

AUDRA SIMPSON AND ANDREA SMITH, eds. *Theorizing Native Studies*. (Durham & London: Duke UP, 2014), 337 pp.

JAMES H. COX AND DANIEL HEATH JUSTICE, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*. (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 2014), 741 pp.

Both *Theorizing Native Studies* and *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature* offer timely reminders of the meaning attributed to the concept of “critical theory” by the Frankfurt School, a meaning that is inseparable from its practical purpose: “a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human ‘emancipation from slavery,’ acts as a ‘liberating [...] influence,’ and works ‘to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers’ of human beings. [...] Critical Theorists [...] seek ‘human emancipation’ in circumstances of domination and oppression. This normative task cannot be accomplished apart from the interplay between philosophy and social science through interdisciplinary empirical social research.”<sup>1</sup> As Dian Million emphasizes in her essay in the Simpson and Smith volume: “Theory, *theorizing* is [...] a verb, an action,” (Simpson & Smith, 32; original emphasis). Theorizing by guiding one’s actions towards decolonization, self-determination, and Native sovereignty underpins both of these important contributions to the discipline of Native American and Indigenous Studies.

*Theorizing Native Studies* addresses the recent explicit turn to “high theory” in Native Studies and poses as its organizing question: how can critiques based on the assumption that theory is opposed to community practice or political engagement or indigenous traditions in fact be turned to the work of theorizing what the editors call “a politically grounded and analytically charged form of Native Studies” (1)? In the outstanding introduction by Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, a comprehensive survey is offered both of the various directions in which theory has been taken in Native Studies, and the utility of these approaches is assessed in relation to issues of decolonization, analysis of settler-colonialism as

both material practices and an epistemological-representational regime, and indigenous intellectual praxis. Beginning with an outline of the relation between theory and truth that raises issues of relativism and essentialism, the editors propose that the “high” theory associated with European poststructuralism is not anathema to indigenous activism; rather, the capacity to interrogate historically contingent regimes of truth is fundamental to the work of historical contextualization and critique that is characteristic of the discipline of Native Studies. This then leads to a nuanced discussion of the question “who owns theory”? The indigenous subjects of settler theorizing or theorists whose thinking is generated within Native communities? Simpson and Smith shift the terms of this debate to question “the perceived ownership of theory,” to suggest that “if we demystify theory to understand it as the thinking behind why we think and do things, it is clear that all peoples, of course, ‘do’ theory” (7). So rather than attempt to prioritize between theory and practice, the editors ask how it is that the two have become separated within Native Studies. A couple of crucially important points arise from this questioning: that praxis divorced from theory risks perpetuating rather than challenging the logics of dispossession and domination undergirding the settler-colonial policies subjecting Native peoples, and that theory is crucial to the development of a critical consciousness for fundamental social change. But what of the “larger capitalist, white supremacist, and settler-colonial logics” that not only inform Native policy but also underpin the disciplinary structure of the academy? Is interdisciplinarity, a project that potentially leads to the kinds of multiculturalism that are complicit with the workings of indigenous dispossession, possible for Native Studies? What does Robert Warrior’s concept of intellectual sovereignty mean for the future of Native Studies as its own discipline, with its own logic of truth and critique, and commitment to decolonization? These questions are taken up explicitly in Smith’s own contribution and in Teresia Teaiwa’s exploration of the intersections between Native and Pacific Islands Studies through the concepts of authentication/authenticity and genealogy/indigenously belonging. Rather than interdisciplinarity in a conventional sense or intellectual isolationism at the other extreme, Simpson and Smith propose “theoretical promiscuity” (9), based on building coalitions of

<sup>1</sup> Max Horkheimer, qtd. James Bohman, “Critical Theory,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/critical-theory/>>.

solidarity with other oppressed groups and compatible theories derived from Marxism, feminism and queer theory, ethnic studies and postcolonialism, with the aim of challenging the intersecting oppressions of capitalism, heteronormativity and patriarchy, white supremacy and racism, settler colonialism, and nation-state imperialism.

The volume promises to move away from a simple opposition between “Western” theory and indigenous practice, and the work gathered here illuminates diverse strategies for a productive indigenizing of “theory.” The introduction frames a series of ten essays that exemplify the issues set out by the editors, engaging epistemological and methodological issues of Native Studies as a discipline, indigenous-focused critique and (re-) constructions of non-indigenous theory, the kinds of theorizing that can be brought into productive coalitional relations, and relations among theory, indigenous experience and traditions, and cultural, artistic, and literary production. In their richly contextualized contributions, Dian Million and Mishuana Goeman each propose that the conditions for theorizing arise out of indigenous expressions of experience: an idea reminiscent of Gloria Anzaldúa’s “mestizaje theory” and the argument of Kimberly Blaeser’s 1998 essay “Like ‘Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket’: Native Women Weaving Stories.”<sup>2</sup> In contributions by Million, Goeman, and Christopher Bracken, stories and other forms of individual and collective cultural expression make available affective (and so effective) forms of knowledge *with which* to understand critically the conditions of Native experience under settler-colonialism and *through which* critical forms of epistemological resistance become possible. Million structures her discussions around the stories told by residential/boarding school survivors, Bracken addresses those of Joseph Johnson’s writings primarily addressed to El-

ezar Wheelock, and Goeman analyzes the mixed-media “memoir,” *Photographic Memoirs of an Aboriginal Savant (Living on Occupied Land)*, by Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Diné, Seminole, Muscogee). These analyses of the theoretical potentials of indigenous self-expression that are occluded by the antagonistic epistemological priorities of settler-colonialism are complemented by Vera Palmer’s reinterpretation of the Jesuit hagiography of Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American woman to be canonized (in 2012), as depicting less a “pure” conversion than a trauma narrative in which traces of Tekakwitha’s Haudenosaunee lifeways are clearly discernible when contextualized and read indigenously.

While all the essays gathered in this volume are of consistently outstanding quality, five of the ten (by Coulthard, Nichols, Rifkin, Morgensen, and Goeman) stand out as meshing perfectly with each other and with the project of the volume, by using a range of theorizing to expose in very specific detail what Goeman calls “the different intersecting scales from which the logic of settler colonialism operates” (238): from subjectivization to the family, kinship, community, and to the global scale. These essays share the insight that the settler-colonial solution for devastating problems created by settler-colonial oppression is a set of settler-colonial instruments that perpetuate the settler-colonial regime. Thus, the cause becomes the cure in an ideological obfuscation that naturalizes an imperial, genocidal social order. Glen Coulthard deploys a form of Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation (the originary and violent seizing of the commons for capitalist privatization and the proletarianization of workers alienated from non-capitalist, land-based modes of life), a theory he modifies to shift emphasis away from Marx’s temporal and Eurocentric emphases towards what Coulthard calls an indigenous “place-based ethics” (57), in order to expose the ideological sleight-of-hand that presents as a victory for indigenous sovereignty the historical shift in Canada’s settler-colonial Indian policy from one of exclusion and assimilation to one based on recognition and accommodation. Recognition of cultural difference by the settler state with no corresponding capacity for political autonomy and self-determination, especially in relation to the land, instantiates settler authority, as Coulthard shows in his analysis of three land claims proposals submitted by the Dene Na-

<sup>2</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “Haciendo caras, una entrada/An Introduction,” “La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness” *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1990), xv-xxvii, 377-389; Kimberly Blaeser, “Like ‘Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket’: Native Women Weaving Stories.” *American Indian Quarterly* 21. 4 (Autumn, 1997), 555-65.

tion between 1976 and 1981. Robert Nichols's analysis of social contract theory, which he renames "the settler contract" (101), makes clear the discursive mechanism by which indigenous dispossession and extermination form the premise upon which the settler conception of an ideal civil society is based. The complexities of "Indian" enfranchisement in Canada illustrate the operation of "difference-blinding universality" (107) where the "equalization" of indigenous people and British citizens works to remove indigenous rights in exchange for an abstract equality located in the European-defined category of the human. Ironically, then, antiracist moves in the context of universal human rights remove opportunities for Native self-determination through a refusal of indigenous difference and the rights attached to it. The work of a depoliticized discourse of "recognition" is mapped by Mark Rifkin from the biopolitical construction of race or "Indianness" onto the intimate belonging of geopolitical space. He asks how the U.S. federal government produces "Indians" as a racial population that is assigned to specific physical places. As Goeman also shows in her essay, the mapping of "Indianness" to particular places obscures by de-naturalizing the indigenous claim to belonging on *all* settler-occupied lands. But Rifkin asks a prior question: how is the settler claim to intimate belonging to the land made ideologically "self-evident" so as to usurp the claim of indigeneity? The rhetoric of two Supreme Court decisions—*United States v. Rogers* (1846) and *Santa Clara Pueblo v. Martinez* (1978)—reveals through Rifkin's scrupulous close textual analysis the construction of "Indianness" through "the tribalization of peoplehood" (175) to produce a racial identity that is cultural and heritable and emphatically apolitical. Membership in a "tribe" or citizenship in a Native nation is "an extension of lineage and domesticity [...] as a deviation from Euroamerican family rather than an alternative model of governance" (176). Scott Lauria Morgensen explicitly invokes Rifkin's point about the necessity of geopolitics to settler-colonialism: "a requirement that Indigenous peoples be dispossessed of lands that settler law then renarrates to perpetuate settler occupation and rule" (188). Morgensen takes this insight into the frame of global health governance, specifically transnational institutions dealing with HIV/AIDS, to challenge the understanding of Native sovereignty as

something that must be "recognized" by settler authority, in favor of a biopolitical form of health sovereignty grounded in "a capacity of Indigenous peoples across differences *and* interrelationships to understand and practice life autonomously from colonial rule" (192). His discussion focuses on transnational indigenous HIV/AIDS organizing that resists a situation in which "the very agencies that created the conditions of illness will continue to manage health for indigenous peoples" (200). By exposing the heteropatriarchal legacy of colonial domination, this form of critique offers to expose the ongoing effects of settler-colonialism while bringing indigenous peoples together transnationally in defence of their nations.

By framing and exposing the ideological work of colonialism on various scales, these essays perform the kind of theory that Teresia Teaiwa describes: "I do not like theory when it is used as a weapon. I especially dislike theory when it is used like a silencer on a gun. I prefer to see and use theory as a frame, a magnifying glass, a key, a plow, a sail, an oar," (46). It is in this sense that the theoretical projects gathered in *Theorizing Native Studies* provide a very helpful complement to the *Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*. The title of this "Handbook" may be a little misleading: Merriam-Webster defines the genre of "the handbook" as a book capable of being conveniently carried as a ready reference or a concise reference book covering a particular subject. The *Oxford Handbook* is neither a manual nor a primer. At 682 pages (excluding index) it is neither concise nor conveniently carried for ready reference, though the outstandingly detailed index makes the volume easily navigable. It is more an extensive anthology, covering the broadest range of reference within Native literary studies, reflecting major methodological shifts in the field, and pointing the way to new research directions. Therein lies its value. As the editors, James Cox and Daniel Heath Justice, make clear in their introduction, two primary disciplinary changes are reflected in the volume: the centrality of indigenous contexts (especially in relation to land claims and treaty rights), communities, and nations as the focus of a literary critical praxis inspired by American Indian nationalism that supports Native intellectual and political sovereignty (1) and also the development of inter- and trans-indigenous approaches to Native cultural expression that exist in ten-

sion with the ethical demand for tribal-nation specificity (2) in order “to see,” as ku’ualoha ho’omanawanui writes in the volume’s “Afterwords,” “how our collective histories resonate with each other, a way to celebrate and honor our specific experiences while perhaps honoring the histories of others and finding points of similarity and solidarity” (678).

The 43 essays that comprise the *Handbook* speak to these points of emphasis. From the Pacific region (Hawai’i, Guåhan, Amerika Samoa) to Jace Weaver’s Red Atlantic, to the Caribbean, to Central and South America, to Quebec, Nunavut and Alaska, and across north American Indian Country, the geo-cultural and geo-political reach of the *Handbook* is deeply impressive, though this is matched by an equally expansive historical range. Divided into four sections, contributors variously focus their work under the headings “Histories,” “Genres,” “Methods,” and “Geographies.” Each section is generous in the scope that it covers. “Histories” includes Keavy Martin on Inuit literature, Kiara Vigil and Tiya Miles on Afro-Native literature, Emilio del Valle Escalante on contemporary Maya literature, Phillip Round on early and Maureen Konkle on nineteenth-century Native literatures, Noenoe Silva on Hawaiian literature, Kristina Fagan Bidwell on Métis literature, Mark Rifkin on queer literary traditions, Craig Santos Perez on Chamorro poetics, Christopher Teuton on indigenous orality and oral literatures, and Margaret Noodin on Anishinaabe literature. After assembling a fairly comprehensive account of the great diversity of historical traditions that inform indigenous literature, the volume turns to a correspondingly rich range of approaches to indigenous literary genres: Robert Warrior on non-fiction, Crystal Kurzen on women’s autobiography, Adam Coon on translation, Sophie Mayer on poetics, LeAnne Howe on performance culture, Alexander Pettit on drama (1970-2011), Denise Cummings on cinema, Dean Rader on intermediality or text-and-image in literature and art, Sean Kicummah Teuton on the novel, Loriene Roy on children’s literature, and Jodi Byrd on transge-

neric fictions and the indigenous challenges to generic conventions. The methods explored in the following section include Shari Huhndorf on the politics of space, Chadwick Allen on comparative trans-indigenous methods, Joseph Bauerkemper on trans-nationalism, Sam McKegney on indigenous literary criticism and anti-colonial coalition-building in Canada, Frances Washburn on teaching Native American Literature, Channette Romero on teaching indigenous literature in a multiethnic context, Renate Eigenbrod on the “pedagogy of redress,” Craig Womack on the legacy of Vine Deloria Jr., Malea Powell on Native rhetorics, and Domino Renee Perez on Chicana/o indigeneity. “Geographies” specifically covers Weaver on the Red Atlantic, Shona Jackson on the indigenous Caribbean, Lisa Brooks on the Native Northeast, Margery Fee on Northern British North America and Canada (to 1960), Warren Cariou on Native Canada (1960-2012), Caroline Sinavaiana Gabbard on Amerika Samoa, James Ruppert on Alaska, Thomas Ward on early Mayan literature, Joshua Nelson on Oklahoma Indian Territory, and Sarah Henzi on francophone aboriginal literature in Quebec.

The network of productive relations offered by the *Handbook* is extremely extensive, befitting a volume of such range and depth. Clearly, the editors have devoted a great deal of careful thought to decisions regarding the organization and composition of the book. While not a “ready reference” for readers of specific indigenous American literary texts, the *Handbook* crystallizes dominant contemporary methodological approaches to Native literatures and offers to enrich the experience of readers by making available many of the literary, historical, and hemispheric contexts that frame, focus, guide, and open to interpretation the complexity and extent of indigenous American literature. This is a volume which, along with books like *Theorizing Native Studies*, both points to future developments in Native American literary studies and takes the next steps towards that future.

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