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# Negotiations of America's National Identity

Edited by  
Roland Hagenbüchle and Josef Raab

In cooperation with Marietta Messmer

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*"Indians" as Metonymy, Metaphor, and Myth: National Self-Conceptualization and the Desire for Cultural Self-Transcendence in the Poetry of the Early Republic*

Frank Kelleter

When, in two or three decades, some historian of discourse will look back upon the interpretive controversies of the 1990s, she will probably find the current critical climate to have been governed by a surprisingly unanimous belief in heterodoxy. At conferences today, there is hardly a paper to be found that does not stress the need to question and destabilize "traditional" readings of what used to be called "our cultural heritage"; for those readings, we tell ourselves, have been established by a dominant cultural group with the explicit aim of masking its own ideological interests as "universal" truths. Starting with the mundane success of Western rationalism in the seventeenth century, the story goes, a unified narrative of historical progress has been constructed that forces marginalized groups to formulate their dissent within a discursive framework that is always already disempowering them. It is agreed, therefore, that these dominant and domineering cultural notions have to be exposed to historical contextualization so that their claim to universal validity can be revealed as an interested fiction. What is striking about such calls for differentiation and historicization is not only their strange uniformity (frequently enough, it does not seem to matter *which* marginalized group is empowered in its resistance against the cultural rule of a monolithically defined center) but also their success within an institutional network that still quarantines itself in a rather effective manner against the task of integrating the very "marginalized groups" that are to be admitted at the level of discourse. The ostentatious exchange of masculine for feminine pronouns, for example, seems to be particularly attractive to scholars who, in the course of the last fifteen years, have come to regard themselves as "white males." I shall come back to this point.

The heterodox self-understanding of contemporary critical discourse is maybe most visibly expressed in the current popularity of the term "alterity." Originally an anthropological concept, "alterity" has by now turned into a

central category in literary and cultural studies as well, replacing such older (and seemingly more metaphysical) notions as "otherness" and "difference." Basically, there are two ways in which the concern for alterity – the concern, that is, for a *socio-historical* (and not only epistemological or hermeneutical) understanding of otherness – expresses itself in the field of literary studies. The first is the attempt to uncover "repressed voices" – i.e. to restore to our historical memory dissenting cultural expressions which, because of their challenge to the dominant narrative, have been excluded from the canon of texts that purports to tell the story of "our cultural heritage." A second possibility to help alterity to gain a voice lies in attempting new critical assessments of long-established versions of cultural identity – in "rereading familiar texts against the grain," as Klaus Lubbers puts it (6).

The present essay belongs to the second category. I take as my point of departure the well-known, almost trivial assumption of a *reciprocal* relationship between ingroup- and outgroup-formation. In other words, I will take for granted that the act of differentiating oneself from others must be seen as a necessary element in any act of self-constitution, or, more abstractly put, that the representation of a collective identity is always dependent upon the positing of a collective alterity. In recent times, the functionality of images of the other for the definition of a unified collective self-image has been demonstrated most perceptively in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Critics associated with the American New Historicism<sup>1</sup> or the British school of Cultural Materialism<sup>2</sup> have taken up this thought and, drawing heavily on the work of Michel Foucault, have added the important insight that the representation of otherness is not only an inevitable, so to speak accidental, by-product of cultural self-definition but that it must be seen as an *active strategy* by which a particular cultural group seeks to secure the rhetorical perpetuation of its own ideology. Thus, not only is every form of cultural sense-making dependent upon negative cultural self-exteriorization, but every such negative cultural self-exteriorization by necessity amounts to an *interested* establishment of otherness. In that sense, the "invention of the other" is never an innocent projection, but always a powerful construction: not simply a cognitive indispensability, but rather a political manoeuvre with which a culture constitutes itself not only as homogeneous but also as dominant. The thinking of hierarchy seems to be inevitably tied to such a thinking of cultural differences.

<sup>1</sup> For a New Historicist study on the representation of Native American culture, see especially Greenblatt.

<sup>2</sup> For a good introduction, see Williams (*Materialism*; *Writing*).

In this essay, I want to test the usefulness of these assumptions for the question of how Native American culture is represented in the poetry of the Early Republic. My aim, thus, will not be to show one more time that the creation of an American national identity in the eighteenth century rests upon the construction of a contrastive cultural foil identified as "Indian." Rather, I want (1) to trace three particular poetic strategies of exteriorizing (and thus constituting) an American ideological collectivity in the early national period, and (2) to relate this orthodox nationalistic rhetoric to its own dialectical counterpart, as it can be found in the various theoretical and institutional self-contradictions of our contemporary discourse of heterodox "alterity." For this double purpose, I will discuss metonymic, metaphoric, and mythic representations of Native American culture (in Joel Barlow's "The Hasty Pudding," Timothy Dwight's "The Destruction of the Pequods," and Philip Freneau's "The Indian Student") and then compare the rhetoric of negative collective self-exteriorization, especially in its "mythic" shape, with the desire for cultural self-transcendence, as it pervades current critical debates.

# 1. METONYMY (A): JOEL BARLOW'S "THE HASTY PUDDING"

Joel Barlow's "The Hasty Pudding" is only rarely thought of as a poem dealing with questions of cultural alterity. In fact, it was not until J.A. Leo Lemay's 1982 article on the socio-political contexts of "The Hasty Pudding" that the poem was seriously thought of as a worthy object of scholarly attention (prior to Lemay's essay, only one analysis had appeared in print; cf. Arner). In a way, this critical silence on one of the most frequently anthologized American poems of the eighteenth century does not come as a surprise, given Barlow's rather formulaic, if not tiresome, imitation of British neoclassical models. Against this background, Lemay's achievement lies not only in having situated "The Hasty Pudding" in the context of late eighteenth-century debates about religion, political action, and the nature of language but also in having restored to the poem a dimension of formal complexity, in fact subtlety, that is lost on readers who decide to regard "The Hasty Pudding" as merely a stylistic exercise in the genre of mock-epic.

Understood as a mock-epic, Barlow's poem indeed seems rather uneven, especially when compared to Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock," a text from which "The Hasty Pudding" borrows freely. There is a certain incoherence in poetic tone, a certain indecision in the speaker's attitude towards his subject matter that makes it hard to determine what exactly

Barlow wants to mock. Consider, for instance, lines 57–62, in which the speaker, traveling in France, addresses his poetic subject:<sup>3</sup>

Dear Hasty Pudding, what unpromised joy  
Expands my heart, to meet thee in Savoy!  
Doomed o'er the world through devious paths to roam,  
Each clime my country, and each house my home,  
My soul is soothed, my cares have found an end,  
I greet my long-lost, unforgotten friend.

Two points should be noted here: first, this short passage can be taken as a perfect illustration of what Lemay calls "the conflicting elements within the [speaker's] persona" (18). As can easily be observed, "The Hasty Pudding" is written in a deliberately provincial voice; throughout the poem, the speaker stylizes himself as a folksy character, conversant with Yankee humor and indifferent to cosmopolitan affairs. In the very beginning of the poem, he alludes to the French Revolution as a subject remote from his own concerns: "Ye Gallic flags, that ... / Bear death to kings, and freedom to the world, / I sing not you" (3–5). Yet there seems to be a good deal of posturing in this self-presentation of the speaker as a hick. As Lemay points out, the persona of the poem is, in fact, extraordinarily sophisticated:

[T]he speaker reveals a knowledge of present and past religious mythologies of Near Eastern and Western cultures, as well as American Indian mythologies. The speaker is an experienced European traveller, alluding not only to such cities as London and Paris, but to a variety of rural areas in Europe and America. (4)

In the passage quoted above, for example, the speaker clearly casts himself in the mythological role of the wandering hero who has to master certain tasks or gain possession of a sacred object in order to be allowed to return home. Like Ulysses, the Fisher-King, or the Wandering Jew (or, later, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*), the homesick Yankee is "Doomed o'er the world through devious paths to roam." Barlow's persona is distinguished from classical heroes merely by the *type* of mastery that serves as prerequisite for his homecoming: no Holy Grail has to be found, no journey into Hades to be undertaken, but the consumption of a corn dish is sufficient to lift the curse and overcome the speaker's dislocation, his estrangement from

<sup>3</sup> I am citing from the Fellow and Adam edition (1796), as reprinted in Baym (829–37).

the world (cf. Lemay 4). On the one hand, this contrast between trivial causes (the profane physicality of cornmeal mush) and portentous effects (the speaker's spiritual salvation) must be seen as a typical device of mock-epic poetry, and the inconsistency in the speaker's voice thus reveals itself as a necessary adjunct to Barlow's parodic intentions. On the other hand, however (and this is the second point to be observed about the passage under discussion), Barlow's variation on the quest-myth is more than simply a joke. As a matter of fact, lines 57–62 probably reflect the actual occasion of the poem's composition; for it was in Savoy that Barlow, while running for election to the French national assembly, was fed a bowl of American corn pudding and, as a result, sat down to write his most famous work. In that sense, the speaker's encounter with his "long-lost, unforgotten friend" could be read as a genuine expression of homesickness, an "expatriate dream of home cooking," as Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury put it (69). Read this way, there would be no bathos in the poem's juxtaposition of classical mythology and provincial cuisine; Barlow seems to speak in quite a serious manner when he praises the salvational effects of cornmeal on an exiled "soul."

But there's more to it. Barlow's seemingly mock-heroic celebration of hasty pudding has a serious undertone not only as far as its autobiographical roots are concerned. The poem transcends the confines of the parodic mode also by linking the speaker's taste in food to an explicitly *socio-economic* message. *What*, then, is celebrated when the speaker celebrates his favorite dish? What does the hasty pudding *stand for*? So much is clear: Rather than confessing to some gustatory idiosyncracies, the speaker seems to make use of a poetic trope when he "sings" what he calls "My morning incense, and my evening meal, / The sweets of Hasty Pudding" (16–17). The meaning of this trope is made explicit in Canto II, where we are told that the hasty pudding *represents* the very agrarian virtues of which it is a product (190–95):

But since, O man! thy life and health demand  
Not food alone, but labor from thy hand,  
First in the field, beneath the sun's strong rays,  
Ask of thy mother earth the needful maize;  
She loves the race that courts her yielding soil,  
And gives her bounties to the sons of toil.

These lines are remarkable mainly for the nexus which they establish between the notion of "toil" and the image of "courtship," between "labor"

and "love." Interestingly, Barlow's salute to agrarian economics does not seem to deny that the rural life actually consists of "a long course of daily toils to run" – as George Crabbe puts it in "The Village," a poem which explicitly attacks nostalgic pastoralism.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Crabbe, however, Barlow paints agricultural drudgery as a strangely carefree business; his "well-pleased lasses and contending swains" (287) entertain an almost amorous relationship with the soil they labor in. They may be "the sons of toil," still paying for Adam's sin, but they don't seem to do so "in the sweat of their faces," as the divine curse in *Genesis* would demand of them. "Sweat," in fact, the Biblical emblem for humankind's fallen condition, is associated by Barlow with – of all things – the eating habits of the European aristocracy. At the very beginning of Canto II, he writes (158–64):<sup>5</sup>

To mix the food by vicious rules of art,  
To kill the stomach and to sink the heart,  
To make mankind to social virtue sour,  
Cram o'er each dish, and be what they devour,  
For this the kitchen Muse first framed her book,  
Commanding sweat to stream from every cook;  
Children no more their antic gambols tried,  
And friends to physic wondered why they died.

Barlow's point here is obviously that "cookbooks have spoiled cooking, and that children raised on fancy food have lost their playfulness, been given medicines, and died" (Lemay 16). If we extend this thought, however, and take the term "sweat" as a Biblical reference, the implication seems to be that humankind's expulsion from paradise is reflected exactly in an aristocratic over-refinement in diet. By contrast, the preparation of food in an agrarian democracy is presented not only as a rather cheerful but indeed as an explicitly communal affair. While Europe's "vicious rules of art" produce food that makes people "sour" to "social virtue," the production and consumption of hasty pudding seems to indicate nothing less than the existence of a nationwide American neighborhood. Yet it is important to recognize that with this celebration of rural life, Barlow does not want to imply that American farmers have managed to *regain* paradisiacal bliss. "[N]ature scorns not all the aids of art" (179), he writes, alluding to "the

<sup>4</sup> I am citing from Crabbe (157–74, 143).

<sup>5</sup> As Lemay (16) observes, two poems by Alexander Pope are echoed in these lines ("Prologue to Addison's *Cato*" and "The Second Satire of the Second Book of Horace Paraphrased").

rules of art" quoted above, and goes on to praise the (paradoxically sweatless) toils of planting, tilling, harvesting, husking, and finally cooking corn. The result of these community-building "arts" – the hasty pudding – embodies not humankind's return to Eden (for in Eden, no work-ethic is known), but nonetheless humankind's self-disentanglement from the unpleasant consequences of the fall. In a striking dialectic, divine punishment is turned into a way to communal salvation, and the burden of labor becomes "A frolic scene, where work, and mirth, and play, / Unite their charms, to chase the hours away" (268–9). It should be observed that the need to work is not even seen as a "necessary evil" here, but rather as the very cause of the happiness enjoyed by Barlow's frolicsome farmers. Not the original Eden but something possibly even better comes to take shape in the activities of "those who labor in the earth" ("the chosen people of God," according to Thomas Jefferson [165]), because compared to life in the Biblical paradise, the bliss of Barlow's American corn-eaters has the advantage of having overcome human *ignorance* and thus having transcended a merely animalistic content with existence.<sup>6</sup>

The hasty pudding, understood as a poetic trope, thus stands for a specific socio-economic vision: What is ultimately at stake in Barlow's parodic treatment of the mythological themes of homesickness and homecoming is the non-parodic construction and affirmation of a collective identity.<sup>7</sup> With its quite serious celebration of agrarian virtues, "The Hasty Pudding" indeed moves beyond the genre of mock-epic in order to become a true national epic. (Whole passages from Canto II and Canto III could be transferred without loss of meaning to Timothy Dwight's thoroughly non-humorous poem *Greenfield Hill*.) The collective alterity that serves as a negative foil for this collective self-definition can be found, of course, in the snobbish feudalism of Europe, or, more specifically, in the political culture

<sup>6</sup> About "the sly raccoon" and "the bolder squirrel" who threaten the gains of human cultivation, Barlow writes: "Then let them steal the little stores they can, / And fill their granaries from the toils of man; / We've one advantage where they take no part, / With all their wiles they ne'er have found the art / To boil the Hasty Pudding; here we shine / Superior far to tenants of the pine; / This envied boon to man shall still belong, / Unshared by them in substance or in song" (248–53).

<sup>7</sup> As Lemay suggests, this affirmative rhetoric even includes Barlow's address to the "Blessed cow" (316), the bathetic effect of which appears somewhat softened if we regard the cow as an archetypal fertility symbol: "McMichael and the Norton anthology both gloss the 'Mother of Egypt's God' as Osiris's mother, Nut, because she was sometimes depicted as a cow . . . , but Apis . . . , the sacred bull of Egypt, is surely the more likely reference" (12).

associated with British Tories such as Edmund Burke.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, "The Hasty Pudding" is one in a long list of eighteenth-century American literary documents that describe the relationship between Europe and the United States in terms of a "glorious contrast." What is remarkable about Barlow's poem, however, is how it defines American agrarianism as not just another field in which the New World presents itself superior to the Old World but as precisely the root and origin of all of America's superiorities. The very first sentence of Barlow's preface to the poem connects the idea of "simplicity in diet" with two of the most debated concepts in eighteenth-century political philosophy: "the happiness of individuals" (a nod towards Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*) and "the prosperity of a nation" (possibly a reference to Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*).<sup>9</sup> In the beginning of the poem, this may still look like a typical mock-epic strategy, a conflation of low subject matter with resounding high rhetoric, but in Canto II at the latest we learn that Barlow is quite serious in associating "simplicity in diet" with these two revolutionary catchphrases. And if Barlow's surprising semantic combination manages to overcome its initial bathos, this is mainly because the organizing trope of the poem is not a metaphor, but a metonymy.

Once we have recognized that the hasty pudding constitutes a metonymy, what is interesting about the poem's construction of alterity is not so much the use Barlow makes of the "glorious contrast"-motif (the projection of a *European* alterity) but rather the implied representation of *Native American* culture. Of central importance in this context are the lines 123–130, towards the end of Canto I. Again, the speaker addresses his poetic subject:

My song resounding in its grateful glee,  
No merit claims; I praise myself in thee.  
My father loved thee through his length of days:  
For thee his fields were shaded o'er with maize;  
From thee what health, what vigour he possessed,  
Ten sturdy freemen from his loins attest;

<sup>8</sup> According to Lemay, Barlow thinks of Burke when he quotes the "gaudy prigs" of Europe who, because corn is usually fed to swine, compare American corn-eaters to "pigs" (111–14): "Some anti-American English writers may have castigated corn and America in this way. But I believe that Barlow has in mind Edmund Burke's reference to the 'swinish multitude' in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). The phrase quickly became famous and opponents of Burke used the pseudonym 'Swinish multitude'" (6).

<sup>9</sup> The complete sentence runs: "A simplicity in diet, whether it be considered with reference to the happiness of individuals or the prosperity of a nation, is of more consequence than we are apt to imagine" (Baym 829).

Thy constellation ruled my natal morn,  
And all my bones were made of Indian corn.

"I praise myself in thee": So when the homesick traveler is offered a bowl of corn mush in Savoy, his joy of having overcome his dislocation ("Each clime my country, and each house my home," he complains) is not only mentally felt. The hasty pudding, it becomes clear, is not just a symbolic figure for what the speaker has left behind. It is not to be understood as a cognitive construct, does not figure as a mere reminder of his home country; instead it presents a *distinctive feature* of the speaker's national identity – a national identity which then in turn is characterized as an identity rooted in material facts and concrete activities (such as planting and eating corn) rather than in metaphysical ideas. To put it differently, Barlow's title-trope serves not as a metaphor for agrarian democracy, but agrarian democracy – the very source of America's exceptional position in eschatological history – depends metonymically on the production and consumption of hasty pudding. And as the speaker's diet and his self-understanding as an American essentially *include* each other, his spiritual regeneration upon eating corn is indeed the result of a physical, much more than a conceptual, return to his native origins. Consuming a bowl of corn pudding is equalled here to the recovery and preservation of what the speaker calls his "pure hereditary taste" (110).

The problem with this metonymy is that the speaker's assertion of a "native" American identity is by necessity a pretense – or, more abstractly put, a literary subterfuge. In other words, not only is the "physical" nature of his spiritual homecoming established by way of figurative speech – by way of *replacing* a literal meaning –, but the replaced meaning in question (the mental denotatum of Barlow's trope) can hardly boast originality, let alone "Americanness." Neither the belief in the possibility of an agrarian transcendence of humankind's "fallen" condition nor the idea of "you are what you eat" are foreign to European utopian discourse in the eighteenth century. This may not seem to conflict with Barlow's affirmation of American superiority as long as he only seeks to counter the cosmopolitan snobbishness of the European aristocracy by metaphorically pointing out the wholesome aspects of rural life in the New World. But as soon as the "glorious contrast"-motif attempts to assert itself metonymically, it runs into the problem that the New World *already has a native culture* and that this culture is *not* the one that Barlow wants to establish as "American." As a result, the factual existence of a native population has to be integrated within the metonymic argument of the poem. "All my bones are made of *Indian*

corn," the speaker claims and describes the unexpected taste of home on foreign soil in the following words (75–80):

But here, though distant from our native shore,  
With mutual glee we meet and laugh once more,  
The same! I know thee by that yellow face,  
That strong complexion of true Indian race,  
Which time can never change, nor soil impair,  
Nor Alpine snows, nor Turkey's morbid air.

Again it should be noted that Barlow is not speaking metaphorically here. He draws no *comparisons*, points to no *similarities* between his own self-understanding as an American and the factual existence of a Native American culture. The process of replacement by which the term "Indian" comes to stand for White American identity is not governed by the principle of resemblance (as would be the case in metaphoric acts of substitution) but by the principle of "nonlogical deletion" (Lodge 93). In other words, Barlow's speaker subsumes Native American culture wholesale under his concept of a distinct American nationality. White pastoralism and Indian presence are defined as aspects of one and the same linguistic unit. The advantage of this particular trope in the context of the "glorious contrast" argument is obvious: by insinuating that Indian culture is an essential property of the New World's difference and thus linguistically able to *represent* White American identity, Barlow indeed manages to confirm his agrarian utopia as exceptional – because the one thing that Old World pastoralism lacks in comparison to New World pastoralism is Indian culture.

But while this metonymic representation of Indian culture contrives to define White American identity in contradistinction to European models, it inevitably negates the distinct properties of the culture thus represented. Barlow may be one of the first American poets to make conscious use of Indian folklore and mythology, as Lemay suggests (10), but this inclusion of non-European traditions is characterized by the very refusal to regard Native American culture as, in fact, culturally strange. Ironically, it is a phrase like "That strong complexion of true Indian race" that most markedly attests to Barlow's confinement within *European* visions of utopian self-transplantation to a "New World." For we should not forget that the original inhabitants of North America "neither called themselves by a single term nor understood themselves as a collectivity"; the idea of a "true Indian race" must thus be seen as a European conception, "a White invention" (Berkhofer 3). More specifically, in the case of Barlow and other eighteenth-century American

poets, the image of "the Indian" clearly serves to gratify a characteristically European desire for cultural self-transcendence – without, however, posing the danger of cultural self-loss, for the factual strangeness of Native American culture remains metonymically contained within the safe conceptual bounds of a White American identity (which in turn is derived from a long tradition of Old World utopian literature). There can be no doubt, then, that Barlow's positive references to a non-European (indeed anti-European) state of social existence are governed by the same neglect of cultural diversity that already characterized seventeenth-century European fantasies of self-escape. Metonymic statements like "All my bones are made of Indian corn" should be read as expressions of a typically Western discontent with Western civilization.

In sum, what we are confronted with in Barlow's poem is not only the contradistinctive assertion of a collective non-European identity but also the appropriation of a factual cultural alterity *by way of its rhetorical deletion*. This sort of metonymic reference to Indian culture presents one of the most widespread rhetorical strategies in the literature of the Early Republic by which the young nation attempts to disengage itself from its European heritage. We find it as early as 1703, when Robert Beverley opens his pre-national *History and Present State of Virginia* with the confession that "I am only an *Indian*, and don't pretend to be exact in my Language" (9). This is clearly not a metaphoric statement: Beverley does not call himself an "Indian" because he perceives any similarities between himself and his Native American neighbors; the term "Indian" rather denotes "American" in the sense of "Non-European." The only thing that Beverley shares with the Indians among whom he counts himself is the land he inhabits – and in a very short time, even this basis for metonymic relation will be lost, when the reference to "sharing the land" will have turned into a figure of speech in its own right.

In contemporary theories of language, it has become something of a commonplace to point to the "violent" nature of figurative representation, especially in the case of metaphor. Jonathan Culler, for example, quotes a characteristic argument against metaphoric expression:

One forces a word out of its proper sense into another sense, and this is not merely a poetic license which expires at the end of the poem but a true abuse of the word since, in the absence of another term which might succeed its temporary replacement, the word thus forced becomes the proper expression of the new idea. (224)

The one trope that is frequently cleared from the charge of violent abuse is metonymy, because in metonymy, we are told, there exists a "reciprocal relationship" between meaning and denotatum – "each is a distinctive feature of the other" (Campbell 169). As the case of Joel Barlow shows, one should be careful with such classifications of figurative modes according to the degree of "violence" employed. Early on, Roman Jakobson hinted at the fact that metonymy may not be as peaceful a trope as it appears, since metonymic substitutions are about "maintaining the hierarchy of linguistic units" (76). In general, it can be said that a trope's potential for "doing injustice" to what it represents is always dependent on the historical contexts of its formulation. Questions of genre, readership, addressee, and ideological motivation play as important a role in a trope's way of functioning as the specific *type* of tropical language used. In the context of eighteenth-century American mythogenesis, metonymic representations of "the Indian" have their privileged position in a discourse of European-American ideological contrasting. It goes without saying that this particular strategy of constructing native identity by way of its deletion works in a different manner when the rhetorical context is *domestic*.<sup>10</sup> In a next step, therefore, I want to analyze the representation of Native Americans in an *intra*-American cultural setting.

## 2. METONYMY (B): TIMOTHY DWIGHT'S "THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PEQUODS"

Governed as it is by the principle of "nonlogical deletion," metonymy can be understood as a *totalizing* trope: a figure that seeks to deny the semantic disjunction between two linguistic units by pointing to their reciprocal or, more frequently, hierarchical relationship. In that sense, eighteenth-century metonymic representations of Native American culture are certainly culturally oppressive, but in most cases they are not in themselves racist (since they fail to take account of ethnic strangeness, no matter whether it is positively or negatively connoted). In fact, when occurring in racist discursive settings,

<sup>10</sup> In the "environmentalist debate" of the 1780s, for example, Thomas Jefferson realized that he had to ward off Count de Buffon's rhetorical attacks on the Indians (whom Buffon cited as an example of how the New World produced "degenerate" species) if he wanted to defend the legitimacy of the White American nation. In order to comprehend the strategical nature of this defense of America's original inhabitants, one should keep in mind that Jefferson's refutation of Buffon did not stop him from treating Native Americans in a much less understanding manner when the issue was domestic politics.



metonymic argument frequently tends to alleviate the inhumane implications of ethnic prejudice. Timothy Dwight's long poem *Greenfield Hill* provides a good example of this phenomenon. Part IV, "The Destruction of the Pequods," praises the Western missionaries in the New World in the following way (298–306):<sup>11</sup>

Hail Elliot! Mayhew hail! by HEAVEN inform'd  
With that pure love, which clasps the human kind;  
To virtue's path even Indian feet you charm'd,  
And lit, with wisdom's beam, the dusky mind:  
From torture, blood, and treachery, refin'd,  
The new-born convert lisp'd MESSIAH'S name.  
Mid Choirs complacent, in pure rapture join'd.  
Your praise resounds, on yonder starry frame,  
While souls, redeem'd from death, their earthly saviours claim.

The xenophobic undertone of a phrase like "To virtue's path *even* Indian feet you charm'd" does not come as a surprise in a poet with a conservative Congregationalist family background (it should be remembered that Dwight was Jonathan Edwards's grandson). Obviously accepting the Puritan interpretation of "the Indian" as emblem of a sinful "wilderness" – a God-sent trial that has to be endured and overcome –, Dwight describes the "transformation" of "the savage" to "the meekly child" (l. 294) as an achievement comparable to the conversion of America's natural environment (another divinely appointed ordeal) into a quasi-paradisiacal "garden." As is to be expected, the result of this act of "cultivation" amounts to nothing less than the coming of the millennium (295–97):

Hell saw, with pangs, her hideous realm decrease;  
Wolves play'd with lambs; the tyger's heart grew mild;  
And on his own bright work the GODHEAD, look'd and smil'd.

This sounds like a typical seventeenth-century Puritan "New World"-utopia, including the common xenophobic reference to "[the] fierce, dark, and jealous ... exotic soul, / That, cell'd in secret, rules the savage breast" (316–17). But we would do injustice to Dwight if we described his concern for the spiritual "salvation" of "the tawny tribes" (325) as simply an excuse for their physical "destruction" (to use the hardly euphemistic terminology of Dwight's title). In fact, Dwight's xenophobia is combined in a rather

<sup>11</sup> I am citing from Mc Taggart and Bottorff (367–542).

inconclusive manner with a philanthropist sense of tolerance that finds its main expression in the strange sentence: "Yet savages are men" (334). This can be called a "strange" sentence because it evidently attempts to reconcile two diametrically opposed sets of mind: the Puritan reading of Native Americans as emblematic "savages" and the enlightenment's assumption of a universally shared "humanity" (*homo sum et nihil humanum alienum a me puto*, the *philosophes* were fond of quoting). Dwight's attempt at reconciliation, however, is an imperfect one. His sentence clearly contradicts its own premise, for if the threatening other – the "Savage mind," always prone to commit "deadly deeds of malice" (319) – reveals itself as a distant cousin of the proud White cultivators, there appears to be no reason to keep calling these (suddenly familiarized) men and women "savages."<sup>12</sup> Which is to say that there is a difference between stating that "savages are men" and asserting that "all men are created equal." Rather than phrasing a "self-evident truth" in a somewhat self-contradictory manner, the sentence "Yet savages are men" makes conscious use of a poetic trope in order to harmonize Dwight's Puritan belief in the negative eschatological role of the Indians with his enlightened belief in universal reason and the necessity of tolerance. By defining "Indian" as a property of the whole "family of man," Dwight thus manages to inscribe his initial xenophobia within the wider framework of a philanthropist ethics of "education" and "improvement" – without, however, ever having to drop the epithet "savages." It should be obvious by now that such a metonymic conjunction of philanthropy and ethnic prejudice is necessarily based on the assumption of a *hierarchical* relationship between the various members of the human "family." Dwight's attitude towards the Indians may be more understanding than the one held by most of his Puritan forebears, but his enlightened "tolerance" is again purchased at the price of rhetorical totalization – at the price, that is, of denying actual *cultural* differences. It is telling, in this context, that whenever *Greenfield Hill* grants that the Indians are in fact "different," the poem invariably emphasizes their *non-cultural* role as eschatological antagonists. Embodying such apocalyptic (ahistoric) threats as "torture, blood, and treachery" (302), those distant cousins present themselves as an explicitly *metaphysical* challenge to the

<sup>12</sup> Dwight is actually aware of the injustice done to Native Americans by "enlightened" European settlers: he mentions "trader villains" who have "foul'd the Savage mind" and condemns "Avarice [that] pin'd for boundless breadth of land" (307–8). Almost anticipating Herman Melville's critique of colonial expansion in *Typee*, he occasionally even comes close to defending "savage" violence as a justified reaction against unlawful encroachment ("No sweet oblivion soothes the hate impress'd" [322]).

missionary spirit. Similarly, their "sameness" with White civilization resides in a *transcultural* conception of "humanity" – which, in a next step, allows the Native Americans to join the Western "family of man" of which, paradoxically, they are said to be a part anyway (a form of self-realization that today goes under the name of "development").

Dwight thus shows himself as the typical enlightenment educator, a true believer in the perfectability of "man." Like most enlightened educators, however, he exhibits a rather patronizing attitude towards his supposed pupils, and his attempt to "civilize" the Indians basically asks for the remodeling of Native American culture in the image of Western conceptions of "mankind." In other words, the metonymic inclusion of "savages" within a shared experience of humanity effectively manages to perpetuate the dominance of a hierarchically structured value system which doesn't grant any cultural identity to the group thus included. This, then, seems to be Dwight's argument in "The Destruction of the Pequods": Transform the Native Americans into *men like us*, turn them into what we already are – otherwise, they will remain apocalyptic beasts.

### 3. METAPHOR: PHILIP FRENEAU'S "THE INDIAN STUDENT"

Dwight's metonymic ethics of intercultural tolerance offers us a typically pre-romantic conception of "the Indian." More influential on modern discussions of Native American culture (including the current critical debates about questions of cultural alterity) seems to be the romantic paradigm which is mainly based on *metaphoric* and *mythic* strategies of representation. A keytext in this respect is Philip Freneau's poem "The Indian Student, or Force of Nature," which appeared in 1788.<sup>13</sup> In this short poem, Freneau offers us a rather unorthodox picture of the "cultivation" of "the savage mind." His protagonist is a young Indian ("A shepard of the forest") who is sent by a "wandering priest" to Harvard College ("Ah, why (he cried) in Satan's waste, / Ah, why detain so fine a lad?" [7–8]). Here is how Freneau describes the Indian's arrival at the doors of Western rationalism (21–28):

Thus dressed so gay, he took his way  
O'er barren hills, alone, alone!  
His guide a star, he wandered far,  
His pillow every night a stone.

<sup>13</sup> I am citing from Clark (357–59).

At last he came, with foot so lame  
Where learned man talk heathen Greek,  
And Hebrew lore is gabbled o'er,  
To please the Muses, – twice a week.

These lines present an "education" quite different from the one envisioned by Dwight. First of all, it seems noteworthy that Freneau's Indian is clearly not as ignorant as is assumed by the wandering priest (a New England Puritan, no doubt). The "copper-coloured boy" knows his way around the "wilderness," and not because as Satan's child he is acquainted with Satan's territory but rather because he possesses a *practical knowledge of his environment* that all but rivals the Western mind's scientific measurement of natural space. As the metaphoric "pillow" seems to suggest, the Indian is quite *at home* in nature. Moreover, his original habitat – his *native* place – is defined as an explicitly *asocial* landscape, outside of history and tradition. The term "shepard of the forest," associating the Indian's dwelling place with the utopian topos of a timeless arcadia, points in the same direction. Tellingly, not only on his way to White civilization is Freneau's protagonist "alone, alone," but even when he decides to return to his authentic home he shuns tribal organization (his "roots," as we would say today): "to the woods a hunting [he] went, / Through lonely wastes he walked, he run" (43 f.).<sup>14</sup> This metaphoric insistence on asocial natural space (connoting the Indian's authentic "home") pervades the entire poem, with the "resemblance" between vehicle (expression) and tenor (intended meaning) residing in the "un-appropriated" or "atemporal" state of existence of both the "Indian" and "the (waste) land."<sup>15</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Freneau's Indian fares so badly at Harvard. If his self-transformation into a civilized human being fails, this is not because he lacks the intellectual ability to grasp Western knowledge, but because this knowledge, even when mastered, proves inimical to the very foundation of his being. There is, then, an *ontological*

<sup>14</sup> This is the second reference to "waste" in Freneau's poem. While the wandering priest connects the term to the Puritan "wilderness"-concept ("Satan's waste," i.e. uncultivated nature, calling for its own refinement), the "shepard of the forest" regards the waste land – due to its static character ("lonely wastes") – as the place where he can come into his own.

<sup>15</sup> Unlike metonymy, metaphor is based on the principle of *resemblance*, but, as has often been noted, this resemblance is not necessarily to be found in the objects thus compared but may be created by the metaphor itself. What we are confronted with in such cases is the *interested pretense* that an object or mental construct shares particular properties with another object or mental construct. See Campbell (153).

gap implied in Freneau's metaphoric representation of "the Indian" as one who is "at home" in ahistoric or uncultivated landscapes: a gap between "nature" and "culture" (rather than between "wilderness" and "civilization"),<sup>16</sup> a gap between "original being" and "transformation by rational progress" (rather than between "original sin" and "salvation"). And since this gap is an ontological and not a cognitive one, there can be no doubt that it will remain unbridgeable. According to this view, Indian life, being *essentially* atemporal, cannot ever hope to come in contact with a historically "progressing" society without risking the loss of its own identity.<sup>17</sup>

What does this imply about Freneau's attitude towards Native American culture? Clearly, a poem like "The Indian Student" opposes Dwight's patronizing philosophy of education. Compared to the Indian's practical knowledge of nature, instruction at Harvard seems to be regulated by a tight, mechanistic, rationalist schedule (Western Civ. taught "twice a week"). As Freneau makes clear, the "education" encountered by his Indian protagonist is business-like, and so is the intention of the White educators who decide to admit a Native American to their college. Explicitly addressing the metonymic philanthropy that pervades a poem like "The Destruction of the Pequods," Freneau writes (29–32):

Awhile he writ, awhile he read,  
Awhile he conned their grammar rules –  
(An Indian savage so well bred  
Great credit promised to the schools.)

The ironic parenthesis reduces the enlightened ethos of "improvement" and "education" to a question of mere (commercial) self-interest: Knowing how hard it is to lead "savage" minds to cultural refinement, "the schools" expect an even greater fame if they should manage to achieve it. And yet, Freneau's sarcasm about the selfish roots of White tolerance should be an uneasy one; for by exchanging the metonymy of the "human savage" (a figure which at least in its first element has some foundation in ontological fact) with the

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted for this thought to Klaus Lubbers.

<sup>17</sup> As Berkhofer observes in a different context in *The White Man's Indian*: "Only civilization had history and dynamics in this view, so therefore Indianness must be conceived of as ahistorical and static. If the Indian changed through the adoption of civilization as defined by Whites, then he was no longer truly Indian according to the image, because the Indian was judged by what Whites were not. Change toward what Whites were made him ipso facto less Indian" (29).

metaphor of the "man of nature,"<sup>18</sup> he constructs a cultural stereotype that is all the more racist for not being immediately visible as such. A poem like "The Indian Student" may refuse to subsume Native American culture under White concepts of civilization, but it certainly shares Dwight's neglect of cultural diversity. In fact, where *Greenfield Hill* shows itself unable to recognize "the Indians" as culturally *strange*, Freneau's poem fails to understand the culturally strange as cultural at all. Rather than being "strange" or "different," Native Americans here become the very type of the cultural *other*, i.e. the other *of* culture: an allegedly "critical" metaphoric figure that, it should be mentioned, lives on in various contemporary discourses of "otherness" and "uncanniness."<sup>19</sup> By projecting his discontent with his own cultural contexts onto a somehow more "authentic" or "natural" ontological state, Freneau thus defines the figure of the Indian as "a reverse or negative model of White life": as "a negative reference group" that can be used "to define White identity" (Berkhofer 27). As Lubbers remarks, Freneau "never accepted the Indian's culture except as a vaguely understood alternative to pinpoint deficiencies in his own" (214).<sup>20</sup> If the racism of such metaphoric substitutions is not immediately visible, this has mainly to do with the fact that Freneau's notion of "the other" pretends to be affirmative of Native American ethnicity and critical of Western civilization. It is this pretense

<sup>18</sup> The expression "man of nature" seems more appropriate for Freneau's Indian than the frequently quoted designations "noble savage" and "natural man." There are slight hints of deism in Freneau's poem, it is true (61–64), but the Indian student is not the sort of natural rationalist whom the enlightenment tradition calls "noble" in order to substantiate its belief in the universality of human reason. The figure of the "noble savage," it should be remembered, constitutes a European man *in nuce* and in disguise, both a natural aristocrat and a (deist) philosopher of the wilderness: an illustration of what universal humanity would look like if emancipated from conventional prejudices and civilized affectations. By contrast, Freneau's "savage" figures as a radical and inimitable counter-model to European rationalism; he is, to use Berkhofer's terminology, "the romantic savage" who depends "upon passion and impulse alone for a direct apprehension of nature in all its picturesqueness, sublimity, and fecundity" (79).

<sup>19</sup> A concept borrowed from Freud and Heidegger (and subsequently filtered through the writings of Lacan and Derrida), "uncanniness" presents one of the most successful critical topoi in contemporary academic jargon. For a discussion of the roots and meanings of the term in postmodern discourse, see Kelleter (74f., 127–38).

<sup>20</sup> In the same context, Lubbers describes "Tomo Cheeki," the Indian persona used by Freneau for a series of articles published in *The Jersey Chronicle*, as the author's "mouthpiece to launch his skeptical ideas about Anglo-American civilization and to contrast it with the simplicity of Native American lifeways" (213).

more than anything else, I would assume, that makes for the popularity of the topos of "otherness" in current criticism. (Ironically, what is frequently overlooked by postmodern theorists is how their own celebrations of "uncanny" subversions partake in the very type of negative cultural self-exteriorization that is at work in "Western" romantic wishes for cultural self-transcendence.)

It is only fitting, therefore, that the "education" of Freneau's Indian student ends with the "man of nature" returning to his "native wood" (54). The implication concerning the possibility of intercultural exchange between Native Americans and Western settlers is obvious: As long as "the Indian" is metaphorically represented by the "woods" with which he shares a state of authentic non-cultivation, Harvard must indeed remain completely foreign to him. Conversely, he embodies the absolute (ontological) other to the kind of society that Harvard stands for. Both forms of being are radically incompatible, precisely because one of them has no foundation in socio-historical organization. "Nature" and "culture" will not mix in Freneau's American environment. Once more, then, the figure of the Indian serves to express a characteristically Western desire for cultural self-escape. A typical feature of this particular understanding of "the other" is its refusal to engage in any *critical* assessment of cultural strangeness. Indeed, the poem never doubts the *essential* superiority of "native" knowledge to the "tedious," (41) "gloomy," (54) and "musty" (56) atmosphere of White civilization. Such an essentialist critique of Western rationalism, of course, entails the denial of Indian cultural autonomy (not even to mention the question of this particular Indian's *individuality*). In that sense, the metaphoric celebration of Native American authenticity depends on the assumption of the *utopian* status of Indian life – its atemporality and non-historicity. To put it more abstractly, "Indianness" is assigned by Freneau a non-place in the discourse of Western rationalism, an idealized no-where position that serves as "home" to everything that White culture believes it has "lost." In fact, Freneau perceives an intimate connection between the idea of "loss" and the utopian metaphor of "the Indian." The tone of the poem is unmistakably elegiac; the final two stanzas read (73–80):

"Where Nature's ancient forests grow,  
 "And mingled laurel never fades,  
 "My heart is fixed; – and I must go  
 "To die among my native shades."  
 He spoke, and to the western springs,

(His gown discharged, his money spent,  
 His blanket tied with yellow strings,  
 The shepard of the forest went.

Apart from acting as a counter-term to Western "*enlightenment*," the metaphor "native shades" evidently holds a thanatological meaning: those are not only the shades of innocent ignorance, but also the shades of death. There is, then, a darker side to the Indian's ontological superiority. Culture and nature ("white" and "red," "light" and "dark") are diametrically opposed in Freneau's poem, but while there is no doubt about which of the two is more "authentic," neither is there a doubt which will actually win out over the other. As a matter of fact, the utopian status of Indian authenticity inevitably prescribes the death of Freneau's authentic Indian, for nothing but the image of a "lost" state of being will be able to metaphorically absorb White civilization's discontent with itself. This is why Freneau does not hesitate to describe the Indian's return to his heritage explicitly as a movement towards accepted extinction: it is only as an *absent* culture – it is only in its *cultural absence* – that "Indianness" can gratify the Western desire for cultural self-transcendence.

The elegiac lament about the disappearance of a formerly strong and proud Indian race presents the most popular rhetorical strategy of dealing with the physical consequences of White America's western expansion at the end of the eighteenth and in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The unabashed racism beneath the supposedly affirmative topos of "the vanishing race" becomes obvious when one looks at the *reasons* that Freneau and other poets supply for the extermination of whole civilizations. Despite all the plaintive nostalgia to be encountered in poems like "The Indian Student," one thing is never questioned and that is the *necessity* of the historical events thus lamented. Strikingly, the clash between the Indians and the citizens of the young American republic is never depicted as an *intercultural* conflict. In fact, the geopolitical interests of native tribes are not perceived as "interests" at all, and no attempt is made to grant any sort of cultural (let alone legal) legitimacy to them. In the poetry of the Early Republic, the Native Americans are an un-represented people in the literal sense of the term. Thus, by describing intercultural conflict as a conflict not between contending political interest groups but between a utopian "nature" and an inauthentic yet energetic "rationalism," poets like Freneau leave no doubt that the Indian "race" is "doomed" to disappear: its very identity hinges on the assumption of a non-communicable ontological *essence*, and therefore the Indian student's authentic "return" to his native home is executed, as the subtitle of

Freneau's poem has it, by "force of nature." In the words of Klaus Lubbers, it almost appears as if "the aborigines cause their own destruction" (218). The factual disappearance of Native American culture, as it goes hand in hand with the appearance of the literary figure of the "vanishing Indian," is thus presented not as the historical result of a socio-political struggle but as a matter of evolutionary necessity, a phenomenon in accordance with the laws of a nostalgically longed-for "nature."

In sum, it can be said that cultural elegies like "The Indian Student" act as instruments of cultural appropriation: The metaphor of the "vanishing Indian," as it stands for Western civilization's self-constituting belief in a "lost authenticity," a "lost relationship to nature," paradoxically serves to perpetuate the very ideological premises it pretends to criticize. More pointedly put, the romantic glorification of "Indianness" serves to legitimize Western expansion, and it does so precisely by imagining a radical *other* to inauthentic White rationalism, a self-invented utopia that, as utopia, takes its power from being unreachable, absent, and essentially "lost." It is no coincidence, in this context, that many authors of the time, including Freneau, seek to heighten the tragedy of the "waning race" by presenting the death of the last member of a dying collectivity, as if they wanted to emphasize the non-reversibility of the process of loss, the absolute impossibility of natural regeneration. The prime example of this soothingly pessimistic mood can be found, of course, in James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). There is reason to believe, with Roy Harvey Pearce,<sup>21</sup> that such nostalgic celebrations of a pre-cultural *temps perdu* are expressive of deep-seated feelings of historical guilt. To a White American readership at least, the quiet, individual, and sentimental deaths actively sought out by Freneau's and Cooper's "Last Indians" must have seemed much more tolerable than the disturbing untidiness of mass murder and state-organized genocide.

#### 4. MYTH: ALTERITY AND THE DESIRE FOR CULTURAL SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

In Freneau's "The Indian Student" and similar cultural elegies, the figure of the Indian acts as a *utopian* reference point in the literal sense of the term. Which is to say that Native Americans are assigned a cultural *non-place* in

<sup>21</sup> An earlier, identical edition of the same book is entitled *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (1953).

these poems – a position in imaginative discourse which entails, indeed is dependent upon, the factual extinction of the very culture thus idealized. Nationalistic discourse in this manner constructs a contrastive foil which proves true not the dominant culture's fears about its own "depravity" – as has been argued for the Puritan concept of the ignoble "savage" (Berkhofer 27) – but everything the nation wants to believe about itself but cannot possibly fulfill. It should not surprise us that this conception of a transcendental "nature" emerges at a time when the early nation's belief in a harmonious relationship between "nature" and "culture," as it still dominates the agrarian visions of Joel Barlow and Timothy Dwight, is coming apart. In the context of early nineteenth-century expansionism, the metaphoric "Indian" – a White invention, resurrected from the remains and memories of an extinct Native American culture – actually serves to uphold the naturalist (later ecologist) utopias that inevitably accompany the technological exploitation of America's natural landscape (including the resettlement of its native inhabitants). Precisely at this point, however, the utopian figure of the Indian ceases to be merely a "metaphor" and becomes a "myth"; in the absence of actual Native American civilizations that could be compared in a meaningful way to America's natural environment, the correlation between "Indian" and "nature" (which constitutes the metaphor in question) is necessarily shifted to a second level of meaning, becoming a vehicle in its own right. To speak with Roland Barthes, what we are confronted with here is "*un système sémiologique second*" (Barthes 199), in which a sign ("Indian" in its association with uncultivated natural space) is turned into another sign's signifier or vehicle ("Indian" representing a transcendental concept of "nature" that absorbs "culture's" self-discontent). To put it differently, a myth can be described as the metaphor of a metaphor: a substitution of meaning based not on a cognitive relation between two objects or mental constructs but on a semiotic transfer, creating a signifying complex in which the thing said is as unreal or "dead" as the thing meant.

According to Berkhofer, what is remarkable about the topos of "the Indian" in Western literature is "not its invention but its persistence and perpetuation" (31): "That the term [Indian] survives into the present, evokes imagery and emotion yet today, and constitutes an intellectual classification of Native Americans in our own time raises the ... question: Why has the idea of the *Indian* persisted for so many centuries?" (4) Whence this need for stereotyping cultural groups that have factually vanished a long time ago? This question can be answered rather straightforwardly if we recognize the *mythic*, rather than merely metaphoric or metonymic, constitution of this particular stereotype. While in colonial and early national times the represen-

tations of American Indians, stereotypical as they may have been, were derived from actual cultural contact and conflict (an intercultural relation that, as we have seen, almost invariably ended up denying the opposing group's cultural strangeness), it was not until Native American cultures had been effectively obliterated that "the Indian" became a rhetorical fixture in the myth-repertoire of the Western imagination (and thus could and would be employed as a utopian construct by authors who had never actually met Native Americans). It is not surprising, in this context, that European representations of the Indian – ranging from Lord Byron and Chateaubriand to Karl May – do not seem to differ in any significant way from the nostalgic fictions written by Freneau or Cooper. In fact, the American Indian can today be found as a transcendental type in the literatures of all European nations, a quintessentially *transnational* phantasy, expressing what Western culture believes it has lost with its entry into the age of enlightened rationalism. This, by the way, is what distinguishes the representation of Indians from the representation of other marginalized groups in American culture, most notably African Americans. We should not forget that one of the reasons why "the Indian" could be appropriated so readily as a literary topos in the nineteenth century is that after Jackson's presidency, Native Americans did not pose much of a material threat to White civilization any longer. In a way, the price they had to pay for their cultural glorification was physical death (a thought which gives a new meaning to the old saying that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian"). By contrast, the construction of African American alterity – while certainly not free from mythologizing tendencies – never worked in such a unilateral fashion.<sup>22</sup>

A mythic answer to the Western myth of lost authenticity, the utopian figure of the Indian has found its way even into contemporary critical idiom, at least as far as today's academic discourse keeps defining Western identity in terms of loss and repression. In a critical climate where the mere fact of marginalization is often taken as an indication of the presence of uncanny authenticity, the persistent portrayal of Indian culture as subversively "other" – i.e. as truthful negation of a monolithically defined White rationalism – should not come unexpected. A characteristic feature of these discourses of "otherness" can be found in their refusal to formulate any kind of *critical*

<sup>22</sup> Whereas Native American reactions to White definitions of "Indianness" became increasingly irrelevant as the young republic consolidated itself, the participation of African Americans in their own stereotyping (be it by way of strategical correspondence, be it by way of ideological inversion) has always been of a much more decisive nature.

assessment of "the repressed."<sup>23</sup> All sorts of communal, ecological, or spiritual utopias – each and every one of them deeply "Western" in its source and genesis – are thus projected upon a phantasized Indian tradition (in much the same manner as sixties' marxists were dreaming of *ur*-communist societies and seventies' feminists kept looking for a better matriarchal past). So forceful is the utopian pull of this myth of subversive authenticity that even the Red Power Movement of the 1960s felt it necessary to accept for itself what Berkhofer calls "the original White image of the Indian as a separate but single collectivity" (195). The dependence of cultural resistance on the very stereotypes that shall be overcome presents a topic that is still largely unexplored in contemporary criticism. This much seems clear: There is more at stake than simply the creation of a "usable past" when marginalized groups find themselves pressed to rely on the imagology of their cultural opponents (and be it by way of ideological inversion). Not only in the case of *indigenismo*, however, the result of such mirrorings is a discourse which insists on viewing – and, implicitly, always judging – individuals as "members of their collectivity" rather than as "different" human beings (Berkhofer 25). More than that, the countercultural insistence on giving voice to a marginalized "other" paradoxically serves to keep alive the center's belief in its own cultural centrality; today, the only possibility for "Western rationalism" (from the start, a self-contradictory, highly heterogeneous, and constantly discontented movement of thought) to still imagine itself as a unified and potent essence is by way of mirroring itself in its own ideological negations; here at least, it can still picture itself as "the system," "the *logos*," "the phallus."

A future historian of discourse, looking back on the 1990s, might then very well wonder if the strange uniformity behind our contemporary critical heterodoxy is not expressive of a deep-seated desire for cultural self-

<sup>23</sup> The "use of the Indian as countercultural lesson" (Berkhofer 110) extends from scholarly works to the pseudo-anthropological writings of Carlos Castaneda. The "countercultural Indian" has also become a staple in popular culture. In movies such as *Koyaanisquatsi* or novels such as Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, he usually figures as "the alien, often witty, critic of the industrial and mass society that White intellectuals find so hard to live in" (108). Berkhofer furthermore names John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*, and Arthur Kopit's *Indians*. In all these examples, the negative stereotype of "the deficient Indian" (i.e. the definition of the Native American as an embodiment of everything that White Americans *are not*) perpetuates itself in the positive stereotype of the "authentic Indian," an essentialist figure outside history, "unchanged from aboriginal times" (Berkhofer 29).

transcendence – gratified by an oftentimes indiscriminate self-identification with mythologized margins. How is it to be explained that today's discourse of alterity on the one hand recognizes how "the center's" self-constitution depends on the interested construction of contradistinctive "margins," but on the other hand fails to take account of the simple truth that in a discursive environment where the mere fact of oppression indicates the presence of uncanny subversion, "the margin" is inevitably forced to construct for itself the image of a unified and potent central oppressor, only in comparison to which it can be perceived as "marginal" to begin with? Does the theory of alterity, as it presents itself today, really manage to think the *reciprocity* of alterity-constructions? There seems to be something strikingly incongruous about exclusivist discursive networks, established by scholars who are so immensely self-conscious of their gender ("male") and color of skin ("white") that, afraid of being found "dead" in the bargain, it has become something of a habit with them to uncover all sorts of ethnocentric (logocentric, phallogocentric) conspiracies ascribed to a monolithic "white male Western" culture. It is not the necessity of self-criticism that seems to guide such praise of the liminal but the utopian need for cultural self-escape. And while the center can only go on believing itself central by identifying with the margin, the cultural groups actually marginalized go on mirroring the center's claim to (negative) dominance. Today's discourse of alterity will not be able to extricate itself from this deadlock as long as it does not take issue with the utopian myths underlying its desire for cultural self-transcendence – as long, that is, as it does not take leave from essentialist conceptions of "repression," "resistance," and "the other."

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