitive, ugly, passive, drunken, immoral, lazy, weak-willed people” (Miranda 2013: xvi).<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that, as she indicts, missions were chattel slavery institutions which operated not unlike concentration camps (2013: xvii) – rendered metaphorically as “Mission Conversion Factory centered around a *furnace* ... and dependent on continuing fresh supply of human beings” (Miranda 2013: 16-17; my emphasis) – in which “out of an estimated one million Indigenous inhabitants, only twenty thousand survived” (Miranda 2013: 76)<sup>12</sup> the official story of the Spanish missions is a pastoral fantasy: “the padre stood in the shade of the church doorway and watched the Indians – men, women, children – go meekly about their daily work, clothed, Christianized, content” (Miranda 2013: xviii).<sup>13</sup> Historians have termed this version of California’s past a “fantasy heritage” (McWilliams 1968 [1948]: 35-47) or “ersatz history” (Davis 1992: 30) but its promotion has depended, on keeping the “Indian in the closet” (1994

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<sup>11</sup> Miranda offers more adjectives to describe this stereotype: “godless, dirty, stupid, primitive” (2013: xvi), “Indian outlaws, banditos, renegades, rebels, lazy Indians, sinful Indians”, “troublemakers, horse thieves, fornicators, [...] polygamists, Deer dancers, idol worshippers” (Miranda 2013: 97), “pagans who refused to convert” (2013: 99), etc.

<sup>12</sup> Miranda does not provide a source for this number. Most contemporary historians estimate the pre-contact population from around 310 000 (Madley 2016: 23; Sandos 2004: 14) to 350 000 (Castillo 2015: 44).

<sup>13</sup> The state’s early promoters, like Charles Fletcher Lummis, understood that the missions were “the best capital [...] California has” (Lummis in Davis 1992: 24). Thus a pervasive mission mythology, extensively promoted since the booster era and still dominant today in the state’s architecture and public space policies, came into being.

[1947]: 21), as Carey McWilliams noted in the 1940s, on silencing the story of the Indian gehenna and continuing trauma.<sup>14</sup> The perpetuation of the stereotype of deficient, indolent people has helped to sanitize the “Mission Mythology” (Miranda 2013: 63). Inflating the civilizing aspect of the missions and diminishing Indigenous agency, it renders Indian existence past and present as “ungrievable life”, to use Judith Butler’s formulation (2009: 38), which Miranda translates into the “brutal wisdom” (2013: 99) of the epigraph to this essay. Miranda understands that the “Fantasy Fairy Tale” of the missions “has done more damage to California Indians than any conquistador; it “has not just killed us, it has taught us to kill ourselves and kill each other” (2013: xix). She reads its power expansively – “This story is a kind of evil, a kind of witchery”. Hence her second urgent purpose: “We have to put an end to it now” (2013: xix).

And how best to do it? “What’s the best way to kill a lie?” (Miranda 2013: xx) and to crush the evil spell? Miranda by the end of the “Introduction” has come to fully own her Native side. She claims a larger community she belongs to of “California Indian peoples and allies talking back to mythology, protesting, making waves” (Miranda 2013: xx). Having referenced Leslie Silko (2013: xi), N. Scott Momaday and Linda Hogan (2013: xvi), she steps into the role of a Native storyteller to, as she declares, “create a space where voices can speak after long and often violently imposed silence” (2013: xx). Naming her work *Bad Indians*, she signals her goal of establishing an emotional rapport with those ancestors whose names official historical (i.e. mission) records mention only in relation to crimes and/or prescribed punishment. If they were

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<sup>14</sup> The promotion of the missions turned them into “the state’s biggest tourist attractions”, resulted in the proliferating “mission décor” (Miranda 2013: xvii), produced literature (Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona*, Isabel Gibson Ziegler’s *The Nine Days of Father Serra*), mission pageantry (John Steven McGroarty’s *The Mission Play*), mission adventure film (*Seven Cities of Gold*), mission public space projects and mission renovation projects, and sanitized the figure of Junípero Serra to promote him to, first, the state’s Founding Father and then, in 2015, a Catholic saint.

found guilty of transgressions against the heteronomy of the Christian Western world they are her *santos* to whom she writes a passionate novena (2013: 97-99). It is their “unrepentant,” “pagan” (2013: 99) graces that she implores: “make us in your image, grant us your pride. [...] illuminate the dark civilization we endure” (2013: 99). We may think of those “Indian outlaws” (2013: 97) as Miranda’s *um’soma*, her siblings. Such relationships entail obligations, including an obligation to “balance accounts” (Norton-Smith 2010: 137). Hence her offering of a “bridge back to” the ancestors, “to their words and experiences” (Miranda 2013: xx). This is her way of dispelling the evil story – by reclaiming relatedness and (circularly) doing (performing) culture.

When she says, “I feel voices present” (Miranda 2013: xx), she signals that her book will offer a space for those relatives, their ghosts, to speak through her. And indeed, it is a collection of stories recovered, salvaged, hypothesized, conjectured in a circular movement between the present and the past, fact and imagination. Based on extensive research, witty but respectful, constantly moving between personal and communal, her chapters are heterogeneous portals into times, spaces, subjectivities (Serra, Isabel Meadows, Vicenta, Ularía and the river, Digger Belles, Tom Miranda). It is in this sense, that the book actualizes the *living* continuum of the Indigenous culture/community, that is, acquires a different ontological status, perhaps best rendered as the entity of power. In other words, as “the antidote to lies” (Miranda 2013: xx), to the witchery of representation, Miranda performs a rite, becomes a medium, whose work is an instance of glossolalia. That the communal dominates over the personal is also clear from the structure of the book with its organization into four, chronologically-ordered parts focused on the trajectory of a people: “The End of the World: Missionization 1776-1836”, “Bridges: Post-Secularization 1836-1900”, “The Light from the Carissa Plains: Reinvention 1900-1961”, “Tehayapami Achiska: Home 1961-present”.

To summarize the ethical and procedural goals of Miranda in the light of Norton-Smith we may say that the book is premised on: a. relatedness, communal identification, and intersubjectivity; b. the principles of circularity and expansive personhood (transformative ontology) as the metaphor of the “story-bridge” (2013: xx) and the title indicate; and c. a procedural belief in the semantic potency of performance as the author endeavors to *do* culture despite the loss of the tongue. Let me now illustrate how Miranda puts these into practice.

## 2.2. The “right road” of the memoir

Consider the generic location of Miranda’s work. The memoir, we may be reminded, arises in Europe contemporaneously with the rise of Modernity. Andrzej Cieński offers this periodization of the memoir’s history in the strictly European context: handwritten in the eighteenth century, edited and printed in the nineteenth century (Cieński 1981: 69-70). Together with the closely-related autobiography – Andrzej Cieński, after Ireneusz Opacki, says that in autobiographies the author tells us more about himself/herself than the world, while in memoirs the description of the world prevails (Cieński 1981: 16)<sup>15</sup> – the memoir relays the character and strategies of European individualism and imperialism from the seventeenth century through the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> By the eighteenth century it had developed enormous stylistic heterogeneity

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<sup>15</sup> Cieński says: “utwory pamiętnikarskie, w których autor więcej mówi o sobie niż o świecie, to autobiografie, natomiast te, w których dominuje opis świata, to pamiętniki” (1981: 16).

<sup>16</sup> Andrzej Cieński, in his study of eighteenth-century memoirs, reminds us that a “memoir” is much more than a “diary”. In the Old-Polish meaning it stood for a person who remembers a lot (Cieński 1981: 8). Cieński adds that, “*Pamiętnik*’ to także materialny, konkretny przedmiot pamiętający jakieś zdarzenie [“Memoir’ is also a material, concrete object which remembers some occurrence”]” (1981: 8; my translation, all other translations in this text are by the author) and that it used to be identified with the word “*pamiętka*” (1981: 8) which denoted physical places (castles, battlefields), a meaning which survives in the English “memorial”. It also stood for a text composed in order to commemorate important events.

(Cieński 1981: 17)<sup>17</sup> and, at the height of the Enlightenment, it became synonymous with *fictional* narratives (Cieński 1981: 9). Such formal syncretism is also the case with Miranda's work<sup>18</sup> but this is not the only reason to call it a memoir in the Western tradition. Another is its concern with the world (research-based method) as well as its, at times, fictional, or counterfactual character linking it to some traits of the high Enlightenment memoir.

However, Miranda's generic choice seems to derive most probably from the American Indian context. As A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff informs us, American Indian autobiography has been written "more consistently than any other form of prose" at least "[s]ince the early nineteenth century" (1990: 251).<sup>19</sup> This has been so perhaps because the Native conviction is that "there are no real distinctions between various branches of human knowledge—science and religion, philosophy and

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<sup>17</sup> Cieński writes that the memoir narrative of that period would often include such elements as: "własne i cudze wiersze, listy [...], fragmenty własnego diariusza, odezwy, artykuły prasowe z gazet drukowanych i gazetek pisanych przepisane w całości lub streszczone z podaniem źródła lub bez żadnej wskazówki, że to tekst cudzy, mowy, kazania, rozmaite akty prawne, jak metryki dzieci, nadania ziemi, konstytucje sejmowe, [...] modlitwy, rachunki bieżące, rozmaite wykazy, np. zatrudnionych w majątku osób [original and adapted poems [...]] excerpts from one's own diary, proclamations, print paper articles as well as articles handwritten and copied in entirety or summarized with source information or without any suggestion that these texts are adaptations, speeches, sermons, legal acts of various kinds, such as birth certificates, land titles, parliamentary constitutions [...] prayers, bills, various lists, for example, of persons employed by the estate]" (1981: 17-18).

<sup>18</sup> Her tools are equally broad: "old government documents, BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] forms, field notes, the diaries of explorers and priests, the occasional writings or testimony from Indians, family stories, photographs, newspaper articles" (2013: xx), prayers and letters to victims and ancestors, original poems or poems based on others' writings or poems adapted from articles, statistical charts and data, philosophical passages, historical and conjectural (re)writings, medical examinations, surveys, mock-up elementary school assignments, graphs, tables, drawings and symbolic images, photographs, etc.. The memoir ends with a list of "Sources and Permissions", works cited, and a "Family Ancestry Chart".

<sup>19</sup> In *An Annotated Bibliography of American Indian and Eskimo Autobiographies* (1981), Brumble lists almost 600 Native self-narrations (Wong 2005: 130).

song—because everything is related” (Norton-Smith 2010: 138) and the memoir/autobiography has offered American Indian writers an inclusive, adaptable paradigm. One example of this tradition is Silko with whom Miranda establishes a kinship tie at the outset.<sup>20</sup> Silko’s *Storyteller* (1981) is accepted as a paradigmatic example of what J.A. Cuddon, in his entry on autobiography, calls its “interesting, hybrid forms” which “articulate communal, oral traditions ... by presenting ... material as the product of many voices” (Cuddon 2013: 62).<sup>21</sup> Brewster E. Fitz explains that Silko adopts the voice of a “syncretic and ancestral figure: the writing storyteller” who is “linked ... with a spiritual narrator and with the voices of many spirits for whom she is the scribe” (Fitz 2004: 8). Her work, which is “cosmopolitan, and at times almost postmodern”, negotiates the “tension between orality and writing in the content and in the narration” (Fitz 2004: 4), interweaving both modes “with the practice of medicine” (Fitz 2004: 5). Thus Fitz calls Silko the “writing medicine woman” (2004: 5). Both in the form of her work and in her declared allegiances (2013: ix-x), Miranda must be seen as part of this lineage.

The figure of the writing medicine woman brings me back to the Western roots of the memoir. The genre, in its epistemic certainties of the individual, rational mind represents the opposite of Miranda’s existential center; it is an artform upon which the Romantic ideology – the building block of colonialism and the literary companion to European expansionism – stands (Cieński 1981: 71). But precisely because of this the writing medicine woman who must acknowledge *all* relations must take it up to perform, must approach the shadow, the dark side of form, the doing of ideology, the center. She must work through it as a Western genre just as she works within

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<sup>20</sup> Miranda thanks Silko for “the clarifying fire of her faith in this project”, and Linda Hogan for “inspiration and unwavering truth” (2013: ix-x).

<sup>21</sup> Silko’s *Storyteller* juxtaposes “poems, short stories, myths, letters, essays, anecdotes, and photographs”, and telling “mythical, community, and personal narratives, continuing the Laguna Pueblo practice of articulating personal identity from communal stories” (Wong 2005: 139).

the long continuum of Native life writing.<sup>22</sup> It is here that Miranda finds the epistemically *proper road*.

### 2.3. Performing the American Indian world

A prayer in Esselen and English by Louise Miranda Ramirez, the chairwoman of the Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation, opens the book. It sets the first, high interpretive frame for the memoir. It is an offering and a plea “that our people exist” (Miranda 2013: viii).<sup>23</sup> Miranda’s “Introduction” follows. The first few elements of this beginning section, the epigraph and the first paragraph, provide a good example of how Miranda’s writing performs its purpose.

The book begins with a quote from a missionary questionnaire filed at Mission San Juan Bautista in 1812.<sup>24</sup>

They love their children in excess, but they give them no education whatever. They merely recount to them the fables which they heard in their pagan state. [...] They held and do hold those as wise men who knew and could relate more of these fables. This is their chief knowledge. (qtd. in Miranda 2013: xi)

The voice is that of a missionary. The excerpt stands for the tale and subjectivity dominant in the imagination of California and enshrined in the figure of St. Junipero Serra and in recreated mission sites. Its content succinctly reveals the

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<sup>22</sup> Wong points to “narrative wampum belts, quillwork, and pictographic life narratives”, as well as, after H. David Brumble III, to “coup tales, informal autobiographical tales, self-examinations, self-vindications, educational narratives, and stories of quests for visions and power” (Wong 2005: 127) as the autobiography’s predecessors in the American Indian life-writing tradition.

<sup>23</sup> The prayer declares the intentions: “we come in a good way. Days of ancestors are gone but we will not forget [...]. We honor the Ancestors that suffered so that we could live. [...] know that our people exist” (in Miranda 2013: viii).

<sup>24</sup> In 1812 a detailed questionnaire (*interrogatorio*) was sent from Spain to all Alta California missions. Sandos says, that it was answered “between 1813 and 1815. Responses were collected from eighteen of the then nineteen missions, lacking only those from La Purísima” (2004: 118).

governing biases of this origin Story. In epistemic terms, temporal linearity (history moving forward from the moment of the original, radical break) is privileged while the Indians are subject to what Johannes Fabian has termed “denial of coevalness” or a method by which non-European societies are “deemed to exist ... in a radically different timeframe” (Fabian 1983: 35). This is why, the missionary implies, they lag behind: they *still* tell stories heard in a former, “pagan” state; *still* value those who can remember more. If, as Walter D. Mignolo says, “‘time’ is a fundamental concept in building the imaginary of the modern/colonial world and an instrument of both controlling knowledge and advancing a vision of society based on progress and development” (2011: 161), the denial of coevalness and linearization, together with normative preference for Western literacy over the Indigenous performative orality based on recounting/repetition (circularity), usher in an epistemic center of the epigraph that is teleological, horizontal, and genuinely narrative in orientation.

Further, linked with the dismissal of traditional pedagogy as non-pedagogy is a tacit suggestion, we surmise from the missionary’s words, that a different model of parenthood is called for, one that perhaps can be described with George Lakoff’s “Strict Father Model” (Lakoff 2009: 77).<sup>25</sup> By suggesting a double deficiency of the Indian upbringing – their love of offspring in “excess” (not strict?), their education a nonsense – the epigraph appeals to what, after Roland Barthes’ theory of five narrative codes offered in *S/Z* (1972), we can call the American and, more broadly, colonial “cultural code”.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> In this model, “the strict father is the moral leader of the family, and is to be obeyed. The family needs a strict father because there is evil in the world from which he has to protect them” (Lakoff 2009: 77). Punishment is legitimated: “You need a strict father because kids are born bad, in the sense that they ... don’t know right from wrong” (Lakoff 2009: 78).

<sup>26</sup> The five codes are: hermeneutic, proairetic, semic, symbolic, cultural. As each reader animates the codes differently they arrive at different meanings, hence, Barthes argues, the plurality of the writerly text, its polyglossia,

A cultural code, holds Barthes, is “Gnomic” (1974: 18), that is it offers the discourse a base in some “scientific or moral authority” (1974: 18), it references some set of governing precepts. Barthes explains that because, “[t]he utterances of the cultural code” reference “a general will, the law of a society, making the proposition concerned ineluctable or indelible” they are “implicit proverbs” (1972: 100) and the way to discover a cultural code in an utterance, Barthes adds, is to transform it “into a proverb, a maxim, a postulate”. Such a “stylistic transformation ‘proves’ the code, bares its structure, reveals its ideological perspective” (Barthes 1974: 100). What proverb best matches the ideological position of the missionary’s discourse? One comes to mind: “Kill the Indian, and Save the Man”, and, by association the one mentioned here before. Although these proverbs have a shorter history than the missions,<sup>27</sup> they express the same normative biases Columbus inaugurates and the missionary of San Juan Bautista recapitulates: that European beliefs and values are universal and Europeans are obligated to impose them upon others who, in contradistinction, have either inferior values or no values “whatever”. In other words, the appeal to the colonial cultural code – the appeal not only expressed in this epigraph but which forms the foundation of the Mission Mythology – implicitly grants moral authorization for the darkest reality the West imposed upon the Indigenous populations: that of family separation, of *taking children away* for “proper” education and for “their benefit”. It excuses cruelty and physical violence for it (by implication) calls for strict supervision (the antidote to excessive love) and, if we consider that the missionaries’ strict

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and instability, its productive rather than representative character. I return to this topic at the end of this essay.

<sup>27</sup> “Kill the Indian, and Save the Man” is the title of a speech delivered by the founder of the Carlisle Indian School, by Captain Richard H. Pratt, in 1892. “The only good Indian is a dead Indian”, on the other hand, is attributed to General Philip Sheridan. For a detailed history of this slur see Wolfgang Mieder’s “‘The Only Good Indian Is a Dead Indian’: History and Meaning of a Proverbial Stereotype”. *The Journal of American Folklore*. Vol. 106, No. 419 (Winter, 1993). 38-60.

paternal authority (*in loco parentis*) extended to all, adult and children Indians at the missions under the legal framework the institutions operated,<sup>28</sup> we are talking, ultimately, of the reality of cultural genocide.<sup>29</sup> By encoding the “Strict Father” model the epigraph always-already implicitly exonerates the genocidal relations which are its *raison de’etre*.

But there is more to the epigraph. The missionary tells us about people telling and passing down stories, and while his report aims to deny the validity of the American Indian culture, by, transitioning at the end into a quasi-anthropological discourse, it seemingly contradicts its tacit purpose of excluding Indians from the category of Man by admitting that they do use criteria for the verification of knowledge (mnemonic virtuosity) and do sustain culture through education in their “chief knowledge” – stories. Read from start to finish the excerpt suggests thus both Indigenous cultural lack and wealth; rehearsing ambivalence this way it assumes an aura of detached objectivity and mystifies its interestedness.

We can read this ambivalence with Barthes’ concept of the modern myth. The modern myth, Barthes teaches us, operates by “an ambiguous signification” (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 127)

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<sup>28</sup> Under the framework established by the Spanish crown the missionaries were granted exclusive, parental authority “to manage the mission Indians as a father would manage his family” (Engelhardt 1908: 117).

<sup>29</sup> I adopt the definition of the “cultural genocide” after the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015). This is because Miranda’s text, the California missionary’s report, and the Canadian Commission’s report on the legacy of the Indian residential schools are all focused, either explicitly or implicitly, on the issue of family separation. The *Final Report* specifically points to the measure of family separation as one of the most essential elements of the cultural genocidal practices: “*Cultural genocide* is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, *most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next*” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015: 1; my emphasis).

which he describes with the concept of a moving “turnstile of form and meaning” where “form is empty but present, its meaning absent but full” (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 127). Such myth is consumed by dynamic “focusing” happening “according to the very ends built into its structure” (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 127). It operates by what Barthes calls, “speech *stolen and restored*” (1991 [1972]: 124): that which is well-defined is brought back hollowed out of its content, historical complexities are destroyed, “meaning leaves its contingency behind” (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 116). Having in mind that the occluded objective (the contingency) of the missionary’s work within the context of the state institutions of colonial domination and exploitation is, to excerpt a definition of cultural genocide from the *Final Report* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the “destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group” (2015: 1) Barthes helps us understand the missionary’s mystification: he commits what Barthes calls “brief act[s] of larceny” and “surreptitious faking” by appropriating parental (civilizing), pastoral (proselytizing), and scientific (anthropologist’s) discursive strategies and evoking a tangle of moral certainties to assume a “benumbed look” (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 124). It is here, on the verge of the true and unreal, in the constant, dynamic (re)focusing between what is denoted (salvation) and what is connoted (destruction) that the excerpt in its totality is revealed as what we can call, after Barthes, “the mythical signifier ... an inextricable whole made of meaning and form” (1991 [1972]: 127).

The Esselen, Miranda’s father’s tribe, fell early prey to St. Serra’s policy of Native child abduction.<sup>30</sup> Miranda’s chosen

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<sup>30</sup> The Esselen’s territory lay immediately south of Mission Carmel, St. Serra’s headquarters, and quickly fell under its proselytizing influence. Breschini and Haversat (following Tibesar and Geiger) observe that many Esselen did not move to the mission voluntarily. Rather, they were forced to relocate there from remote villages to be reunited with their children. “After baptism, children were permitted to live with their parents in their native villages until they reached the age of reason, after having completed their eighth year” (Breschini and Haversat 2004: 181). Then they were expected to

motto belongs to a larger, normative official/bureaucratic/ethnographic body of accounts about the California Indigenous Other (basically, about Miranda's kin). It represents the official origin Story of the state, as well as the apparatus of knowledge, always usurping a pretense of distant objectivity, in its entanglements with the regime of colonial destruction. In other words, it is Miranda's mortal enemy. Its choice and placement at the outset of her tale reveal Miranda's concerns: not only to dispute the origin Story and its epistemic and axiological certainties but also, in a manner already visible in her generic tactics, to inhabit the Story, to tell her own and her kinfolk origin myths and stories of survival not only against it but through it; to intervene in the mythical speech, to become, as Barthes advises, "a reader of myths" (1991 [1972]: 127) or a "mythologist" who "voluntarily interrupt[s] this turnstile of form and meaning" (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 122) and creates her own patterns of form and meaning. Thus, Miranda declares herself a student of history, epistemology and ethics as well as of discourse and the turnstile's logic. If the epigraph assumes a disembodied and sexless (to the extent that the missionary's cowl obscures the masculinity within it) authority, her work promises to assume an intimate (and feminine) voice; one,

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move to the mission. If children were not given up voluntarily, soldiers took them away. Breschini and Haversat reference a documented 1783 altercation between the Esselen and Spanish soldiers, in which, as James Culleton reports, "a few of the former lost their lives" (Culleton in Breschini and Haversat 2004: 180). Breschini and Haversat speculate that the reason behind this skirmish was a dispute over the transfer of the children of the tribe to the mission. "If this was indeed the case", they add, "then the large number of Esselen being baptized during the following months would be understandable – they had been shown that they could not stand up to the weapons of the Spanish, and they simply wanted to be reunited with their children" (181). If the historians are correct then what is revealed is that the practice of child abduction, a practice enforced under the penalty of death, served also as an instrument of congregating (reducing) Indians at the missions. If many defenders of St. Serra claim that Indians relocated to the missions voluntarily this particular incident which occurred a year before the President's death and involved a reduction at San Carlos sheds light on the missionary's techniques of "moral suasion". The claim of extinction is explained later in this essay.

however, always embracing, open to contingency, hence to heterogeneity, syncretism.

That this is indeed the case is confirmed by part two of the opening segment, the first words by Miranda: "CALIFORNIA IS A STORY. California is many stories. As Leslie Silko tells us, don't be fooled by stories! Stories are 'all we have,'" (2013: xi). Having evoked the paradigm of the Mission Mythology, Miranda loudly, by capitalization, stands up to its authority; it is no longer "the" California Story but explicitly "A", one of "many". The missionary's words meet a different authority, that of Silko. Silko's words further decenter the Story; a warning, "don't be fooled by stories!", is a plea for informed, critical mythologist perception. To whom is it addressed? To a community of readers/listeners she establishes by this conative act. But just as stories may be misleading, for American Indians, Miranda quotes Silko further, they are "all we have". Silko's plea then first ushers in a community and then offers this community, the larger "we", a unifying paradigm upon which *we* (Silko, Miranda, the readers) thrive.

It is a fourth voice (after the missionary's, narrator's, Silko's) that now, having first agreed with Silko – "And it is true" (2013: xi) – not only explains but also, in another type of confluence of meaning and form, provides a direct example of that which the missionary calls the chief knowledge and Silko defines as *our* existential foundation. We hear: "Human beings have no other way of knowing that we exist, or what we have survived, except through the vehicle of story" (Miranda 2013: xi). The meaning and effect of the sentence hinges on its syntax and the syntagmatic, final placement in the paragraph – it confuses the reader's expectation as to the semantic consistency between Silko's "we" and the "we" here.

When that voice first speaks the reader is led to assume it is the narrator's own, Miranda's, who as a reader of Silko now takes over and as if inherits the communal aura the older writer's words just generated (by direct appeal to readers and a collective generalization). But in the sentence that follows,

the “we” is made separate from the “human beings” the humans only get to know *us* and learn about *us* through stories. The shift from the human “we” in Silko into a clearly Other voice here is abrupt. It estranges me and intrigues me. Grammatical inconsistency breaks the semantic inertia and I undergo a shock of incomprehension, instantly short-circuited back to the beginning of the sentence. And again. Who is the “we” here? I reread, want to correct it. Then I realize that Miranda has just played a circular trick on me. When one realizes this one falls into an ontologically-expansive horizon, a chasm of uncertainty, into another dimension. The “we” of the previous sentence, hitherto taken for granted, and to which I, the reader, can relate as my community, still echoes in my mind, amplified by Silko’s authority, while it collapses into and integrates with this collective, plural voice of the Other coming from another entity. This recognition awakens me meta-linguistically and I become an active participant in the making of the book. And it awakens me ontologically. To discover spirits residing in these lines is not effortless and when one finally comes to this realization one has a sense of having animated them. Simultaneously the experience exposes porous borders of my subjectivity. Who talks to me, in me? Perhaps Miranda’s ancestors but also, possibly, other non-human *Persons* like spirits, plants, animals, etc.. Simply put, Miranda, even though she writes in English, now speaks in tongues and when one realizes this one creates and hears glossolalia.

The sentence performs an actualization of what would otherwise have to be an elaborate explanation of the ultimate purpose of the American Indian stories: to enable cross temporal and cross-ontological communication and communion. At the same time, the “we” is also the “we” of the people, the trans-historical “we” spanning generations from the past and into the future. Either way, the time consciousness that the sentence engenders corresponds to the time of the Native stories – it is sacred, non-linear, non-human. When we are forced to reread, circularity is affirmed and *performed*. In general, the

sentence engenders another world by language confirming Norton-Smith's claim that "*Different words make different worlds*" (2010: 7), that "worlds are constructed ... through the use of language" (2010: 6). Miranda's text becomes at this moment an entity of power where the power is the Powers and the People.

The opening segment assumes voices, engages in mediumship and glossolalia, demonstrating Miranda's collective, permeable, genealogical/anamnestic, playful, sacred/mythical, productive approach. Stories, like prayers, she seems to tell us, are vehicles of hierophany, of momentarily ascending a different, sacred order of things. The very arrangement of the theme of storytelling here (from the detached epigraph, through Silko's critical closeness, to the transcendent) combined with skillful meta-linguistics offer one example of how Miranda organizes her text into what can be termed hierophanic ladders, which take her readers onto a journey of epistemic expansion, reawakening. And if we consider that this is the purpose of ceremonies, and ceremonies are inseparable from medicinal purposes, we may conclude that the ultimate purpose of Miranda is writing as medicine, which confirms the thesis that Miranda is the writing medicine woman.

#### **2.4. Mission soledad: The epistemic differential**

Both Miranda and I have separately visited the same place. I stopped at Mission Soledad in California's Salinas Valley in July 2013 and the experience left a lasting impression on me.<sup>31</sup> It was during later research that I stumbled upon Miranda's short story "Soledad", included in *Bad Indians*, which revealed to me an aspect of the place I had entirely missed. It may be instructive to compare our reactions as it illustrates

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<sup>31</sup> I published an article about the experience: "A Visit at Mission Soledad: On Path to Communion" in *Borderlands: Art, Literature, Culture* (2016). Ewelina Bańka and Zofia Kolbuszewska, eds. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL. 119-162.

the difference between propositional and procedural knowledge.

Mission Soledad was established on the site of an Esselen Indian village, Chuttsgilis (Breschini and Haversat 2004: 85) in 1791.<sup>32</sup> The Esselen lived in the Santa Lucía Mountains south of Serra's headquarters in San Carlos. Their small population<sup>33</sup> had been exposed to mission influence from the beginning and the founding of Soledad marked the next step in the bilateral, Spanish-Esselen history – it spelled the Esselen's final encirclement.<sup>34</sup> Soledad contributed to the massive reduction of the Esselen population. The last five Esselen were baptized in 1808 (Breschini and Haversat 182), in 1833, it was reported, that "there were already few Esselen left" (Beeler in Breschini and Haversat 2004: 8). Alfred Kroeber considered the tribe "the first to become entirely extinct" (Kroeber in Breschini and Haversat 2004: 8).<sup>35</sup> As if to match this dark impact, by 1830 Mission Soledad was, in the eyes of one reporter, "the gloomiest, bleakest and most abject looking spot in all California" (Robinson in Evans 1956: 20). After the secularization (1834) the mission fell into ruin. Reconstructed in 1954 and rededicated the following year, it serves today as a church and museum.

When I arrived in Soledad I hoped to locate a neophyte cemetery, for I knew that at missions it was the Indians, not

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<sup>32</sup> This version of the village name after Gary S. Breschini and Trudy Haversat (2004: 85). Engelhardt's version is essentially the same: *Chuttusgelis* (1897: 95); Alfred Kroeber's entirely different: *Wacharo-n* (in Evans 1956: 25, note 1).

<sup>33</sup> Gary Breschini and Trudy Haversat estimate that upon contact the entire population of the Esselen was between 1,185 and 1,285 (2004: 67).

<sup>34</sup> To the south of Soledad, Mission San Antonio was established in 1771 among the Salinan Indians. It was the third Spanish mission and for the twenty years preceding Mission Soledad's founding had exerted an influence on the Esselen communities.

<sup>35</sup> The Esselen have survived and today there are two groups claiming Esselen descent. These are the Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen Nation and the Esselen tribe of Monterey County. Miranda is a registered member of the former.

priests, who lived, worked, and died.<sup>36</sup> To my disbelief I found only two tombstones. Both are of distinguished Spaniards: one of padre Florencio Ibañez, the other of governor José Joaquín Arrillaga. I did not know at the time that originally two Indigenous cemeteries had been in operation here, nor that Harry Downie, the master builder in charge of the reconstruction, bulldozed the site causing “extensive destruction” (Kimbrow, Costello, Ball 2009: 221). Currently, one Neophyte Cemetery is “under agricultural use” and the other has been converted into a parking lot (“Soledad Register” 2014: 11).<sup>37</sup> The absence of Native graves or any information about them was glaring. The site’s uncanny tranquility, occasionally interrupted by a tractor plowing nearby, only intensified my unease. Questions were mounting as I drove off.

Miranda’s story came as a shocking revelation:

It’s Saturday morning, and we have never walked so mindfully. We find bone fragments on paths, in the parking lot, at the edges of groomed green fields. Here is a finger joint, here a tooth. Here a shattered section of femur, here something unidentifiable except for the lacy pattern that means human being. (2013: 149)

What I missed that day were human remains! In the difference between mine and Miranda’s concerns at the site, we find a good illustration of the difference between what we may call, albeit at the risk of generalization, the Western linear and Native circular epistemology.

My reaction corresponds, roughly, to the former. First of all, I came with a *purpose* of confirming/refuting a thesis (say, about the “Mission Myth” or “Indian in the closet”). It was “me”

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<sup>36</sup> In Mission Soledad, despite epidemics of 1805 and 1806, its population peaked in 1805 with 727 (Engelhardt 1897: 381) or 688 (Jackson and Castillo 1995: 55) neophytes.

<sup>37</sup> Owned by the Diocese of Monterey the Neophyte Cemetery’s “exact historical dimensions [...] have not yet been determined. The east boundary lines of the district as they exist today were established at a distance from the East Wing. This area likely includes the anticipated extent of the cemetery area, and the actual limits will not be known until more archaeological investigation takes place” (“Soledad Register”, 2014: 11).

and “my” epistemic center that were the source of inquiry. Second, because museums are conventionally, by way of syntagmatization of exhibits and discourse, spaces of “transparent” objectivity, I was unwittingly following the lead of curators and so – my skepticism as a student of discourse notwithstanding – I was *reading* the site. Third, perplexed by the museum’s silences, I resorted to a sort of new-age mysticism of “feeling” the site, that is I withdrew to the kernel of the self. Thus, in all three instances, I approached the site propositionally from the position of an inductively reasoning rather than experientially perceiving subject. Such linear, future-oriented ratiocination allowed me to project my assumptions on the place and blinded me to the reality literally unfolding on the ground.

Consider now that American Indian knowledge proceeds, as Norton-Smith says, from “observing the world to learn something from it”, that is, it emphasizes the “experiential content” (Norton-Smith 2010: 59, 61). More precisely, says Gregory Cajete, native philosophy “roots the entire tree of knowledge in the soil of direct physical and perceptual experience of the earth” (2004: 45). When we add to this, first, the moral injunction to proceed with caution because “everything we do and say – even everything we think – has a moral dimension” and, second, that truth in the Native world is what one does and not what one says, truth as “a property of respectfully successful action” (Norton-Smith 2010: 61, 64) then we may begin to grasp the motivations of Miranda’s group. If all actions are morally salient then this includes one’s every step and what is called for is a downwards-oriented mindfulness. This is especially true if one is walking on ancestral land and comes not to study discourse but to pay homage.

Most Western visitors walk differently. They wander around, admire an old chapel, take pictures, and, perhaps, stumbling upon the two graves, sympathize with the Europeans in monks’ clothing. Then they whizz away in their “Chevy trucks and Mercedes-Benzs [...] across the dirt parking lot created by

bulldozing the graveyard of Soledad's Indians. Bits of bone rise up from the dirt, catch in the steel-belted tire treads of tourists, carry our ancestors out to Highway 101, scatter them to the wind" (Miranda 2013: 149).

Places like that hold sacred value for California Indians. Many are sacred twice. First, because, like Soledad, they were established where original Native villages once stood. Second, because as Deloria teaches, a place can "be sanctified by an event that occurred at that site" (in Norton-Smith 2010: 14). Thus even if this had not been an ancient place, Mission Soledad and its catastrophic consequences would have made it sacred. For American Indians such sites are not museums. They are places of remembrance and mourning which must be periodically visited and where ceremonies must be held.

There is a jar at Mission Soledad with a sign: "Please: do not collect any bones" ("The Missing Burial Ground ..."). Métis writer Lorraine Mayer summarizes the indigenous way of being in the world as the three "Rs" of "respect [...] responsibility and relationship". The respect called for here is not for any signs but for "other people and [...] all other living things" (in Norton-Smith 2010: 112). Miranda and her companions act upon this higher law:

We gather this chipped harvest in our hands, pockets, cotton tobacco pouches, circle the mission slowly, follow Louise, who found our language buried beneath her tongue ... James kneels, digs a hole with a flat sharp stone. Chris prays shyly: the old grandmother hums inside her skin. Ernie holds up the iridescent abalone shell, lets pale blue smoke bless this lonely air. (2013: 150)

The group "circle the mission slowly" in a mindful search. Once bone fragments are collected a symbolic and actual burial follows; a ceremony, an act of gratitude which aims to honor the relatives and renew the entire cosmos. As smoke rises – smoke as the sacred conduit connecting humans with the di-

vine, with another ontology – prayers are lifted to heaven.<sup>38</sup> Louise, the leader, initiates a speech act in the Esselen, a language “buried” but now resurrected – another sacred conduit.<sup>39</sup> “*Xu-lin*, we say to our broken ancestors.’ “*Xu-lin*”, Miranda explains, “means ‘reclaim, return, recover’”, three other principle Rs. The word signifies a homecoming, mending, making whole. Miranda continues: “*xu-lin*, sprinkling sage, mugwort, and tobacco over the small grave. *Xu-lin*, we whisper as the earth takes back. *Xu-lin*, a plea and a promise: return”.

We see here at play all of the four Native principles. Relatedness undergirds all the actions. Circularity dictates the manner of proceedings. Expansive personhood motivates Miranda’s lexical choices and imagery – “children run to us with handfuls of ancestors”, “our relatives scattered on the earth” (Miranda 2013: 149) – and the group’s solemnity. Affirming the semantic potency of performance the group engages in a respectful action with a symbol, offers symbolic speech, prayer, and gifts to renew and sustain the networks of relations, their ties with other Persons, and to elevate their own personhood. When “the children hover like butterflies, taste the past without fear” (Miranda 2013: 150) an actual dance takes place and a communion with the past and the ancestral animate spirit beings present at this place is made.

Here, in the contrast between my reactions and those of Miranda’s team, we find the parameters of the difference between the Western and Indigenous epistemic logic. The Western model starts with the self and self’s concerns. One looks for causality and linear patterns, mobilizes grand narratives and engages in the play of rational deciphering of structures of representation and in psychological mystifications. The American Indian subject is motivated perceptually (experientially) and

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<sup>38</sup> For more on the role of smoke in Indigenous cultures see for example James Axtell’s *Imagining the Other: First Encounters in North America* (1991), 17-18.

<sup>39</sup> The “Louise” here is most probably the Esselen Tribal Chairwoman Louise Miranda Ramirez who has worked to revive the Esselen language and traditions. Hence Miranda’s reference to Louise as the one “who found [...] language buried beneath her tongue”.

procedurally (morally); the self emerges in seeking out relations and patterns of cycles within the reality of expansive personhood; hence mindful awareness of one's every step, balancing accounts, and re-ordering action which have the effect of (re)integrating one with that higher reality and with a different, eternal time frame, that is, of elevating ("hover like butterflies") and healing the (no longer alone) Native subject(s).

### **3. Conclusion: *Real Persons***

Above, I was able to signal at least four ways of considering Miranda's work from the point of view of the American Indian epistemology. In the first section, I discussed the author's declared intentions (affirmation and an antidote to lies) and her strategy (doing, glossolalia). In the second, I discussed the generic location of the text and linked it to the medicinal purpose and form-exorcism tactics of the writing medicine woman. Third, I demonstrated in detail how Miranda's text creates in language a plural, historically and ontologically expansive space which offers itself up to its readers for decoding and in this way engages the reader in the process of its creation, in its *doing*. Fourth, I discussed how Miranda's narrative underscores experiential and procedural knowledge, and is one instance of a dance of person and place. The memoir's other sections – for example, the opening poems in which Miranda inhabits the voice of Junípero Serra (2013: 3-5) – support the thesis that Miranda's work is *respectfully* expressive of, and performs, the Native worldview. In other words, the memoir passes the Native test of "truthfulness".

Norton-Smith says that "the successful telling of an origin story puts the People's experiences into perspective and helps them to understand their place in the world" (2010: 100). By writing down history and reflecting on the present, offering, to adopt Hertha D. Sweet Wong's words, a "form of testimony, bearing witness not only to a history of genocide, but to survival and continuance and the possibility of healing from the

‘wounds of history’” (Wong 2005: 142), Miranda’s memoir may be considered a tale of the origin of the tribe – the new tribe of Bad Indians, of survivors and those subjected to both genocide and syncretism, and deontological purgation by means of biased representations. Despite Norton-Smith’s claim that it is performed oral stories and not written texts that possess the world-ordering power (2010: 11),<sup>40</sup> I want to argue that Miranda’s work exemplifies a written text which due to its truthful character, its successful *doing* – strengthening bonds, incorporating difference, and tying Native life “to other human and nonhuman persons in the world” (Norton-Smith 2010: 100) – can be considered a successful instance of a dance of person and place. And Miranda, the master of the ceremony, can be called a Real Person for she accomplishes this dance, becoming a writing storyteller of her tribe. Crucially, however, her readers also stand a chance of becoming *whole* when they animate *Bad Indians* with each *mindful* reading correlating various registers and codes (movements) of the text.

One way of thinking about *Bad Indians* as an animated entity in a more traditional, narrative theory manner, could be to reference Barthes’ concept of the “writerly text” as a plural, unstable, and multivalent network of the five codes mentioned before. Fitz was perhaps the first to suggest a parallel between the “strategy adopted by the writing storyteller” (2004: 5) and the Barthesian model. Barthes explains the writerly text as that which is “written (rewritten) today” (1974: 3) that is, one which is no longer consumed but produced by the reader who “function[s] himself, [...] gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing” (1974: 4). The five codes are the cords the reader animates; it is, as Fitz says, “*ourselves writing*”, but how one navigates the different codes is always a matter of difference in a “perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language [...] can be superimposed, [...] before [...]

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<sup>40</sup> Norton-Smith emphasizes: “the *written* text of stories cannot put experiences into perspective, teach moral lessons and strengthen tribal bonds in an oral tradition. The stories must be performed” (2010: 1000).

some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances” (Fitz 2004: 7).

Barthes proposed this liberatory methodology in reaction to the Western tradition of what he calls “the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader” (1974: 4). But perhaps the problem Barthes identifies is deeper and goes back to Western epistemology? The memoir/autobiography is a quintessential Western genre and it is here that one sees this producer/user divide perhaps the most. As James Olney, the founder of autobiography studies, defined it: it is an offering up of one’s life “to the general public for consumption” (2015 [1980]: 3).<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy, then, that American Indians have not only embraced the genre but have transformed it by making “tribal culture and history important parts of their life stories, [which reflects] their continuing perception of themselves as part of a tribal community” (Brown Ruoff 1990: 265-266). In other words, American Indian writers have embraced the “master’s tool” but, drawing from their own epistemic and axiological American Indian difference, they have proposed a “reconsideration of all three of [the autobiography’s] roots – self, life, and writing” (Wong 2005: 126). Wong says:

Native American notions of self, while varied, tend to share an emphasis on interrelatedness (not only among people, but between humans and the natural world) and community, rather than individuality; indigenous ideas of what kind of life is worth narrating are inclusive of the partial, everyday experiences of ordinary people, rather than focused on the complete lives of important public people; and while Native people have and do write

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<sup>41</sup> For more on this, see Hertha D. Sweet Wong’s “Native American life writing” (2005) in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 125-144. For the perspective represented by Olney and others see, James Olney’s *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014 [1980].

autobiographies, historically, they spoke, drew, and performed aspects of their life stories. (Wong 2005: 126)

In general then, the memoirs/autobiographies by the American Indians lean toward the productive, fragmentary, inclusive, ontologically plural and intersubjective. They do so because of the values and the world version – the epistemology – they uphold and (re)construct. Miranda’s text, as I have demonstrated, does exactly this. It represents a ceremony, a redressive action, it continues and expands on the tradition of American Indian life writing, and it reflects a practice of “feminist and ethnic-American self-narrations” (Wong 2005: 125) which seeks to inhabit and redefine the form and subject of the autobiography. If we remember the memoir/autobiography’s paradigmatic role in the Western cultural realm, then Miranda’s and other Native writers’ interventions into the genre have larger ramifications. They aim to reprogram the Western epistemic coordinates from within and the key to this reprogramming lies in bridging the divide Barthes laments, in *giving one’s life to the general public for production*.

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Grzegorz Welizarowicz  
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-3513-7029  
Institute of English and American Studies  
University of Gdańsk  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
[grzegorz.welizarowicz@ug.edu.pl](mailto:grzegorz.welizarowicz@ug.edu.pl)