

THE PLACE OF STORY AND THE STORY OF PLACE:
HOW THE CONVERGENCE OF TEXT AND IMAGE MARKS
THE OPENING OF A NEW LITERARY FRONTIER

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE PLACE OF STORY.....	9
3. THE STORY OF PLACE.....	35
4. CONVERGENCE.....	54
WORKS CITED.....	74

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Marie E. Lynn, <i>Inside Out</i>	62
2. Jonathan Safran Foer, <i>Grandma's spaces</i>	67
3. Jonathan Safran Foer, <i>Grandfather's text</i>	69

ABSTRACT

While certain scholars are lamenting that literature has become less relevant in these postmodern times, I have found that this is not at all the case. What is actually happening is that literature is the process of change, due in no small part to our blossoming visual culture. Interweaving Native American and dominant culture literatures, this document explores the ways narrative has historically played a critical role, not only in constructing human identity, but also in defining our relationship with place. More recently, new literary hybrids, with various degrees of intertwining text with image, are proliferating. These literatures of image are propelling us beyond postmodernism into a new era.

INTRODUCTION

It is as if we are blessed with elegant tiles for a mosaic but have no design. There are mounds of great ideas, insightful bits, and clever pieces but no artist with a plan for turning the whole assortment into an elegant, integrated picture and no grout to hold it together. ~ Don Edward Beck and Christopher Cowan

Reflecting upon premodern times, we can discover particular elements that help us make sense out of the jumble of postmodern life. Alan Lui provides a delightful story showing how the Guayaki people of South America share many commonalities with present-day knowledge workers. In addition, he reimagines the word *cool*, which he uses to indicate the cutting edge of postmodern sensibilities. Originating during the jazz era of the 1930s, the term was appropriated by youngsters in the 1990s. Lui, however, expands the parameters of *cool* by showing how it can embrace both the postmodern and the premodern, and this is an area I will explore further.

If we look closely into our postmodern jumble, we can discern that it is made up of two different modes--arborescent, that is to say growing in an orderly tree-like manner, and rhizomatic, which, like ginger, grows underground in unpredictable directions. First introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, these two distinct patterns seem to influence all forms of life on this planet. While Leonardo Fibonacci is credited with generating the mathematical sequence of the golden ratio, Lynn Margulis explains the occurrence within living species of the arborescent patterns this

ratio creates. Chaos theory, on the other hand, is the study of complex natural systems that seem to function in random ways because their activities are entirely rhizomatic.

Looking even more closely into postmodern phenomena, we find that within human populations a rhizomatic sense of placelessness has become rampant. Patricia Price explains how this feeling of dislocation tends to cause a rupture of meaning in our lives when the link between place and identity is broken. Frederic Jameson, however, attempts to provide a sense of direction for postmodernism through analysis of its artistic production, yet his thinking is a bit too arborescent, which is why his prediction about the decline of literature is off the mark. The fact is, literature is reinventing itself by incorporating elements of the premodern, and this shift is causing a ripple effect that marks not the decline of literature, but of postmodernism itself. The dynamics and implications of this literary shift are the focus of this study.

Alan Liu in *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information* prefaces his tale of the premodern with the following vignette:

The generations of cool destined for cubicles, let us imagine, only appear to accept a future in which they sit docilely in front of cold computer mutely clicking and mousing. In reality, they are wild and sit by hot campfires at night where their soul can sing. What they sing is older than the rock music that the cool used Napster to appropriate in the late 1990s. It is older even than the jazz that an older generation of cool (in the first colloquial usage of that term) vented in the nightclubs of the 1930s. To hear that song--a cry of 'more!' as primeval as the forests--I will listen to the anthropology of an 'archaic' tribe of the forest and make of it a fable for the tribe of the cubicle (288).

In this imagining, he shows how mild-mannered knowledge workers tap into an

ancient momentum, a particular way of expressing discontent with the way things are. Drawing on the anthropological work of Pierre Clastres with the Guayaki people of South America, Liu creates a list of laws for the tribe of the cubicle, who, like the tribe of the forest, “also inhabits a sociality of mandatory disempowerment” (292).

This sociality of mandatory disempowerment among the Guayaki is a result of two very specific factors: environment and gender imbalance. Because the forest environment they inhabit is not conducive to agriculture, they must rely on gathering and hunting in order to survive. Regardless of location, all indigenous groups of people who subsist on hunting and gathering abide by strict rules that mandate the sharing of food. In this the Guayaki are no different. However, because there are twice as many males as females, the men must also share their wives in the practice of polyandry, which is the source of the husbands’ resentment (290). In the case of present-day knowledge workers, the postindustrial environment also causes a sociality of mandatory disempowerment, and Lui’s six laws show how this works.

First, the Law of “Nature” demonstrates that global competition is the prime factor in the postindustrial world and can be compared to the unforgiving forest, which is home to the Guayaki. Next, the Law of Mobility shows how “restructuring, downsizing, outsourcing, and the replacement of career workers with permatemps” (292) caused by global competition has become the new nomadism. For the next two, the Law of Modularity and the Law of Random Access, Lui does not provide a direct comparison, but we can easily imagine that interchangeability and accessibility would be important factors in the lives of the Guayaki, due to the necessity of specific

work roles being fulfilled in order for the people to survive. The Law of Exchange shows a strong parallel between the two groups because the Guayaki must exchange food and wives, while knowledge workers are required to network information. And finally, we come to the Law of Cool, which is a bit more complex. Lui defines *cool* “as the ‘gesture’ of ambivalent, recusant oppositionality... within knowledge work” (293). This he likens to the Guayaki men when they periodically get together and sing their protest against the social laws they are required to obey, but often do so resentfully.

According to Lui, *cool* is a form of protest. “Structured as *information designed to resist information*, cool is the paradoxical gesture by which the ethos of the unknown--of the archaically and stubbornly unknowable--struggles to stand in the midst of knowledge work” (294). What these six laws indicate is that certain aspects of the premodern are relevant to postmodern life in the twenty-first century.

Certainly, one of the highlights of these postmodern times is the concept of rhizomatic and arborescent thought introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their ground-breaking text, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*:

On the one hand, multiplicities that are extensive, divisible, and molar; unifiable, totalizable, organizable; conscious or preconscious--and on the other hand, libidinal unconscious, molecular, intensive multiplicities composed of particles that do not divide without changing in nature, and distances that do not vary without entering another multiplicity and that constantly construct and dismantle themselves in the course of their communications, as they cross over into each other at, beyond, or before a certain threshold (33).

The first description of extensive multiplicities Deleuze and Guattari have termed

arborescent, or growing in tree-like patterns. We are taught to think in these orderly, non-contradictory patterns. The second group, intensive multiplicities, would fall under the domain of the rhizome. The Internet is a good example of rhizomatic function.

A few examples that correlate with structured arborescent multiplicities are the geometric forms abundantly found in the natural world: crystals, seashells, flowers, snowflakes, pinecones. The ancient Greeks, and possibly even the ancient Egyptians, investigated the underlying mathematical phenomena that are at play in these esthetically pleasing geometries. In his book *Liber Abaci*, published in 1202, Leonardo Fibonacci posed the following problem:

A certain man put a pair of rabbits in a place surrounded on all sides by a wall. How many pairs of rabbits can be produced from that pair in a year if it is supposed that every month each pair begets a new pair which from the second month on becomes productive? The resulting sequence is 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, ... (Fibonacci).

This sequence of numbers, which represents a ratio, has since been dubbed the Fibonacci sequence. Imitating the geometry of nature, many of the great Renaissance artists utilized an approximation of this numerical sequence in their artwork. While it has been called many things--the golden ratio, the golden mean, the golden section, and even the divine proportion, the Fibonacci sequence continues to delight both serious mathematicians and casual dabblers because of the lovely arborescent designs associated with it.

In *Symbiotic Planet*, Lynn Margulis provides a fascinating explanation of how arborescent patterns found in the natural world occur by comparing them to computer-

generated fractals. She writes:

Recent work in mathematics, called fractal geometry, shows that elaborate graphics can be made not by an artist with a finished idea but by repetitions of simple computer steps called algorithms. Life produces fascinating “designs” in a similar way by repeating the chemical cycles of its cellular growth and reproduction. Order is generated by nonconscious repetitious activities. Gaia, as the interweaving network of all life, is alive, aware, and conscious to various degrees in all its cells, bodies, and societies. Analogous to proprioception, Gaian patterns appear to be planned but occur in the absence of any central “head” or “brain” (126).

This comparison seems rather startling at first glance, yet we can see that it has grown out of the scientific study of complex biological systems together with a basic understanding of fractal geometry. If these nonconscious repetitious actions are what generate orderly designs as Margulis argues, then perhaps there are undiscovered patterns of repetition lurking in depths of chaotic systems as well.

Chaos theory is the study of the random and chaotic elements in nature, which we can correlate with Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic multiplicity. While some argue that chaos theory is all about discovering the order in extremely complex natural systems, others simply get on with the business of studying all of these exciting things. And they are exciting to study because with chaotic systems we don’t know where the edge is; this is a place where we are able to think more rhizomatically about how things work. It seems that nearly everything in the natural world can be studied for its chaos--waves crashing on the shore, erratic growth cycles in between dormant ones, radical winds, even outbreaks of disease.

Within the present day social milieu, it often seems as though rhizomatic multiplicities have become the norm, which deeply affect our sense of who we are

and where our place in the world is. Patricia Price, author of *Dry Place: Landscapes of Belonging and Exclusion*, argues:

We can approach contemporary anxieties over placelessness, dislocation, and being lost, and the annihilation of livelihood and way of life that is seen to be allowed by this, as the product of a fundamental rupture of meaning between place and identity. When the linkage between place and meaning is perceived to have ruptured, when this spatial signifying chain snaps, the result is loss (or a shattering) of a stable identity--or at least the illusion of that stability--which is rooted, in part, in a place (119).

This rupture of meaning has led to a state of mind she calls “spatial schizophrenia” where there is no sense of rootedness, either in place or in identity. Deleuze, Guattari and Price have all appropriated the word schizophrenia, thereby pathologizing certain rhizomatic processes. Price might even consider the phenomenon of placelessness to be a postmodern virus, since it is no respecter of persons, proliferating regardless of wealth and privilege, or the lack thereof.

While Fredric Jameson wrote the book on postmodernism, literally, his agenda as a good Marxist was and is to implicate, “the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism” (37). He does, however, create excellent connections between theory, architecture, literature, film, visual art and economics. Although Jameson points to architecture as “the privileged aesthetic language” (37), he also argues, “That film today has become postmodernist, or at least that certain films have, is obvious enough; but so have some forms of literary production (69). However, it is video that he singles out as the medium standing as “the cultural dominant of a new social and economic conjuncture” (69). Of particular interest to us at this point, is Jameson’s belief that literature is presently in decline.

Literature, whether oral or written, has shaped our human sensibilities in the past, and continues to do so. Cultural narratives tell the stories of who we think we, the people, are and where on this earth we believe we belong. Yet, these narratives have become confused because, in North America, we do not possess a single culture; we are possessed by many. While the interrelated notions of place and identity have gotten scrambled in the eggbeater of postmodernism, they are, nevertheless, still with us. In fact, they are in the process of being creatively reimagined by present-day writers, and this is the mosaic we shall explore.

In Chapter One, “The Place of Story,” I demonstrate the importance of narrative in our personal lives as well as in a larger cultural context by focusing on several different facets of oral and written texts. Integrating perspectives from both the dominant culture and Native American cultures, the second chapter, “The Story of Place,” explores the terrain of image-heavy landscape writing, showing how these literatures tend to counteract the sense of dislocation that seems so ever-present. And, in Chapter Three, “Convergence,” I investigate the ways text and image come together, which is creating fresh opportunities for literature and moving us beyond postmodernism into a new era, as yet unnamed.

THE PLACE OF STORY

The truth about stories is that that's all we are. ~ Thomas King

In this chapter, we begin our journey together by first taking into account some of the reasons we underestimate the influence of story upon us. Next, several different cosmogonies, those stories which are foundational to our culture, are introduced. From there, I investigate the relationship between myth and story, as well as take up some of the legacies of the Enlightenment, since these continue to exert such a powerful influence on us. Because story has figured so prominently in Native American lifeways, we turn next to Navajo, Apache and Pueblo literatures for guidance. Within these cultures, we find a mythic co-presence of past and present, narratives that embody a dual knowledge of self and place, the extensive influence of oral traditions and a belief in the sacred power of words to create. Last, but not least, I consider some of the psychological influences of story upon the human psyche, which illuminate why story is such an enduring phenomenon.

Story, myth, tale--these words are simple indeed. Yet, they invoke a certain disdainful reaction. *She told you a real fish story; he is still enthralled with that old myth; wow, that was a tall tale if I ever heard one!* Somehow these simple words have become associated either with childhood fantasy and fabrication, or with ignorant explanations for observed natural events by ancient peoples. Yet, the fascinating thing about story is that without it, we are lost.

Perhaps due to our tendency to dismiss narrative as obscure mythic stories or as child's play, we underestimate its capacity to exert an influence in our personal lives and upon our culture. Ben Okri, author of *The Famished Road*, writes:

In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted--knowingly or unknowingly--in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives (qtd. in King 153).

In providing this insight, he reveals how narrative can affect us deeply, with this organic image of stories growing within us. If, as Okri argues, stories have the power to change our lives, then we should pay more attention to how they work.

The Truth About Stories is a delightful text that follows traditional Native American storytelling patterns. In it, Cherokee-Greek-German scholar Thomas King playfully explores the serious business of narrative in our culture. He asserts,

Did you ever wonder how it is we imagine the world in the way we do, how it is we imagine ourselves, if not through our stories. And in the English-speaking world, nothing could be easier, for we are surrounded by stories, and we can trace these stories back to other stories and from there back to the beginnings of language. For these are our stories, the cornerstones of our culture (95).

King is specifically referring to the literary canon as the place where we can investigate all of the stories that have created our culture. If we pick up any anthology of literature and glance through the table of contents, we can quickly determine how it is organized. Many anthologies take a chronological approach; others may be organized thematically. Some are only composed of British literature, with the earliest writings coming from Anglo-Saxon sources, while in most anthologies

dedicated to American literature, the earliest are written accounts taken from Native American oral traditions. Often found in collections of classical literature, Greek mythology has also exerted an incredible influence on Western civilization. And, what King cleverly points out is that the human agency of imagination is the power behind all these stories from which our culture(s) proceed.

Certainly one of the foundational stories of the dominant culture in America, the story of creation from the Judeo-Christian tradition, is recorded in the Book of Genesis. Chapter One provides an orderly account of the seven days of creation, powered by the spoken language of God (Gen. 1:1-31). Chapter Two of Genesis, on the other hand, seems to be a different story altogether, one that tells of a more active God who fashioned the first man from dust and then breathed into him “the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). In this second story, God is portrayed as a gardener, an artist and even as a surgeon, when the first woman is created from a rib of the man (Gen. 2:21-22). Tactile and colorful, Genesis Two is a much more delightful origin story than Genesis One.

Harold Bloom and David Rosenberg’s *The Book of J*, sheds new light on these two different stories. The Documentary, or Source, Hypothesis of Graf, Vatke and Wellhausen in the nineteenth century began the process of unraveling the tangled threads of biblical authorship. The earliest writer was the Yahwist, or J, followed by one or more authors known as E for Elohist. Later, a Priestly source labeled P as well as the authors of Deuteronomy, or D, were also identified. The final revision was done by R, the Redactor (20-21). Bloom hypothesizes that J was a woman writing at

the end of the tenth century. “My further assumption” he writes, “is that J was not a professional scribe but rather an immensely sophisticated, highly placed member of the Solomonic elite, enlightened and ironic” (9). Since the J text predates the Priestly Genesis One, a later writer or editor, most likely R, placed the P text first, which is why we have the two creations of Genesis.

The Book of John begins with yet another cosmogony. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1:1-3). The Greek *logos* may be translated as God in action. Additionally, whenever capitalized, Word also refers to Jesus since the text later posits, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14). So, in this account of origins, there is the element of divine action together with the individual, Jesus.

These narratives reveal a sense of the beginnings of all things that proceeds from the words and actions of the divine being, God. While many indigenous creation narratives are place-bound, these biblical stories have become liberated from their place of origin in the Middle East as a result of the migratory history of the Israelites, who became known for their portable religion.

Choctaw author LeAnne Howe provides a different perspective on origin stories from one of our non-dominant cultures: “Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes. America is a tribal creation story, a tribalography” (29). By this, she means that stories have the power to create realities by providing ways to

see and understand the world. Howe goes on to argue, “Creation stories gave birth to our people, and it is with absolute certainty that I tell you now: our stories also created the immigrants who landed on our shores” (29). What she is specifically referring to are the ancient prophecies found in most North American tribal lore regarding the coming of the light-skinned peoples.

Like Howe, Sam Gill seems to consider American history to be a powerful creation narrative, as yet unfinished. In *Mother Earth: An American Story*, he has undertaken a searching investigation into the constructed religious belief in Mother Earth. He writes, “placed in the broader historical context the statement [of Tecumseh regarding Mother Earth in 1810] stands in the midst of a story of imagining America that began as early as 1575 and is still in progress” (7). The importance of a pan-Indian belief in Mother Earth, whether metaphorical or appropriated, is that it is one of the principle tenets upon which the creation story of America builds.

Near the end of his book, Gill specifically takes up the question of myth. He explains that in order to disentangle myth from history, it is helpful to consider “myth as the story on which truth is based” (156). He brings this up because his research indicates that scholars may be the real architects of the myth of Mother Earth:

In terms of the scholars and their studies of Mother Earth, the judgments they have made and the truths they have claimed make sense when placed within the parameters of a myth which they themselves have largely constructed. For the scholars, Mother Earth is not a hypothesis, she is a figure whose existence, whose structure, whose character is the basis on which many of the disparate and complexly diffuse cultures from throughout human history and geography cohere meaningfully (156).

While Gill believes this myth has been beneficial for scholars, he argues that it has

also been a positive construction, not only for Native Americans, but for all Americans because it enables every member of this pluralistic society to participate in the story of being nurtured by a goddess of cosmic proportions--Mother Earth.

Yet, we need a more clearly defined conception of myth itself, in order to understand how it relates to story. One commonly held idea is that myths originally were accounts of actual events in the distant past that became larger-than-life tales through the imaginative retelling by generations of storytellers. Another notion is that myths were devised in order to explain certain events in the natural world that people could not comprehend. Of course, the experts in the field have written volumes on mythology. Let us sample a few of the more potent definitions of myth.

In *Myth and Reality*, Mircea Eliade writes, "Myths reveal that the World, man and life have a supernatural origin and history, and that this history is significant, precious and exemplary" (145). He prefers the study of myth within "primitive" societies because they seem to be undiluted specimens of a tradition that is still alive (5). While acknowledging the complexity of myth, Eliade believes that "The foremost function of myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities..." (8). In other words, myths tell people what they must do in order to be proper humans.

Sean Kane takes a different approach to the study of myth, which is informed by his work with the aboriginal people of Australia. In *Wisdom of the Myhtellers*, he argues that myhtelling is simply the dialogue that humans and nature have been engaged in for thousands of years (14). He writes, "Because a people coevolve with

their habitat, because they walk the paths their ancestors walked, myth telling assumes that the stories already exist in nature, waiting to be overheard by humans who will listen for them” (33). Kane believes that myth is a sacred activity that is conveyed through story, and that it reveals hidden relationships (45). This relational perspective resonates with aspects of Native American mythmaking.

Typically, myths from Native cultures of North America focus on actions and relationships, excluding description, motives and analysis. This event-centeredness encourages listeners to ponder the questions being raised and to construct their own interpretations. According to anthropologist Karl Kroeber,

Only when we recognize that like our own best literary art they [myths] embody testings, examinations, questionings of cultural practices and assessments of the values and costs of socially defined constraints and freedoms will we begin to appreciate them as dynamic processes upon which the persistence and vital transformativeness of oral societies primarily depend (18).

While Native American myths are far more spare than most dominant culture literature, Kroeber points out the similarity of imaginative construction. Trickster tales, for example, are myths that encourage listeners to question and reevaluate social norms. While people may laugh at his insatiable greed or wonder how he can possibly engage in such troublesome antics, it is clear that the Trickster is a model of behavior that proper humans should not follow.

Wendy Doniger, who has done extensive cross-cultural work with Greek and Hindu myths, advocates an interdisciplinary approach utilizing multiple techniques to analyze the multifaceted refractions of myth (153). Her contribution to illuminating

the esoteric nature of myth is immense. She writes, “every myth is driven by the obsessive need to solve a paradox *that cannot be solved*, a mess that cannot be cleaned up... [it’s] not merely about *mental* constructs and patterns, but about *emotional* needs and conflicts” (147). This insight really seems to be getting to the heart of myth--that addressing both human emotions and unsolved paradoxes is its unique work.

So, while some may use the words myth and story interchangeably, it appears that there are specific differences between the two. Every myth is a story, but every story is not a myth. A myth is a certain kind of cultural story that is particularly potent; that tends to incorporate the supernatural; that is capable of revealing hidden relationships; that is open to varied interpretations; that grapples with paradoxes; and that attends to the emotional side of life.

Margulis uses the word myth to indicate a powerful story that reveals hidden connections. She argues that even scientists have a need to participate in mythmaking, fashioning their own origin stories:

The origin of life is a mythical concept, not in the sense of being untrue but rather in stirring a deep sense of mystery. Even scientists need to narrate, to integrate their observations into origin stories. How did the earliest life, the first bacterial cell, begin? How did the ur-bacteria differ from the environment from which they are alleged to have emerged?... Answers to the “origin of life” problem are woven from the lifework of scholars in many nations. The scientific story of the first life on Earth is the least parochial of the world’s origin myths. It is freely available to all who care to learn about it (70).

This is particularly interesting because we tend to think of scientists as persons so dedicated to objectivity that it is difficult to imagine their capacity to entertain a sense

of awe, yet apparently they do. Interestingly enough, this particular cosmogony is subject to revision, as scientists gather more evidence and update their theories, unlike most origin stories, which are often regarded as revealed truth.

Mary Midgley provides a fascinating expose of some of the scientific stories passed down to us from the Enlightenment in her work, *The Myths We Live By*. She begins by explaining that certain metaphorical concepts,

Used by scientists... are not just passive pieces of apparatus like thermostats. They have their own influence. They are living parts of powerful myths--imaginative patterns that we all take for granted--ongoing dramas inside which we live our lives... They are the matrix of thought, the background that shapes our mental habits... When they are bad they can do a great deal of harm by distorting our selection and slanting our thinking. That is why we need to watch them so carefully (3-4).

Midgley argues that we must not simply throw the baby out with the bathwater of the Enlightenment, but rather realize that these matrices, “often have to be reshaped or balanced by other thought-patterns in order to correct their faults” (4). In tackling the social-contract, omnicompetence of science and progress myths, she points out that dramatic simplification, while alluring, has been the major downside of Enlightenment concepts (5).

She goes on to explain that the omnicompetence myth, the belief that science can provide all the answers we will ever need, is especially problematic because, “exaggerated and distorted ideas about what physical science can do for us led... to the rise of powerful, supposedly scientific ideologies such as Marxism and behaviourism,” which Midgley offers as examples of pseudoscientific systems that claim the authority of science (6). The myth of progress, which is linked to the belief

in the omniscience of science, has contributed to a distorted sense of confidence that has guided our entry into the scientific age. While this, in itself is not a bad thing, it has certainly led to a distorted sense of scientific knowledge as, “a new scale of values, a new priority system, leading to particular political projects... [and] a moral signpost that could take the place of religion” (15). In other words, we have come to believe that science is capable of solving all of the world’s ills.

The omniscience and progress myths, according to Midgley, have gotten us into a whole lot of trouble, from environmental destruction to bio-engineering and everything in between. Rather than just bashing every exploitation that humans have been responsible for, she provides a valuable recipe for change:

In order to dig out something so deep in our psyches we do indeed need to reverse it explicitly in practice. The painful words WE WERE WRONG must not only be spoken but spelt out in action, and this needs to be action with a strong symbolism that bears on the offenses that have been central to our crimes... Moves like these are not just futile hand-wringing over the past. They are ways of *committing us to changing direction* for the present and the future... They are changing the myth in order to commit themselves to changing the wider reality, and that is the way in which serious changes are eventually brought about (Midgley 175).

This compelling argument for the need to change our myths by changing our actions is certainly convincing, yet we should also consider reworking some of our stories at the same time. Perhaps we would then discover appropriate ways in which to change our actions, for story can be a highly effective means of transformation.

Fire in the Turtle House by Osha Gray Davidson is a non-fiction story about the disease turned epidemic called fibropapilloma (FP) that is ravaging populations of the planet’s oldest living reptiles, sea turtles. Immediately after the title page,

Davidson includes the Hawaiian legend of Kauila, a Green Sea Turtle who would transform into a human to save drowning children and who was also responsible for providing spring water for the people to drink (viii). The rest of the book unfolds like a detective story; Davidson shadows marine experts who are following a trail of clues about how FP may have originated and what can be done to save the turtles. What they discovered is that due to human-introduced pathogen pollution, a marine metademic is currently underway, which is threatening the health of the oceans and all life within them (163). There is, of course, no easy solution to the problem.

Davidson writes,

We could stop treating the ocean as if it were the world's largest garbage dump and start treating it like the sacred source of all life that it is. We could end our mindless plundering of the sea, a process that plays havoc with complex marine biology, unweaving millennia of evolutionary relationships. We could balance growth and development with habitat preservation. We could, finally get serious about stopping global warming. We could, we could, we could--but will we?" (218).

Since the sea turtle is sacred to many traditional peoples, Davidson returns to this topic towards the end of the book. During an interview with Sam Ka'ai, a *kahuna* storyteller, the cultural significance of the *honu* to the people of Hawaii is revealed:

“Turtle is seen as a benevolent character who inhabits the spiritual world and the physical world at the same time. It is the link between the two. Turtle is the foundation.” Similar to the relationship between the Plains Indians and the buffalo, Davidson explains that Pacific islanders venerate the sea turtle as, “...a source of physical, spiritual and cultural nourishment” (217).

There is nothing quite so satisfying as a good story. Davidson has managed to

turn a terrible real-life scenario into a really good read by weaving many interrelated human interest stories into it. Although our work here isn't really about how to change the world, it's clear that narrative has the potential to do so.

Because story has traditionally been such an integral part of Native American cultures, much can be learned by exploring this literary terrain. One critical aspect of these stories is a co-presence of the past and the present. While this layering of time can be found in many different Native cultures, Navajo author Luci Tapahonso has beautifully developed the technique in a slim volume of poems and short stories, *Saanii Dahataal: The Women are Singing*. In the preface, she relates how her collection has come into being:

This work ranges from stories I heard as a child, to stories that were told by relatives, friends or colleagues, and to other poems or stories that are based on actual events. Most of the pieces originated in Navajo, either orally or in thought, and the English translation appears here (x-xi).

Some of the selections in the book are obviously written from Tapahonso's own experiences--"The Pacific Dawn" and "What I Am," for example. Both of these interweave references to past events and people while describing situations occurring in the present. However, we find a more powerful intermingling of past and present in her mystical poems.

"In 1864" is about the forced march of the Navajo from Dinetah to Fort Sumner. While driving past the fort, she remembers the story and her aunt tells it to Tapahonso's daughter, who is also in the vehicle. The poem is about a man who had been working on the power lines in that area and heard the voices of the people who

had died during the march. After three tortuous nights, he decided to leave the job and return home because, “The place contained the pain and cries of his relatives, the confused and battered spirits of his own existence” (8). Having lived through that painful chapter of their history, one Navajo survivor reminisced, “‘We will be strong as long as we are together.’ I think that was what kept us alive. We believed in ourselves and the old stories that the holy people had given to us” (10). Since the poem includes the present day perspective in the car, the story from the past about the man who left his job because of the ghosts, the historical event of the march itself and the survivor’s perspective, the past and present are alive, commingling and cross-fertilizing one another.

“Blue Horses Rush In,” on the other hand, is about the birth of a child. Just as the child is ready to emerge from her mother’s body, all those present hear a great thundering of hooves when a herd of mythical horses gallops past the house. As her mother pushes the child out, the wind outside swirls in the darkness, and the newborn takes her first breath. The father watches and prays. The white horses from the west “ride in on the breath of the wind,” yellow horses from the east bring “the scent of prairie grasses,” blue horses come “snorting from the desert in the south” and black horses from the north “are the lush summers of Montana and still white winters of Idaho” (1-2). In this dramatic manner, Tapahonso weaves her ancestral belief system--the cardinal directions, the colors and qualities of the Navajo cosmos, together with the all-important wind--into a delightful tapestry that documents, in real time, the birth of her relative, Chamisa Bah.

Another important aspect of Native stories is that of timing. King explains:

For Native storytellers, there is generally a proper place and time to tell a story. Some stories can be told anytime. Some are only told in the winter when snow is on the ground or during certain ceremonies or at specific moments in a season. Others can only be told by particular individuals or families (153).

While this certainly is the case, Claire Farrer in *Thunder Rides a Black Horse* provides a more intimate glimpse into this aspect of timing as it occurs in Mescalero Apache storytelling. Because the place where this group of people lives is in the high desert of New Mexico, rainfall is both sparse and precious. Farrer explains that the story about the origin of thunder and rain can only be told when rain is imminent. Storyteller Bernard Second reveals the reasons why this is so when he states, “One only talks about things in context...” (35) and, later, “Apaches know that calling Rain’s ritual name in narrative results in calling the physical presence of rain to oneself” (39). Furthermore, when this story from the Long Ago is retold as it begins to rain, the phenomenon mentioned earlier, of the past and the present coexisting within the story and within lived experience, occurs once again.

In *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*, Keith Basso details several different types of stories, which grow out of the three ways of speaking--ordinary talk, prayer and narratives. Narratives are categorized as myths, historical tales, sagas and gossip (49). Myths are temporally focused in the far distant past, and they are used to enlighten or instruct. Historical tales from long ago are retold as warnings or criticisms. Sagas, which are from more recent times, are purely for entertainment. And gossip, focused in the present, serves

either to malign or to inform (50). These four types of stories are the components of the whole fabric of Western Apache text.

While we might be inclined to think these people are not interested in their own history because, unlike many other tribes, they have never had a tribal historian, the Apaches from Cibecue have quite a different perspective of the past than do most Euramericans. Basso explains:

the past is a well-worn ‘path’ or ‘trail’... which was traveled first by the people’s founding ancestors and which subsequent generations of Apaches have traveled ever since. Beyond the memories of living persons, this path is no longer visible--the past has disappeared--and thus it is unavailable for direct consultation and study. For this reason, the past must be constructed--which is to say, imagined--with the aid of historical materials, sometimes called ‘footprints’ or ‘tracks’... that have survived into the present (31).

Stories and place names are counted among these historical materials. By utilizing materials such as these, ancestral knowledge is accessed.

Speaking with place names is an ancient practice. Still in use today, it is a multi-layered activity, involving human speech, visualization of specific images, oral narratives and memory. When spoken aloud, place names, which are precise descriptions of places, stand in for narratives that “illustrate aspects of ‘ancestral knowledge’” (89). The Western Apache practice of speaking with place names is a type of visual-aural shorthand.

During a relaxed backyard get-together, four individuals (five, if we include the dog) share this rather baffling exchange:

Louise: Shidizhe... (My younger brother...)

Lola: Tsee Hadigaiye yu ‘agodzaa. (It happened at Line of White Rocks Extends Up and Out, at this very place!)

[Pause: 30-45 seconds]

Emily: Ha'aa. Tuzhj' Yaahigaiye yu 'agodzaa. (Yes. It happened at Whiteness Spreads Out Descending To Water, at this very place!)

[Pause: 30-45 seconds]

Lola: Da'anii. K'is Deeschii' Naaditine yu 'agodzaa. (Truly. It happened at Trail Extends Across A Red Ridge With Alder Trees, at this very place!)

Louise: [laughs softly]

Robert: Gozhoo doleel. (Pleasantness and goodness will be forthcoming.)

Lola: Gozhoo doleel. (Pleasantness and goodness will be forthcoming.)

Louise: Shidizhe bini'eshid ne goshe? (My younger brother is foolish, isn't he, dog?) (79).

These individuals must rely on the visual memory of three different places in Western Apache territory, each of which keys into a specific oral text.

Basso helps us sort out just how place names are working to construct meaning in this particular conversation. Lola, Emily and Robert are all offering sympathy and good thoughts to Louise because of an unfortunate situation that has happened to her brother. Rather than criticizing the brother, the others speak the names of three specific places where certain of their ancestors made serious errors in judgment. From their mistakes, those individuals learned how to live better. By speaking these place names, Lola and Emily are bringing to mind those stories as a reminder that bad things sometimes happen, but people learn from them. The conversation draws to a close with Robert affirming that pleasantness and goodness will be forthcoming, and this is seconded by Lola. And with typical Western Apache circumspection, Louise's final comment signifies that she appreciates their thoughtful concern, that she recognizes her brother's foolishness and, by directing it to the dog who cannot respond, that she is done talking about it (99).

In this little book, Basso claims that Native people understand place and

identity in several complex ways. He writes:

For Indian men and women, the past lies embedded in the features of the earth--in canyons and lakes, mountains and arroyos, rocks and vacant fields--which together endow their lands with multiple forms of significance that reach into their lives and shape the ways they think. Knowledge of places is therefore closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one's position in the larger scheme of things, including one's own community, and to securing a confident sense of who one is as a person (34).

Speaking with place names embodies this dual knowledge of place and self. By engaging in this practice, the Western Apache people integrate the texts of their oral stories with their mental images of places, distilling these into a few wisely chosen words.

Reflecting back on the stories associated with the Judeo-Christian heritage, we can see that they are not as attached to specific places as are the Native American narratives we have been sampling. Perhaps this is due to the long history of oral traditions from which these indigenous cultures proceed.

“Where I come from,” writes Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko, “the words most highly valued are those spoken from the heart, unpremeditated and unrehearsed. Among Pueblo people, a written speech or statement is highly suspect because the true feelings of the speaker remain hidden as she reads words that are detached from the occasion and the audience” (Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit 48). This statement explores the suspicion of her people regarding the written word. Although now highly literate, the folks from Laguna have a much longer history of oral tradition; this is why the spoken word is more highly regarded than the written.

Many Native stories incorporate a traditional belief in the power of spoken words to create reality, and this belief is foregrounded in Silko's *Ceremony*. In this text, the author relates a story about the origin of all the world's evil. A group of witches were having a contest to see who could invent the scariest thing. They all took turns, brewing potions, making up spells, enacting animal rituals and the like. The last witch told a story that involved mayhem, disease, bloodshed and terror, and when it was over the others agreed that this story won the contest, hands down. Then, they said, "...what you said just now--it isn't so funny. It doesn't sound so good. We are doing okay without it. We can get along without that kind of thing. Take it back. Call that story back" (138). However, it was impossible to be called back, for once a story has been told, the process of its creation has already been unleashed.

Ceremony begins with a segment of Laguna oral history. Silko incorporates this story about stories in order to demonstrate the significance of narrative to the Pueblo worldview:

I will tell you something about stories,
 [he said]
 They aren't just entertainment.
 Don't be fooled.
 They are all we have, you see,
 all we have to fight off
 illness and death.

You don't have anything
 if you don't have the stories.

Their evil is mighty
 but it can't stand up to our stories.

So they try to destroy the stories
let the stories be confused or forgotten.

They would like that
They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then.

He rubbed his belly.
I keep them here
[he said]
Here, put your hand on it

See, it is moving.
There is life here
for the people.

And in the belly of this story
the rituals and the ceremony
are still growing (Ceremony 2).

It may be difficult for us to conceive of stories as having the capacity to ward off illness, evil or death, yet this is the way the people from Laguna Pueblo understand the creative power of words. Perhaps this belief is due to the key role the oral tradition has played in keeping cultural knowledge and practices alive.

Explaining how orality has worked to preserve her culture, Silko posits,

The oral narrative, or story, became the medium through which the complex of Pueblo knowledge and belief was maintained. Whatever the event or the subject, the ancient people perceived the world and themselves within that world as part of an ancient, continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories (Yellow Woman 30-31).

Oral stories are all interconnected. In his work with oral myth, Claude Levi-Strauss explains how this phenomenon works by describing systems of interlinked narratives that are similar to a child's construction set containing:

Immovable narrative cells... [which] conserve the properties we have found

elsewhere in myths, notably the invariance of internal relations under a series of transformations... It is somewhat as though each narrator had a fixed number of cells at his disposal to begin with and had the right to use them like toy pieces in a game to construct such-and-such a history of which he has a model in his own mind (121).

This concept of invariant cells is extremely important because it shows not only how oral narratives are constructed by arranging and rearranging these component story cells, but also how very long, complex narratives can be remembered and retold.

Each story is a stand-alone segment of a larger story--the story of all that is.

In *Storyteller*, Silko not only places herself securely in the traditional role of storyteller, she also provides wonderful family vignettes, which show exactly how the oral tradition works:

She [Aunt Susie] was of a generation,
 the last generation here at Laguna,
 that passed down an entire culture
 by word of mouth
 an entire history
 an entire vision of the world
 which depended upon memory
 and retelling by subsequent generations...
 As with any generation
 The oral tradition depends upon each person
 listening and remembering a portion
 and it is together--
 all of us remembering what we have heard together--
 that creates the whole story
 the long story of the people (7).

According to Oglala Sioux historian Craig Howe, tribal histories, which were originally all oral, are event-centered. These stories of remembered pasts were and are still required to incorporate four dimensions: spatial, social, spiritual and experiential (164). The spatial element locates events in the specific places where

they occurred. The social dimension, “relates land and identity to the concept of ‘peoplehood,’ a unique community identity differentiated from other tribes and from individual Indian persons” (165). The spiritual aspect is not perceived as something separate; it is the foundational worldview that interpenetrates all aspects of tribal life. In the experiential dimension, all four of these aspects converge because tribal communities “are based not on what the people believe to be true but rather on what they experience as being true” (166). This way of remembering the past through stories is, by its very nature, interactive.

Silko further explicates this notion of interactivity: “The storytelling always includes the audience, the listeners. In fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller’s role is to draw the story out of the listeners” (Yellow Woman 50). In other words, the one telling the story must be hyper-aware of the audience--who they are, what backgrounds they have come from and especially which stories they are most likely to be familiar with. Then she is able to draw the story from those present and tell it in such a way that all are actually participating, whether by interjecting comments or questions, or simply by nodding and murmuring their agreement. Storytelling has also been described by Kroeber as a social contract because it is an agreement between the one telling the story and the ones listening, to actively engage in the process (11).

Silko elaborates further on some of the intricacies of the oral tradition:

But sometimes what we call “memory” and what we call “imagination” are not so easily distinguished. I know Aunt Susie and Aunt Alice would tell me stories they had told me before but with changes in details or descriptions.

The story was the important thing and little changes here and there were really part of the story. There were even stories about the different versions of stories and how they imagined these differing versions came to be. I've heard tellers begin "The way I heard it was...." and then proceed with another story purportedly a version of a story just told but the story they would tell was a wholly separate story, a new story with an integrity of its own, an offspring, a part of the continuing which storytelling must be (Storyteller 227).

The oral tradition is a powerful force, interspersed with many unique nuances. Not only does it work to preserve cultures, orality also allows for the imaginative re-creation of the stories that comprise these cultures.

Since Silko's portrayal of the oral tradition is, in itself, a story of resilience and integration, perhaps we should consider the place of narrative within the discipline that has provided these terms--psychology. In doing so, we find that our minds are indeed hard-wired for story. Very simply, here is the way it works; something happens. An individual who either sees or somehow gets involved with the event remembers it. When the person returns home and gets asked about what happened, the details of the experience are related. Voila, a story is born! If it captures the interest of those to whom it is told, it will undoubtedly get retold, and this is the place where the story begins to take on a life of its own, replete with reasons for the occurrence of the event. "Stories add up to a great human invention," writes social scientist Charles Tilly, "comparable in their own zone--the organization of social relations--to the plow in agriculture" (95). We humans are curious creatures, always wanting to understand what's going on--within us, between us and all around us. We insist on knowing why.

Rather than thinking of humans as reasoning animals, Tilly challenges us to

consider that, “We might even define human beings as reason-giving animals. While, by some definitions, other primates employ language, tools, and even culture, only humans start offering and demanding reasons while young, then continue through life looking for reasons why” (8). In his book, *Why?* Tilly examines four different kinds of reasons: conventions, stories, codes and technical accounts (15). He writes, “All four kinds of reasons commonly do relational work.” This work may confirm, establish, negotiate or repair relations between people (19-20). Since codes and technical accounts are rather specialized justifications used primarily by government officials, the military and people in medical or technical positions, we will not delve into them. Conventions and stories, on the other hand, are everyday occurrences, so these are of interest.

The prime example of the use of conventions that Tilly offers is that of etiquette. Since reasons justify practices, “Supplying appropriate reasons for the situations and relationships at hand helps shape human social life as we know it” (34). Basically, conventions are widely used formulaic reasons, and they are highly effective as long as they are appropriate to the situation in which they are used.

Stories, on the other hand, “provide simplified cause-effect accounts of puzzling, dramatic, problematic, or exemplary events... they help make the world intelligible” (64). More substantive than conventions, verbal stories are tailored to the specific social situations in which they are told. Yet, according to Tilly, all stories provide reasons for events that have already occurred, or that are presently occurring in the world and within ourselves. These reasons may attempt to justify practices, or

they may attempt to generate greater understanding. Often, stories seek to analyze and take issue with reasons provided in other accounts. Stories of other people's experiences often resonate with our own; they touch us in a personal way. And we always want to know why others react in the particular ways they do, as if that will help us understand our own reasons for doing what we do. Perhaps we should consider ourselves reason-seeking animals, rather than reason-giving ones.

Due to this human tendency to seek the reasons for events, and especially for behavior, story has become a valuable tool in the field of mental health within the last two decades. In this context, narrative is seen as the means of "grasping how people create and maintain meaning over time" (Hauser, Golden and Allen 206). If, as Jarl Wahlstrom argues, core changes in the ways individuals make meaning are at the heart of psychological recovery, then it follows that narrative is now considered, "a promising metaphor for integration" (39). The two basic positions regarding narrative are that an ability to create a coherent story leads to psychological resilience, and that good storytelling reflects a capacity to deal with adversity. Resilience can be defined as this ability to deal with very challenging circumstances. In other words, if a person can tell a good story, this will help that one become more resilient, and the ability to tell a good story also demonstrates a measure of resilience. Hauser, Golden and Allen raise a third possibility, that narrative is able to accomplish both of these tasks (208). This position seems to make the most sense.

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) is a groundbreaking diagnostic instrument first introduced in 1985. It demonstrated that, "the way a person told a

story could provide accurate, reliable and useful information about very complex and subtle psychological constellations that had not been experimentally accessed before” (215). Since then, the AAI has been reworked and refined, and has proved to be a highly effective resource for therapists working either with adults or with children. This shows the importance of narrative for gaining greater access to difficult patterns of thinking, which has led to improved diagnoses.

Wahlstrom believes that a disturbed sense of agency arising from inconsistencies in meaning-making, either collective or individual, is at the root of mental illness. Through a process of restructuring personal narratives during treatment, “joint participants in an evolving process of reality construction” come to a place of reclaiming authority in their lives (46). This movement toward a more balanced sense of agency is known as integration, and this is the goal of psychotherapy. Wahlstrom also points out, “Therapy talk becomes subsumed into cultural theories on individuality, emotions, morals and values” (47). Like a pebble dropped into a pool of water, this narrative turn in psychoanalysis is sending out ripples, which are spreading out to influence the larger sphere of public awareness.

Clearly, our stories exert a powerful influence on us. The need to know and explain why things happen the way they do is always going to be a prominent aspect of the human mind, no matter in what direction(s) postmodernism takes us. Because narrative fulfills that need so magnificently, it will continue to be an important part of our experience. Our stories inform us both about our sense of identity and about our sense of belonging, or lack thereof, in a particular place. And since it has historically

played this critical role, it stands to reason that without story, we are lost.

THE STORY OF PLACE

Our language is steeped in visual imagery. In fact, whenever we compare one thing to another, as we constantly do... we are relying on our sense of vision to capture the action or the mood. ~ Diane Ackerman

In this next phase of our journey we delve into place-based writing, which has a tendency to be image-heavy. I begin with feminist art critic and theorist Lucy Lippard's conceptions of place and space in order to establish an understanding of the capacity of place narratives to counteract postmodern dislocation by fulfilling the need for a more grounded discourse. Lippard's perspective will serve as our map of this territory. Then, concentrating on the region of the Southwest, I explore certain Native American literatures of place.

To fully appreciate these Native literatures, however, we must come to terms with the fact that they are profoundly different from those of the dominant culture. In order to properly navigate this terrain, I address certain theoretical considerations specific to Native stories, as well as some of the fundamental ways the values of Native American people tend to differ from those of the dominant culture--those concerning time and space in particular.

Moving toward the center of this investigation, I investigate the contested terrain of the Western frontier, together with its corollary, Manifest Destiny. These interrelated concepts have powerfully shaped the construction of place in the imaginations of the European immigrants, and their legacy is palpable in the

Southwest. The process of claiming and reclaiming land is especially evident at the San Xavier del Bac Mission situated in the heart of the Sonoran Desert, just south of Tucson, Arizona. And because so much of the Southwest is desert country, I also sample a few different literary perspectives of these unique landscapes.

In the final segment of the chapter, I address landscapes of remembrance. These are places where disastrous events have occurred in the past, yet through memory and story, they have become havens of reconciliation and healing. The knowledge that it is possible to heal even some of the most dreadful human activities can be a great comfort.

In *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, Lippard claims that space and place are pivotal concepts. She boldly writes:

Space defines landscape, where space combined with memory defines place... In contemporary criticism, the word 'space' represents the desentimentalized (some would say dehumanized) postmodern version of place. It is used as a neutral sociological and economic synonym for the more literary, aesthetic, cultural sentimental, and sometimes ecological word 'nature'" (9).

If space and place are roughly synonymous, memory must be the ingredient that causes us to become attached to particular landscapes. Throughout the text, Lippard explores nostalgia as a major factor in the way we think about and remember places. In the final chapter, she reveals, "The popularity of 'place' even in academia is suspect on some levels... it indicates that a portion of the multicentered population is in fact longing to belong..." (292). Since the sense of place is so integral to how we perceive ourselves in relation to the world, perhaps we need to consider re-cultivating our landscape narratives so that we can remember where it is that we belong. Simply

stated, one of the fascinating things about place stories is that without them, we are lost.

Abounding in visual imagery, place-based writing is appealing precisely because it provides us with a sense of regaining our bearings when we feel adrift, physically or psychologically in our postmodern world. The sense of longing to belong that Lippard mentions is certainly apparent in the Southwestern United States where, for literally thousands of years, many different groups of people have taken up residence. Not only has this location inspired significant visual art, it has also been the birthplace of an amazing body of Native American literature.

It is important to note that while contemporary modes of literary criticism can be used for Native American literatures with marginal success, they cannot actually do them justice. Therefore, new ways of theorizing these works must be developed. Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish literary scholar Louis Owens explains how critical certain background information is for understanding Native fiction:

Without an awareness of the nature of traditional trickster narratives, for instance, a reader is likely to be lost and perhaps outraged by Vizenor's *Bearheart*. . . Similarly, without knowing the story of Yellow Woman from Laguna and Navajo mythology, a reader will fail to comprehend the fullness of *Ceremony* just as one must recognize the wedded contraries of the Blackfoot trickster-creators, Old Man and Old Woman, to correctly read Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (10).

Owens points out the requirement for at least a minimal knowledge of the oral traditions of those who are the subject of Native literatures, in order for these works to be read properly. He also cites Arnold Krupat's argument for the need "to formulate a new theoretical discourse that may encourage dialogue with this literature rather than

merely overlaying it with an authoritative and ill-fitting European theory-grid” (38). In addition, a more holistic type of criticism should be developed so as to avoid the problems that arise from attempting to break these texts apart for analysis, because they lose their holistic interrelatedness when compartmentalized. Taking all three of these ideas into consideration--the oral stories, dialogical theory and holism--could be a good place to begin creating a new literary paradigm appropriate to Native literatures.

Creek poet Joy Harjo provides a conceptual framework in her poem, “RECONCILIATION: A Prayer” that can help establish a point of entry into Native American worldviews:

- I. We gather at the shore of all knowledge as peoples who were put here by a god who wanted relatives.
 This god was lonely for touch, and imagined herself as a woman, with children to suckle,
 to sing with--to continue the web of the terrifyingly beautiful cosmos of her womb.
 This god became a father who wished for others to walk beside him in the belly of creation.
 This god laughed and cried with us as a sister at the sweet tragedy of our predicament--foolish humans--
 Or built a fire, as our brother to keep us warm.
 This god who grew to love us became our lover, sharing tables of food enough for everyone in this whole world.
- II. Oh sun, moon, stars, our other relatives peering at us from the inside of god’s house walk with us as we climb into the next century naked but for the stories we have of each other. Keep us from giving up in this land of nightmares which is also the land of miracles.
 We sing our song which we’ve been promised has no beginning or end.
- III. All acts of kindness are lights in the war for justice.
- IV. We gather up these strands broken from the web of life. They shiver with our love, as we call them the names of our relatives and carry them to our home made of the four directions and sing:
 Of the south, where we feasted and were given new clothes.

Of the west, where we gave up the best of us to the stars as food for the battle.
 Of the north, where we cried because we were forsaken by our dreams.
 Of the east because returned to us is the spirit of all that we love.
 for the Audre Lorde Memorial 1993 (Harjo xv-xvi)

The four-part structure of this poem demonstrates the traditional belief in a quadripartite universe. The four cardinal directions encapsulate this belief. Different North American tribes assign different colors and attributes to these four directions, but they are universally acknowledged. Not only do these directions represent the four seasons, they also correlate with the seasons of human life--birth, maturity, old age and death.

Harjo's play with language both disturbs and delights. A father-mother god who wanted relatives and was lonely for touch? A god who laughed and cried with the foolish humans? A god who became sister, brother and lover? What kind of a creation story is this? Welcome to the dimension of indigenous thought--where the sun, the moon and the stars are all relatives of the humans. This is the place of promise, where human song as the oral tradition stretches forth, without beginning or end.

What is time really? Time, conceived of as an imaginary line with the point of origin being either the Biblical creation or the scientific conception of the birth of the universe, is a construct of Western civilization. Events of history can all be assigned a place on this timeline. It can also be neatly divided up into the hours, minutes, seconds and even nanoseconds that chart the course of the passing days, weeks, months and years. While this timeline can be a useful notion, it is not the only

way to think about time.

In indigenous thought, time is cyclic. The sun passes through the dome of the sky; the moon goes through its waxing and waning phases; constellations shift their positions; the seasons turn; creatures are born, mature, grow old and die. Humans have observed and documented all of these phenomena. Life as we know it cycles through phases.

Time can also be conceived of as a child's toy slinky of infinite length, which may be stretched so that the coils are far apart from one another, or compressed until no space is readily visible between them. This cyclic model of time, with its inherent capacity for expansion and contraction, is foundational to Native peoples' experience. When the time-slinky is extended, the past seems far removed, yet it is always directly linked with the present. When compressed, the past and present merge in what has become known as the mythic present.

Farrer, who is an anthropologist-folklorist, explains the mythic present from the perspective of the people she has worked with for thirty years--the Mescalero Apache:

What mainstream Americans consider to have happened long ago, if it happened at all, is real and present during everyday life on reservations. There is a co-presence of events in which the Warrior Twins engaged and those taking place around a dinner table; this is the mythic present. Both the Long Ago and the Now are present together in thought, song, narrative, everyday life, and certainly in religious and ritual life... It is the oscillating movement between the mythic present and the lived present, as I call what we perceive reality, that gives contemporary Indian reservations their special character, their sense of depth, their roots, their rationale and exemplar (2-3).

This particular way of perceiving time is common among the people indigenous to the

Americas. Especially during ceremonies, the coils of the time-slinky get compressed when ancient tribal stories are reenacted by appointed tellers.

In *Almanac of the Dead*, present day storyteller Silko writes:

For hundreds of years white men had been telling the people of the Americas to forget the past; but now the white man Marx came along and he was telling people to remember. The old-time people had believed the same thing: they must reckon with the past because within it lay seeds of the present and future. They must reckon with the past because within it lay this present moment and also the future moment (311).

This statement reflects the holistic nature of cyclic time, as opposed to the compartmentalized nature of linear time. By old-time people, Silko means those Pueblo people who were active participants in the oral tradition. Reckoning with the past was an important aspect of life for them because the oral narratives speak of how events that happened in the Long Ago often recur, sometimes in unfamiliar guises. Due to the circularity of time, this phenomenon can be depended on. As the saying goes, what goes around comes around.

Time is intimately connected with space. Because indigenous peoples perceive time as cyclic, their worldviews are oriented spatially. These cyclic-spatial orientations are fertile ground from which religious sensibilities rather different from those of the dominant culture have grown. Quechua scholar Sandy Grande argues that these societies recognize certain places as being sacred because of their traditional understanding of both time and space (67). She further explicates these space-time connections by quoting Vine Deloria Jr.:

Judgment inevitably intrudes into the conception of religious reality whenever a temporal definition is used. Almost always the temporal consideration

revolves around the problem of good and evil, and the inconsistencies that arise as this basic relationship is defined turn religious belief into ineffectual systems of ethics. But it would seem likely that whereas religions that are spatially determined can create a sense of sacred time that originates in the specific location, it is exceedingly difficult for a religion, once bound to history, to incorporate sacred places into its doctrines. Space generates time, but time has little relationship to space (67-68).

Deloria is showing how the Western mode of linear time and its influence on religious thought differs sharply from the sense of time as sacred found in indigenous cultures, and these have always been spatially based.

Donald Fixico, a Creek scholar of American Indian history from the University of Kansas, explains the spatial orientation of knowledge within traditional Native American cultures:

‘Indian thinking’ is ‘seeing’ things from a perspective emphasizing that circles and cycles are central to the world and that all things are related within the universe. For Indian people who are close to their tribal traditions and native values, they think within a native reality consisting of a physical and metaphysical world... ‘Seeing’ is visualizing the connection between two or more entities or beings, and trying to understand the relationship between them within the full context of things identified within a culturally based system... This holistic perception is the indigenous ethos of American Indians and how they understand their environment, the world, and the universe (1-2).

By this, Fixico shows not only how knowledge is gained, but that this type of understanding is spatially based, relational and inclusive. In traditional indigenous societies, knowledge accrues from lived experience, hence the importance of respecting the wisdom of those who have survived into old age. This lived experience is powerfully grounding; subsistence farming, hunting and gathering on the land are the foundations for understanding life in a spatial manner.

Silko, in her four major works, *Ceremony*, *Storyteller*, *Almanac of the Dead*

and *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, has created a map of Laguna cultural terrain by weaving segments of traditional oral stories into her texts. In doing so, she has also re-created Thought Woman's spider web, which is the spiritual point of origin for the people of Laguna Pueblo. Speaking about the international border south of Tucson, Arizona, Silko's character Calabazas demonstrates this spatial way of thinking:

‘We don't believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that. We are here thousands of years before the first whites. We are here before maps or quit claims. We know where we belong on this earth. We have always moved freely. North-south. East-west. We pay no attention to what isn't real. Imaginary lines. Imaginary minutes and hours. Written law. We recognize none of that. And we carry a great many things back and forth. We don't see any border. We have been here and this has continued thousands of years. We don't stop. No one stops us...’ (Almanac 216).

In other words, traditional peoples of the Americas know an inclusive reality that is bigger than the compartmentalizations of Euramerican time and space. Calabazas continues, “‘We have always had the advantage because this country is ours--it's our backyard. We know it in the black of night. We know it in the July heat of hell. The gringos come in and the going for us gets rough. But we just get tougher. That's how it's always been ’” (218). Silko shows how their intimate knowledge of the space of this territory has served the indigenes well.

The mystique of the space known as the American West is perhaps best embodied in the frontier, that place of great encounters. Owens writes, “‘Seen from the stock Euramerican perspective, frontier is the cutting edge of civilization. Beyond the frontier is the incomprehensible ‘other’ ’” (44). This untamed space had to

become knowable by mapping, exploring and encircling with boundaries, in order that it might be assimilated into the master narrative of Westward expansion.

Price accurately identifies the Euramerican perception of Western space when she writes, “It was the perceived *blankness* of the Western landscape in the national geoimaginary--a form of borderlessness--upon which white expansionism was predicated” (46). It is the sense of blankness that is the origin of that infamous construction, manifest destiny. This blankness itself, however, was carefully orchestrated through the planned erasure of the original inhabitants of the American West--their primary sources of food, their ways of life, their histories, their languages, even their very presence.

This mindset of erasure undoubtedly stemmed from the Europeans who believed they had “discovered” the New World. Owens elaborates on the complex psycho-social forces at work in Manifest Destiny:

Having no history, no ‘place’ within the landscape, the European American can only define it in abstract, broadly aesthetic terms that enable him to subsume it into his own romantic narrative. In such an instance, and throughout the acting out of the American metanarrative, the North American continent becomes a kind of deadly theme park in the Euramerican imagination, ‘free land’ as Frederick Jackson Turner would call it, for the manifest imagination in the process of creating its own hyperreality (8).

This is a fascinating way to think about the wide open spaces of the West, as a hyperreal, yet deadly theme park. Because the European newcomers did not have a sense of historical rootedness in the New World as the Native peoples did, they had to construct one through a romanticizing metanarrative.

While reflecting on some of the historical processes that have shaped

America, Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz provides this vision of Manifest Destiny:

It was a national quest, dictated by economic motives. Europe was hungry for raw material, and America was abundant forest, rivers, land.

Many of them
 built their sod houses
 without windows.
 Without madness.
 But fierce, o
 with a just determination.
 Consulting axioms
 and the dream called America.
 Cotton Mather was no fool.
 A few remembered
 Andrew Jackson,
 knew who he was,
 ruminating, savoring
 fresh Indian blood.
 Style is a matter
 of preference,
 performance,
 judgment yearning
 to be settled quickly.
 The axiom
 would be the glory of America
 at last,
 no wastelands,
 no forgiveness.
 The child would be sublime (16-17).

This child of the European colonial imagination is none other than our America.

Price also makes the observation that, “There is a master narrative at work in all place stories, one that constructs identity at individual as well as collective levels by laying claim to land through stories” (27). It seems there is a complex interaction between identity construction and the narrative process of constructing place.

Furthermore, she argues, “To say that place is conjured is not to say that place, landscape, and identity are somehow powerless or immaterial. It is, rather, to note

that the power of place lies in the politics of its production, and that such politics is suffused with, not apart from, narrative, myth and ritual” (31).

The mission San Xavier Del Bac is a perfect example of the politics of production that Price is referring to. The White Dove of the Desert, as she is sometimes called, lies nine miles south of Tucson and dominates the desert landscape. Jesuit priest, Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, first came to the village of Wa:k in 1692, renaming it San Xavier del Bac, and in 1700 he began to build a church there. Whether it was ever finished and where its exact location was, remains a mystery. What is known, however, is that he was the first to bring Christianity to the desert dwelling Tohono O’odham. Kino died in 1711 at another location. In the 1750s, a second church was built by another “blackrobe,” Father Alonso Espinoza; this edifice did not survive either. Following the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish empire, a group of Franciscans began construction of the present church in 1783. It was completed in 1797 (Walker 17).

In another turn of events, the Franciscans were ordered by the Mexican government to leave in 1827, and were not allowed to return for another 76 years. The church was then abandoned to the elements. The Jesuits were permitted to return in 1863, but their stay only lasted for one year. They did manage, however, to establish a school at the mission, which led to “... the first educational appropriation in the Arizona Territory” (Walker 32).

Historically, the missions served their communities by providing food and spiritual sustenance, and they also operated as supply stations for settlers and miners.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of San Xavier is that its interior “is a classroom of Catholicism where the history and the tenets of the religion could be taught to the new converts and the yet-to-be-converted” (Walker 22). Long before the school was built at the mission, visual learning was taking place within the church’s walls. Identities were thus constructed: the priests as educators and the Natives as pure fools. This is the story the European religious told themselves as they laid claim to place.

What is of even greater interest than this history is the way this portion of the Sonoran desert where San Xavier was built got named and claimed. Originally, this land belonged to no one, but was occupied by its indigenous inhabitants; then it became a part of New Spain called the Pimeria Alta, or land of the upper Pimas. This was when Father Kino re-named the village San Xavier del Bac. Following the Mexican Revolution of 1810, it was part of Mexico, and then became part of the United States in 1854. This shows the shifting winds of power and politics, all of which left their mark on this stunning mission in the desert.

According to Price, “The term ‘desert’ harkens to the Judeo-Christian understanding of deserts as wildernesses, comprising any uninhabited (deserted) places, regardless of relative humidity” (44). This sense of the desert reflects Anglo perceptions of the harshness in the arid landscape of the Southwest. Silko, however, sees the area in a different light:

In the high desert plateau country, all vegetation, even weeds and thorns, becomes special, and all life is precious and beautiful because without the plants, the insects and the animals, human beings living here cannot survive. Perhaps human beings long ago noticed the devastating impact human activity can have on plants and animals; maybe this is why tribal cultures devised the

stories about humans and animals intermarrying, and the clans that bind humans to animals and plants through a whole complex of duties (Yellow Woman 69).

This way of seeing the desert is reminiscent of Fixico's concept of Native peoples' relational and inclusive understanding of the universe. In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko paints a somewhat different portrait of the desert, which adds to the larger picture:

The old people did not call the desert Mother for nothing; they did not cry in vain. Once Liria had asked Calabazas what their protection was from outsiders, and he had pointed at the sun and then out at the creosote flats and rocky foothills of cactus and brush. 'We are safe for as long as we have all this,' Calabazas had told her, and at the time he said it, he had believed there could never be any end to it (222).

To the newcomers, every feature of the desert landscape--the rocks, vegetation, arroyos and mesas--all had a tendency to look the same. This is why they were easily lost in the trackless expanse. For the Native people, however, the Mother desert has always been a haven of safety.

Silko makes the claim in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of Spirit*, that "The Pueblo people and the land and the stories are inseparable" (14). Elaborating on this interdependence between the environment and the Pueblo peoples, she explains:

One of the other advantages that we Pueblos have enjoyed is that we have always been able to stay with the land. Our stories cannot be separated from their geographical locations, from actual physical places on the land. We were not relocated like so many Native American groups who were torn away from their ancestral land. And our stories are so much a part of these places that it is almost impossible for future generations to lose them--there is a story connected with every place, every object in the landscape (Yellow Woman 58).

This is the way Pueblo identity is irrevocably linked with their geography, through narrative. This ancestral land has been home to the people and they have been telling

stories about this place for so long that the phrase, time immemorial, really begins to make sense.

Price argues that stories become permanently attached to places through a process of inscription. She writes, “By thinking of landscape and narrative as working in tandem, we understand that when culture-stories are physically inscribed in the land, they are accorded a fixity” (24). Thus it is that Silko has brought the heroes and heroines from Laguna oral tradition to life for non-Natives, especially in *Ceremony* and in *Storyteller*: Spider Woman, Kochininako, the Hero Twins, Buffalo Man, Reed Woman and her sister Corn Woman, the Gambler and Sun Man. These are the personas who inhabit the culture-stories inscribed into the landscape, not only in and around Laguna Pueblo, but throughout the entire region.

From the perspective of the dominant culture, “Landscapes not only allow us to tell stories about ourselves to ourselves and thereby construct collective identities, they also allow us to write them down. In telling tales through landscape, speech becomes writing” (Price 24). This kind of landscape writing is a part of our literary history. It is the Euramerican equivalent of Native place stories.

Silko offers another way to think about landscape, one that is certainly applicable to the times in which we live:

So long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading. ‘A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view’ does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow *outside or separate from* the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on

(Yellow Woman 27).

This is an important distinction because within Native worldviews, nothing is compartmentalized. As impossible as it would be to separate the physical earth from the landscape, so it is equally impossible to separate the viewer from her or his surroundings. Animate and inanimate, all are a part of the whole, and this is reflected in Laguna storytelling. From this perspective, there is no need to reclaim identity, only the need to keep remembering the stories that tell how the people and the land are one.

Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* begins and ends with a story about the open-pit uranium mine near Paguate Village:

It had been 1949... The old-timers had been dead set against ripping open Mother Earth so near to the holy place of emergence. But those old ones had been dying off and already were in the minority. So the Tribal Council had gone along with the mine because the government gave them no choice, and the mine gave them jobs... [There were] raging arguments made by the old-time people who had warned all the people would pay, and pay terribly, for this desecration, this crime against all living things" (34-35).

Then, a giant stone snake had mysteriously appeared at the base of the piles of mine tailings. Some of the old folks believed that the snake was the legendary Maahastryu, returning once more to the people. They turned it into a shrine (761). At first, it seemed as though the snake had been trying to escape the tailings, or perhaps it was getting ready to gobble up the next mesa. Then, the price of uranium fell and the mine was closed.

The snake didn't care if people were believers or not; the work of the spirits and prophecies went on regardless. Spirit beings might appear anywhere, even near open-pit mines. The snake didn't care about the uranium tailings;

humans had desecrated only themselves with the mine, not the earth. Burned and radioactive, with all humans dead, the earth would still be sacred. Man was too insignificant to desecrate her (762).

Ortiz tells a different kind of place story in the following poem--one that highlights the interconnectedness of place and memory:

In 1969
 XXXX Coloradoans
 were killed in Vietnam.
 In 1978
 XXXX Coloradoans
 were killed on the highways.
 In 1864,
 there were no Indians killed.
 Remember My Lai.
 In fifty years,
 nobody knew
 what happened.
 It wasn't only the Senators.
 Remember Sand Creek (15).

This forgotten event was the massacre of a peaceful group of Arapaho and Southern Cheyenne that occurred on November 29, 1864 at Sand Creek, in Southeastern Colorado. One hundred five women and children and twenty-eight men were slaughtered by a group of seven hundred heavily armed soldiers under the command of the Reverend Colonel Chivington. The ultimate irony of this attack is explained by Ortiz: "A U.S. flag presented by President Lincoln in 1863 to Black Kettle [the Cheyenne elder who went to Denver to express the group's desire for peace two months before the massacre] in Washington, D.C. flew from a pole above the elder's lodge on that gray dawn. The People had been assured they would be protected by the flag" (8).

In spite of this horrific occurrence and its subsequent repression through Anglo non-remembrance, Sand Creek has become a landscape of remembrance through Native storytelling, just as the open-pit uranium mine near Laguna has. Below are the opening and closing poems from Ortiz's collection, *from Sand Creek*, which demonstrate not only a hopeful spirit, but also a clear sense of healing and of reconciliation:

This America
has been a burden
of steel and mad
death,
but, look now,
there are flowers
and new grass
and a spring wind
rising
from Sand Creek (9).

* * * * *

That dream
shall have a name
after all,
and it will not be vengeful
but wealthy with love
and compassion
and knowledge.
And it will rise
in this heart
which is our America (95).

Price got it exactly right when she wrote, "Stories matter. They can move mountains. They can inspire the ultimate sacrifice" (23). I think Silko would agree. In the final chapter of *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko's character Sterling finds his way, at long last, to the family sheep camp just beyond the uranium mine. "The taste of the

water told him he was home. 'Home.' Even thinking the word made his eyes fill with tears" (757). As long as we know where home is, we cannot be lost.

CONVERGENCE

Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and innumerable gradations of color. Imagine a world before the “beginning was the word.” ~ Stan Brakhage

In this final segment of our journey, we delve into a bit of history in order to understand how our world has become so text-heavy. In spite of this dominance of text within our iconoclastic culture, place-based writing, which can be characterized as aborescent, has already found a niche. Our blossoming visual culture is affecting literature in profound ways also, and this has led to the development of rhizome-like literary hybrids that bring texts and images together in creative new ways. The implications for this literary renaissance are that it is reconfiguring the balance of power within the arts, which signals the end of postmodernism as we know it, and the dawning of an entirely new era.

The separation of text and image in the Western hemisphere can be traced to the religious fervor for iconoclasm inspired by the cult of Yahwism. As discussed in my first chapter, Genesis Two was originally written by the earliest biblical writer known to us as J. Between 950 and 900 B.C.E., this author composed what Bloom calls the Book of J, which includes parts of Genesis, Exodus and Numbers (9). We will never know to what extent the J source was edited by later writers and redactors. What is apparent, however, is that the editing was performed by individuals who were intent on preserving the purity of their religious cult by attempting to obscure J’s

lively imagery.

Scholars believe the first revision of J was done by the Elohist between 850 and 800 B.C.E. Deuteronomy is believed to have been written between 650 and 600, which may have added another layer of revision to the J text. Then, between 550 and 500 B.C.E., the Priestly text was written. And in 400 B.C.E. one known as the Redactor edited and put the J, E, D and P texts together in what became known as the Five Books of Moses (7-8). The significance of all of this is that we no longer have a clear sense of what the earliest texts of J were trying to accomplish. According to Bloom, “Archaic Judaism is all but totally unknown to us” (33). What is clear, however, is that from the time of Ezra through the destruction of the Second Temple, the cult of Yahwism was transformed by the iconoclastic impulses of a normative Judaism into a religion of the book.

The zeal of the British Reformation reflected this earlier iconoclasm. Benson Bobrick’s *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired* documents the bloody history that ensued following the invention of the printing press. Before literacy became widespread in Western Europe, clerics relied on images to teach spiritual precepts. As soon as printed text became readily available, the enmity between image and text was born. The first books printed were Scriptures and other sacred texts; these were greatly desired because they enabled people to experience a greater sense of the Sacred without the intervention of the clergy (152). The result of this was that over the course of time, the earlier reverence for images became translated into a reverence for text, though not without strife.

From the time of John Wycliffe, who was the first to begin translating the Bible into English 1380, through the mostly tolerant reign of Queen Elizabeth and even into the time of James I when the Authorized Version of the Bible was finally completed, tensions between religious factions threatened to tear the country apart. The Holy Roman Catholic Church was the cause of much of this trouble. First, Pope Gregory VII declared the church's infallibility and invested the office of the pope with monarchical powers in the eleventh century (23). Later, Pope John XXII inaugurated the sale of indulgences in 1316, which enabled "anyone with money to sin with impunity, so long as he could pay the 'fine'" (33). This enabled the Church to amass wealth in earnest, which had the tendency to encourage excessive luxury on the part of clerics. Urban VI attempted to put a stop to these abuses beginning with his cardinals, but he inadvertently precipitated a defection that resulted in the Great Schism with two popes in 1378 (46). Wycliffe was disgusted by all of this, and he believed that in order to liberate Christians from papal corruption, the text of Scripture must be made available in their own language, so people could formulate their own judgments (50). This was the beginning of a long and bitter struggle to translate the Bible into English.

Throughout the Reformation, iconoclasm became the *modus operandi* of purging the idolatrous images from Christianity. Under the direction of Thomas Cromwell, King Henry's principal advisor, English translations of the Bible were allowed into the country, after having been suppressed and banned since 1382. Additionally, Cromwell undertook a program of secularizing Church property. In the

process, church buildings were destroyed, sacred images were vandalized, even “the bones of St. Thomas of Canterbury [were] pilfered from their shrine” (154). This was too much for the commoners, already stressed by rising prices and taxes, and it caused them to rebel in what became known as the Pilgrimage of Grace. There were, of course, many complications and reversals throughout the course of the Reformation. Perhaps its darkest hour was when Mary, the daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon ascended the throne. During her three year reign, she sent over three hundred Protestants to be burned at the stake (172). The legacy of all of this zeal to set Christianity aright is the dominance of text over image, and this continues to be the norm in Western cultures.

Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders trace text’s historic rise to power in *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind*. They write, “Only the alphabet has the power to create ‘language’ and ‘words,’ for the word does not emerge until it is written down” (7). This startling idea becomes more clear when the authors later assert that, “Like words and text, memory is a child of the alphabet. Only after it had become possible to fix the flow of speech in phonetic transcription did the idea emerge that knowledge--information--could be held in the mind as in a store” (15). These bold statements are based on ground-breaking research done by Milman Parry and Albert Lord on the folksingers of Serbia in the 1930s, and that work substantiated Parry’s thesis that the Iliad was neither the work of an editor or a poet, but of an unlettered singer who was thoroughly familiar with on-the-spot composing, drawing from stock words and phrases of the oral tradition (18-19). In fact, these two authors confidently

claim, “it is now clear that a purely oral tradition knows no division between recollection and doing” (15). Reflecting back to our explorations of Native American orality in chapter one, we can see that this holistic unity between thought and action is indeed the case. The perspective of Illich and Sanders is that the alphabet has given birth to both memory and words, and it is thereby largely responsible for the development of Western Civilization.

Leonard Shlain, however, takes somewhat of a different view of the alphabet. In *The Alphabet versus the Goddess*, he writes, “The introduction of the written word, and then the alphabet, into the social intercourse of humans initiated a fundamental change in the way newly literate cultures understood their reality” (7). He acknowledges the incontrovertible benefits of literacy, yet he believes the fundamental change brought about by alphabetization is what is responsible for the upsurge of patriarchy and misogyny, the demise of goddess worship and even religious wars.

While there is much we can disagree with Shlain about, there is also something we ought to consider. A surgeon by training, he bases his argument on the known asymmetry between the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Patients suffering either from strokes or severe head injuries have clearly demonstrated that specific brain functions are located within each of the hemispheres. Shlain explains:

If a right-handed person has a major stroke in the controlling left hemisphere, with few exceptions, a catastrophic *deficit of speech, right-sided muscle paralysis and/or dysfunction in abstract thinking* will occur. Conversely, damage to the right brain will impair the afflicted person’s ability to *solve spatial problems, recognize faces, appreciate music, besides paralyzing the*

left side of the body (18).

Because of this lateralization scheme, the right-handed majority of the populace has a left hemisphere that is in charge of speech, abstraction and numeracy, which indicates this hemisphere is largely responsible for our ability to read and write. The right hemisphere of the brain, governing music appreciation, spatial relationships and face recognition as it does, deals more with images. Whether we wish to agree with Shlain's hypothesis that the invention of the alphabet has led to the debasing of women and a tendency to rely on linear thinking, it is clear that alphabetization is indeed responsible for a huge cultural shift--away from images and toward text.

Running counter to our dominant cultural impulse of iconoclasm, landscape and environmental writing are rooted in visual imagery; perhaps we should consider them literatures of image. Often appealing to a deep desire to get away from all of the complications of postmodern human existence, most place-centered writing attempts to convey the flavor of the local. Environmental writing, on the other hand, tends to persuade readers to take on a greater sense of responsibility for pollution and global warming. Native American literatures, however, take a different tack. According to King,

The magic of Native literature--as with other literatures--is not in the themes of the stories--identity, isolation, loss, ceremony, community, maturation, home--it is in the way meaning is refracted by cosmology, the way understanding is shaped is shaped by cultural paradigms (112).

Hence we have the need to take these cultural paradigms into account. Still, this body of writing does rely heavily on visual images, as Basso has made abundantly clear.

Owens explains that Euramericans often read Native literatures as a kind of literary sight-seeing. *Why not jump into our little story-mobile and take a tour of Indian country, just for fun?* This mode of thinking, however, is extremely limited. What Owens proposes instead is to consider Native literatures as frontier space--a place of encountering the Other, and discovering that this Other is simply *another*. He argues, "It is in our interest and the interests of our students to conceive of this literature and our classrooms not as contained territory but as frontier space, which... is multidirectional, uncontained, unstable, and always plotting return visits" (42-43). In re-appropriating this baggage-laden term frontier, he turns it on its head because it can no longer be considered the place where civilization ends, but the place where we can strive to read across and between cultures. In this way we resist homogeneity, making a space where cultural difference is not dangerous, but rather, a terrain to be explored open-mindedly.

In order to understand the place of these literatures of image in a culture that fears and resists image, we must turn to W.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory*. In this work, Mitchell explicates the dichotomy between text and image in this way: "There is an ancient tradition, of course, which argues that language is the essential human attribute: 'man' is the 'speaking animal.' The image is the medium of the subhuman, the savage, the 'dumb' animal, the child, the woman, the masses" (24). He does, however, take note of the fact that Scripture tells us that humans were created in the image and likeness of God, just to show how deep-seated our ambivalence toward images really is. The most critical assertion Mitchell makes, however, is that we are

presently in the midst of a pictorial turn (15) where images are proliferating and coming into their own. As a result, more complex relationships between image and text are becoming evident.

In order to understand how this pictorial turn is affecting us, we need to delve into the study of human perception. Richard L. Gregory analyzes how the human capacity of vision is unique in the animal kingdom. In “Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing,” he writes:

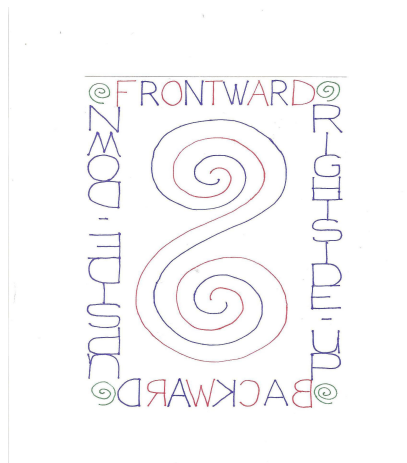
What is so special about human vision? We learn a lot from observing other animals; but only humans can draw or paint representations, and only humans have a structured language. It turns out that both pictures and language depend on imaginative use of ambiguities... It was presentations of alternative realities, and playing with fantasies through ambiguities, that released mankind from the tyranny of reflexes and tropisms of our distant ancestors (38).

Whether or not we want to agree with his assertion that other animals do not create representational art or structured languages, the notion that imaginative play with ambiguities is the way humans differ from other species is certainly worth considering. Gregory also compares the act of perceiving with the creation of a scientific hypothesis. While this at first seems a bit radical, we surely can agree with his statement that hypotheses are always subject to possible “ambiguities... distortions, paradoxes, [and/] or fictions” (38). If perception is likewise susceptible to these types of things, which certainly seems to be the case, then perhaps it actually is our imagination, interpreting what we see through our cultural filters, that informs the visual process.

Building on the foundations of culturally-constructed ways of seeing, S. Brent

Plate describes the study of visual culture as, “an interdisciplinary field of inquiry drawing on established disciplines like art history, graphic design, cultural anthropology, and sociology, and on newer fields of study like gender studies and ethnic studies, among others” (7-8). It is an academic field that began to emerge in the early 1990s, and focuses primarily on the visual elements in everyday life, as opposed to those found within the fine arts. Visual culture studies seek to understand the “connection between *how we see* and *how we live*” (9). This field not only informs, but is also informed by Mitchell’s work with text and image.

One of the first moves Mitchell makes is to argue for a revived iconology, which he defines as “a mutually critical encounter with the discourse of ideology” (25). He develops this line of thinking throughout the text, focusing on the need to go beyond simple comparison. In fact, Mitchell asserts that it is imperative to take into account, “the whole ensemble of *relations* between media...” (89). This refreshing perspective leads us to understand how a conversation between text and image can come about.



1. *Inside Out*

In his section on textual pictures, Mitchell argues that “The pictorial turn in contemporary culture has not just changed the way visual culture is produced and consumed. It has also raised new questions, and new versions of very old questions, about the place of visibility in language” (109). This statement is an excellent descriptor of what Jonathan Safran Foer is actually accomplishing in his novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, asking questions about the place of the visual amid the textual. Counting the fifteen page flipbook at the end as one, there are a total of 105 images in Foer’s text. These include signs, business cards, letters, messages, symbols, red ink, crossed out text, biographical cards, Grandfather’s over-printed text, the flipbook pages and all of the photographs. Many of these are integrated into the text, while others seem fairly random, with tangential connections to the story.

We could certainly say that Foer’s book is a postmodern read with enough of a storyline to it that it keeps readers eagerly turning the pages. In this, we would not be incorrect. However, the peculiar way the text and the images seem to be interacting with each other, indicates that we need to explore this terrain in greater depth.

In his section on pictorial texts, Mitchell writes:

Texts present, in general, a greater threat to concepts of the ‘integrity’ or ‘purity’ of images than vice versa. For one thing, they unavoidably and literally impose themselves within and around the pictorial object... The images in texts, by contrast, are generally regarded as immaterial, figurative, and dispensable... (209).

He also points out that we nearly always explicate pictures with text or verbal discourse, yet we almost never use pictures to interpret text. Strange, but true.

Furthermore, Mitchell argues that, “The notion of an ‘iconology of the text,’ of a thorough rereading or reviewing of texts in the light of visual culture is still only a hypothetical possibility” (210). While this was probably the case in 1994 when *Picture Theory* was published, Foer’s novel, published in 2005, indicates that things are changing.

Examining Foer’s text more closely, it becomes apparent that more is going on than simply a conversation between the words and the images. Because of the way he has constructed the physical layout of the book, it is quite possible, and in fact quite likely, for readers to think in terms of an iconology of text. This is because directly after the red endpapers, the novel begins with three black and white photographs. First, is an empty keyhole, next a group of flying birds, and last is a group of apartment windows. Then comes the usual title page followed by a dedication. At the end of the novel, just before the red endpapers, comes a fifteen page flipbook, also black and white photography. This format automatically sets readers up to read the text in light of visual culture.

Moving into the story, one of the first things we discover about Oskar is that he makes a text of his body by deliberately bruising himself. Just over a year after his father’s death at the World Trade Center, he finds a key in a mysterious vase way up on the highest shelf in his dad’s closet; this is how his quest to become closer to his father begins. In Oskar’s words, “I zipped myself all the way into the sleeping bag of myself ...[and] gave myself a bruise” (37) because his mom and Ron were laughing at the very moment of his discovery of the key.

The next morning, Oskar begins fabricating a trail of lies, first by telling his mother he isn't feeling well enough to go to school. He even tells her that he took his temperature and it was 100.7 (38). He does this in order to protect his secret mission, which he believes will lead him to more information about his father--locating the lock that the key will open. These lies are invisible texts, each one carefully counted and accounted for by Oskar.

Another interesting artifact made by Oskar is the special book that he keeps tucked between his bed and the wall, *Stuff That Happened to Me* (52). Directly after this book is introduced comes a series of twelve images without explanatory text. All of them are black and white, except for the word purple, which is written in green ink. It seems these are the pages of his special book, but we are never completely sure.

And perhaps the most fascinating thing about Oskar is the way he hides the phone containing his dad's last messages. Incredibly smart, he steals some of his father's emergency money, goes to Radio Shack, buys an identical phone, takes it home and records the greeting from their original phone on it. He then hides the first phone under several layers of junk in his closet. He says that all of this is just to protect his mother (68). What he actually ends up protecting through these covert actions, is the text of his father's last moments of life.

Going back to Mitchell for a moment, we also come across the concept of the imagetext, which he resists defining outright. He writes, "The suturing of the imagetext, then, is not a symmetrical or invariant relationship, but depends on the institutional context of the medium in which it appears" (210). The reason he calls it

an asymmetrical suturing is that the relationship between text and image is not evenly balanced. While Mitchell explores this dialectic as it appears in the institutions of painting, sculpture and photography, we shall examine how it works in Foer's novel.

Oskar's texts are simply fascinating. While Oskar's lies are imagined texts designed to keep his mission secret, his special book, *Stuff That Happened to Me*, seems to be a text made almost entirely of images, most of which never actually happened to him. In addition, he goes to extreme lengths to keep the physical artifact containing his father's last text secure. And, Oskar's bruises are certainly imagetexts, since they are images that tell a story of physical fragility together with a need to inflict pain on the body.

By cleverly playing with text and space, Foer creates some thought-provoking mental pictures in Grandma's chapters. The first thing we notice is the title, "My Feelings," which is the title of all of her chapters. Next, there are several extra spaces between all of the sentences, as if these are safe places for her feelings to inhabit. She experienced devastating trauma during the Dresden bombing, yet she manages to continue functioning in near-normal ways by creating room for her feelings in these empty spaces of her home and her writing. These spaces are interspersed throughout the text in all of her chapters; they are a type of imagetext that signify Grandma's need for space.

MY FEELINGS

They are announcing flights over the speakers. We are not listening. They do not matter to us, because we are not going anywhere. I miss you already, Oskar. I missed you even when I was with you. That's been my problem. I miss what I already have, and I surround myself with things that are missing.

Every time I put in a new page, I look at your grandfather. I am so relieved to see his face. It makes me feel safe. His shoulders are pinched. His spine is curved. In Dresden he was a giant. I'm glad that his hands are still rough. The sculptures never left them.

I didn't notice until now that he is still wearing his wedding ring. I wonder if he put it on when he came back or if he wore it all those years. Before I came here I locked up the apartment. I turned off the lights and made sure none of the faucets leaked. It's hard to say goodbye to the place you've lived. It can be as hard as saying goodbye to a person. We moved in after we were married. It had more room than his apartment. We needed it. We needed room for all of the animals, and we needed room between us. Your grandfather bought the most expensive insurance policy. A man from the company came over to take pictures. If anything happened, they would be able to rebuild the apartment again exactly as it was. He took a roll of film. He took a picture of the floor, a picture of the fireplace, a picture of the bathtub. I never confused what I had with what I was. When the man left, your grandfather took out his own camera and started taking more pictures. What are you doing? I asked him.

Better safe than sorry, he wrote. At the time I thought he was right, but I am not sure anymore.

174

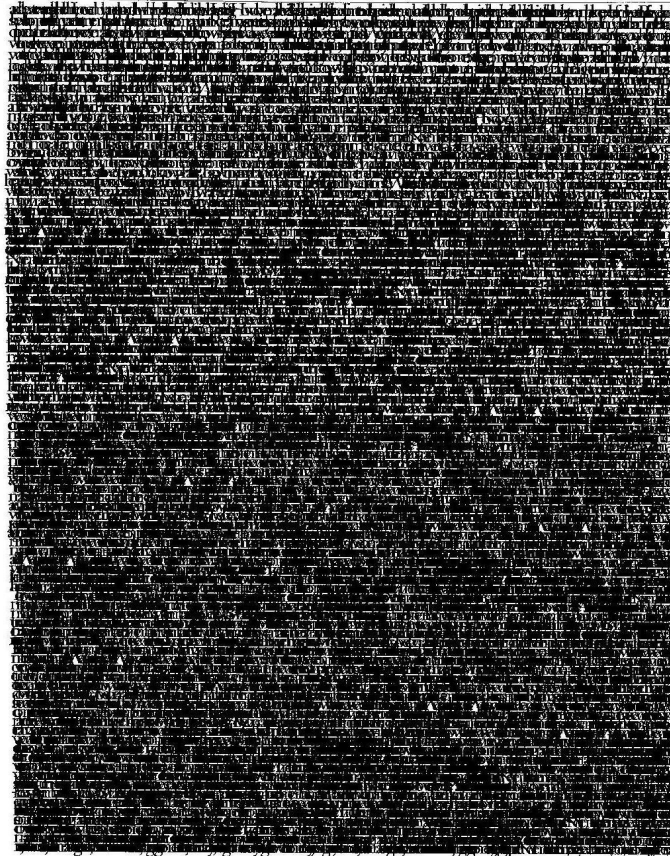
2. *Grandma's spaces*

Perhaps even more telling is the story of her life, which she writes “after years of working in solitude” at the typewriter in a Nothing Place of their home (120). Her

mute husband estimates that she has just handed him a thousand pages. He flips through them, finding them all entirely blank. While Oskar's Grandma is perfectly capable of writing letters to Oskar that detail past events, she is unable to type even a single page of her own life story.

It is Grandma who provides the clue to all of the photos of doorknobs scattered throughout the book. She explains that when they were first married, her husband took pictures of everything in their apartment--especially the doorknobs. All of them (175). She never understood why he felt the compulsion to do such a thing. Since he was no longer able to produce spoken words, Grandfather needed to produce images and texts in abundance, and this he did.

His chapters are all titled "Why I'm Not Where You Are." Perhaps even more interesting than Grandma's, they are a study in voluminous written words and shrinking spaces. He has text tattooed on the palms of his hands, and his filled daybooks, at times, threaten to overtake his life. He even attempts to distill his life into single characters, wondering, "What... is the sum of my life?" as he tries unsuccessfully to communicate with his wife by punching numbers into a pay phone (269). He has written reams of letters to his only son, whom he never gets to meet. First, we notice that the spaces between the words and letters are beginning to get smaller. A few pages later, the words start to run together because, as he repeatedly states one page earlier, "I'm running out of room" (280). Finally, the type gets so dense that there is hardly any white showing through at all.



3. *Grandfather's text*

While at first it appears that Grandfather cannot be where anyone who matters to him is because he has filled all the space in his life with text, he does manage to be

there for his grandson when it matters the most. After Mr. Black has informed Oskar that he will no longer accompany him on his quest to find the right lock, Oskar is devastated. Then, he encounters “the renter” at his Grandma’s apartment. Foer describes the meeting:

As I had been telling the renter the story, he kept nodding his head and looking at my face. He stared at me so hard that I wondered if he wasn’t listening to me at all, or if he was trying to hear something incredibly quiet underneath what I was saying, sort of like a metal detector, but for truth instead of metal (254-255).

For the very first time, Oskar shares the recordings of his father’s voice with “the renter,” and together they plot and execute the culmination of Oskar’s adventure--digging up his dad’s coffin. Through this shared experience, the story of trauma becomes one of healing, both for Oskar and for his grandfather.

While Foer uses images as texts throughout the book, he also uses text as image both in Grandma’s and Grandfather’s chapters. These are imagetexts. Other places where Foer utilizes this technique are where he reproduces business cards, entire letters and biographical cards. Every text that is functioning as an image can be considered an imagetext.

The imagetext incorporates an element of the premodern in the way that it draws text and image together, suturing them into a new creation. In fact, it is somewhat similar to the Apache practice of speaking with place names in the way that it melds the image and the text into a single entity. As time goes on, we will undoubtedly see more use of the imagetext in creative new ways because it enables us to reimagine both images and texts. And this is just the beginning.

Graphic novels like Art Spiegelman's *Maus I*, *Maus II* and *In the Shadow of No Towers* might at first seem like comics for immature people who can't be bothered to actually read a book. On closer inspection, however, they demonstrate a complex level of interaction between the text and the images, together with an incredible degree of communication with very few words. On the other hand, Barbara Hodgson's *The Lives of Shadows: An Illustrated Novel* is an elegant and sophisticated volume that plainly dispels the notion that illustrated books are solely for children. This convergence of text and image, whether it be found in landscape, environmental, Native American literatures or these newer forms of writing that incorporate images, is the evidence that we are moving into an entirely new phase. As these and many other types of hybridized works proliferate and become the norm, we will see that postmodernism has become a thing of the past.

Anthropologists have, for years, written about the liminal. This term is derived from the Latin word *limen*, which means threshold; it describes a space between two major stages of a lifespan or of a culture. The classic space of liminality occurs during rites of passage, between the initial separation and the final aggregation phase. It is a place of uncertainty characterized by the experience of statuslessness, humility and indeterminacy by the ritual subject. Building on Arnold Van Gennep's theories of liminality to encompass what he calls *communitas*, Victor Turner explains in *The Ritual Process* that *communitas* occurs during the liminal phase as, "society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community or even communion of equal individuals..." (96).

Individual and community-wide liminality can be found in many guises--the court jester, symbolic figures from folk literature such as the simpleton or the holy beggar, monastic orders, millenarian religious movements, the beat generation and the 1960s hippie generation, to name just a few. Turner explains the significance of *communitas* by relating Lao-Tse's story of the chariot wheel, "The spokes of the wheel and the nave... to which they are attached would be useless, he said, but for the hole, the gap, the emptiness at the center" (127). This emptiness is what he likens *communitas* to. Furthermore, he attributes the quality of potentiality to *communitas*, which makes sense when we consider his argument that, "Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, 'edge men' who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the cliches associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other[s]... in fact or imagination" (128). Indeed, this is where the potential for creative change has always come from, the liminal.

Within an iconoclastic culture such as ours, literatures of image reside in this place of liminality. This is because they are not, strictly speaking, just images. Neither are they purely texts, engaging the visual as they do. They are, most definitely, hybrids. Whether we wish to categorize illustrated novels, landscape, environmental and Native American writings as textual images or visual texts, we must recognize that there is a place for them in this culture precisely because they run counter to the mainstream.

The creative tension produced by Native American literatures is something very positive, not only for the field of literary studies, but for society at large. The

primary reason for this is because our mainstream culture of iconoclasm is not only text-heavy; it is also incredibly temporally focused. Indigenous cultures, on the other hand, tend to be image-heavy and spatially focused. Each of these cultures can not only learn from the other, enriching both, but they can also serve to critique the excesses of each. In terms of literatures of image, most of these tend to bring spatial elements to the fore, focused as they are on the visual, which results in diminishing the tyranny of linear time so rampant in Western culture.

Liminality is the new literary frontier. It is the place of convergence between text and image. It is also the place where new cultural stories are fashioned--stories that reimagine the who and the where of human existence. Because this rhizomatic way of creating and recreating story has limitless possibilities for bringing together, as opposed to all of the breaking apart we became so familiar with in deconstruction, it signals a new turn in theory, which indicates that we are headed into a new cultural cycle.

Literature can never die because of that fascinating little truth--
without story, we are lost.

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