BECOMING VISIBLE IN INVISIBLE SPACE: HOW THE CYBORG TRICKSTER IS
(RE)INVENTING AMERICAN INDIAN (NDN) IDENTITY

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates issues of representation surrounding the American Indian (NDN) and the mixedblood. By combining images of the trickster as described by NDN scholars with the postmodern theories of Donna Haraway, I explore how the trickster provides a way of viewing formerly accepted boundaries of identity from new perspectives. As cyborg, the trickster is in the “system,” but it is also enacting change by pushing against those boundaries, exposing them as social fictions. I create a cyborg trickster heuristic, using it as a lens with which to both analyze how NDNs construct online identities and the rhetorical maneuvers they undergo. As well, I show how NDNs are strengthening their presence through social media. Ultimately, I argue that the cyborg trickster shows how identities (NDN and non-NDN alike) are multiply-created and constantly in flux, transcending the traditional boundaries of self and other, online and offline, space and place, to allow for a new understanding of the individual in society and society within the individual.
**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................................... iii

Prologue .......................................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One: The Changing Technologies of Self: NDN Rhetorics of Identity ................................. 3

1. Four-footed Beginnings ................................................................................................................................. 6
2. The Technology of Breed(ing) ....................................................................................................................... 8
3. The Invented Indian ......................................................................................................................................... 9
4. Survivance in Multiplicity ............................................................................................................................. 17
   How People Were Made ............................................................................................................................... 22

Chapter Two: Tricksters, Cyborgs, and Social Proprioception ............................................................... 24

1. The Trickster .................................................................................................................................................. 25
2. Going Cyborg ................................................................................................................................................. 32
3. A Trickster Trait: Social Proprioception ..................................................................................................... 38
5. Cyborg Trickster Hermeneutics ................................................................................................................... 42
   Decolonization .............................................................................................................................................. 43
   Humor and Irony ........................................................................................................................................... 44
   Dissolution of Boundaries/Ambiguity/Transvaluation of Values ................................................................ 44
   Social Proprioception ................................................................................................................................. 44
   Tribal Languages .......................................................................................................................................... 45
6. Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................................... 46
   Something Fishy Going On ........................................................................................................................... 48

Chapter Three: The NDN Cyborg Trickster ................................................................................................. 51

1. Methodologies Part 1: Background & Participants/Subjects ....................................................................... 52
2. The Participants/Subjects ............................................................................................................................. 54
   @IAmNotAMascot ......................................................................................................................................... 55
   @Slow_ro ....................................................................................................................................................... 56
4. Methodologies Part 2: Trickster Hermeneutics ................................. 61
5. Self-Representation ........................................................................... 62
6. Humor and Irony ........................................................................... 70
7. Dissolution of Boundaries/Ambiguity/Transvaluation of Values ........... 74
8. Social Proprioception ..................................................................... 82
9. Tribal Languages ........................................................................... 87
10. Conclusion .................................................................................... 91

Glooskap Turns Men into Rattlesnakes .................................................. 93

Chapter Four: Becoming Visible in Invisible Space .................................. 95
1. Settler Colonialism ........................................................................... 96
2. Enabling Agency through Social Media ........................................... 100
3. The NCT in the Academy ................................................................. 108
4. Decolonizing the Classroom ............................................................. 116
7. Invisible Space, Visible Survivance .................................................. 122

Conclusion .......................................................................................... 125

Notes .................................................................................................... 130

Works Cited .......................................................................................... 131

Appendix .............................................................................................. 138

A. Certification of Exemption, IRB Number 13049 ................................. 138
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: NDN Cyborg Trickster Codes and Criteria ................................................................. 61

Table 2: Enactment of NCT Codes by ndns ........................................................................... 62
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Social Networking Graphically Charted ................................................................. 39
Figure 2: @IAmNotAMascot ................................................................................. 55
Figure 3: @Slo_ro ......................................................................................... 56
Figure 4: @RedIndianGirl .............................................................................. 57
Figure 5: @1491s ......................................................................................... 58
Figure 6: @Sherman_Alexie .......................................................................... 60
Figure 7: Sesame Street ndns ........................................................................ 65
Figure 8: @RedIndianGirl Self Portrait ............................................................. 81
Figure 9: Connecting Social Networks ............................................................ 83
Figure 10: Urban Outfitters ndn ..................................................................... 85
Figure 11: Indigenous Language Learners ...................................................... 89
Figure 12: Canadian *Daily News* Opinion Piece ........................................ 99
Figure 13: Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show .................................................... 102
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the “othered” American Indians/First Nations/Alaskan Natives who remain Indians, even if they are not recognized as such by the federal government or even by their tribes.
The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past.’ It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence, but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin.’ (Hall, Representation 53)

Like all walls, it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on…[t]he wall shut in… the rest of the universe. It enclosed the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free.

Looked at from the other side, the wall enclosed Anarres: the whole planet was inside it, a great prison camp, cut off from other worlds and other men, in quarantine. (LeGuin 1)

This dissertation is an exploration/examination of individual and collective cultural identities and the politics and technologies that shape and continually reshape them. While I have always been fascinated by identity theory, this dissertation originally was going to be a study on virtual identity creation/relation in the social media platform of Twitter. However, during my oral exams, that concept was married with my frequently unstable identification as an American Indian, and it became obvious that the figure of the cyborg, as I was using it, was very much a
postmodern trickster from traditional Indian lore. As a mixedblood, I am both and neither, and I have always viewed the world and my position in it from multiple perspectives. So my focus shifted to looking at how American Indians are using Internet technologies, and specifically Twitter, to (re)connect with one another, and through individual and collective action, reclaim agency.

From the broader perspective of identity theory and cultural rhetorics, this dissertation seeks to complicate the following questions: can the concept of identity be seen as a technology? How do the colonial underpinnings of our society continue to operate on/through us, and what do they do to shape/reshape/confuse identities? How can new technologies help reconnect people not only to one-another, but also to their histories, their stories? And, how can these new technologies help us overcome the invisible walls constructed by the concept of the self/other binary and the uneven power relationship that results? Clearly, these questions go far beyond the scope of a single dissertation or even a lifetime of research, which is why I don’t seek to “answer” them as such, as I would creating new walls through my conclusions; what I hope to show are what some of the possibilities may be.

In order to explore these issues, and specifically how they play out in Indian Country, I am not writing a traditional dissertation per se; if I were to remain situated strictly in academic discourse, I would remain within the walls of that discourse, and I would be unable to see from outside those walls. Instead, I have chosen a position on top of the wall, looking at both sides from different perspectives, to gain a better understanding of how colonialism continues to shape us. And for American Indians, I explore how they use Twitter and other social media to disrupt/dislodge/challenge/reform the traditional narratives of what it means to be an Indian.
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. (Silko 2)

This is a story. There was a white man of Scottish decent, William Albert Chisum, and his brother John, who went west to find their fortunes. John began running cattle and adding to his herd (partly through theft), until his ranch covered half of New Mexico and a large chunk of Texas. William opted to get into law enforcement and became a U.S. Marshall. He met a young Cherokee girl who had survived the Trail of Tears and married her. They had two children, a girl, and a boy twelve years younger. When the boy, William Albert Jr., was one year old, William Sr. was killed in a gunfight. The Cherokee woman sent her daughter to live with Uncle John on his ranch, and she married a Methodist minister named Thomas Quaid. William Jr. grew up,
became a wood smith, and married a Cherokee/Choctaw girl named Naomi Couch. They had thirteen children; the second youngest was Thomas Herbert ("Bud"), who was my grandfather.

That is the story that was handed down to me, and while I know some of it is true (and even made it into the John Wayne movie, *Chisum*), some of it I know to be fiction (I can find no record of any Chisum ever being a U.S. Marshall), but it is my story, my linkage through time to my ancestors. It has shaped who I am and how I relate to the world around me. “In the stories we tell, we translate lived experience into narrative; conversely, we rely on narratives to live our lives, make sense of our worlds, engage in production, relate to others, and construct and assert our identities” (Lyons, “A Captivity Narrative” 88). In American Indian tradition, all of life is a story, and the story itself is alive and changing, including new people each time it is told. Children learn about the world through stories, and by participating in stories, they begin to create their own stories, their own identities.

This dissertation is a story, an analysis of my identity as I seek to make sense of the many worlds I inhabit. It is an investigation of how technology is changing our identities and how the concepts of identity and race themselves are technologies of representation. It is a story with multiple beginnings, with new strands being added all the time, changing the shape and very fabric of who I am.
1. Four-footed Beginnings

I grew up in the town of Alpine, California, about forty-five miles east of San Diego. We had two-and-a-half acres of sagebrush, huge boulders, and steep hills. My father was an executive at the aerospace firm of General Dynamics, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom who had a college degree in bacteriology. My mom was, as she herself admitted, “not all that good with kids,” and she focused on getting my brother and me grown up (basically, as quickly as possible) and becoming responsible adults. As a result, I learned that when I was upset over something, there was little comfort to be found from my mother, and I turned instead to my four-footed family. We had a family dog, but he was my brother’s, and so my dad got me outdoor cats (he and my brother are allergic to cats). When I was eight, we moved to our second house in Alpine, which had a barn and a corral, and my dad felt I was old enough to handle a horse. I got my horse; my brother got a dirt bike (that’s what off-road motorcycles were called in the seventies). My dad also decided it was time for us to learn about “the birds and the bees,” so he constructed a rabbit hutch and we began raising rabbits. When not in school or playing with friends, I spent my time with my horse and my cats, and a male rabbit I named Nibbles, who became a close friend over the next four years. I talked to the coyotes and the birds and the cottontails, learned to avoid rattle snakes, and experimented with grinding up acorns on granite rocks, trying to make an edible mash (and failed on every level). I read every animal story in the local library, and read The Black Stallion so many times I had the first eighteen pages memorized word-for-word. When I was ten, we moved into my father’s first custom home. While I loved the house, I kept asking myself why people had to build new houses and destroy the homes of
animals, when there were plenty of existing houses on the market. My dad’s job kept him traveling a lot, but when he was home, he spent as much time with my brother and me as he could. He taught my brother how to hunt with a recurve bow and a gun. I learned how to skin and tan the rabbit hides. We were raised not to be racist (although the town was predominantly white), and I had friends of all different religions. But it wasn’t until I was twelve that I found out about my Indian heritage.

Alpine was a town of 1,500 people and quite spread out. About forty-five minutes outside of town was the local Indian reservation, and the Indian kids were bused to my school. One of them became a friend, although at first she was very hesitant to talk to a “white” kid, but our mutual respect for nature and animals won her over. One day on the way home, she said she’d talked to her parents several times and they’d agreed to let me come for a sleepover one weekend. I got home and asked my mom; that was my first real encounter with racism in a supposedly non-racist house. She said reservations were dangerous places and there was a lot of poverty and a lot of drunk people; she tried to spin it so that it was an issue of me being that far away and possibly in danger, but I knew. I clearly remember my friend’s look on the bus the next day when I said my mom wouldn’t let me come—it was the look of someone who was used to being labeled as “less than.” She quit speaking to me shortly after that.

Years later, my mother explained that she knew I would become very attached to my Indian friend and want to learn more about her culture, when my dad and his father had tried hard to fit into white society. She wanted me to follow in my father’s footsteps and become a successful member of society, not someone clinging to “mythic notions of a bygone era.”
I first started looking at identity as a technology in a graduate course that focused on institutions and bureaucracies as technologies, where we applied Foucault and Feenberg, amongst others, to a study of a particular bureaucracy. For my seminar paper, I opted to focus on the American Kennel Club (AKC), since I had two purebred Alaskan Malamutes, and one of them, Glacier Icefall Inditarod, was a champion and a stud dog (which is a whole other story; I had no intention of getting into the beauty pageantry of dogs.) In my analysis of the AKC, I was shocked to find out all the different rules and regulations surrounding purebred dogs. There is a breed “standard” that outlines the dog’s size, coloring, eye color, temperament, and desirable and undesirable traits. Breeders then breed for these specific traits. There are thirty-five pages of rules outlining registration policy and procedures (including the length of dogs’ names), and I discovered a very Foucauldian policy of registration: that not only was it something to be privileged (AKC purebred dogs, and champions in particular, can be sold for thousands of dollars); it was also used as a method of discipline. For instance, I had no idea that by owning a registered purebred dog, the AKC could send an inspector to my house at any time to “inspect” my kennel and how I was taking care of the dogs. I have to have my registration papers handy to produce, and if the papers are out of order, certificates missing, or if the inspector doesn’t think my house and yard are clean and safe, the AKC can have my dogs removed. Having a dog removed immediately suspends that dog’s registration, which means that any litters born after that suspension cannot be registered, ever. If the registration is revoked, then that dog and all offspring of that dog are no longer members of the AKC and cannot be sold as AKC purebred dogs. Tied to all of these issues of registration is money. There is a fee for each registration, and
not only do breeders have to register the individual dogs, they also have to register the entire litter when it is born. The more dogs registered, the more money the AKC receives.

My analysis of the AKC really got me thinking about my own background as a “mixedblood mutt” and made me wonder what types of AKC-like technologies were employed in defining an American Indian, and what stigmata worked like registration—as something both to be desired and to be shunned. The AKC was founded in 1884, and the basics of defining a breed were based on the eugenics theories of the time.

3. The Invented Indian

In Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices, Stuart Hall states that

[m]arking “difference” leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal. However, paradoxically, it also makes “difference” powerful, strangely attractive precisely because it is forbidden, taboo, threatening to cultural order. Thus, “what is socially peripheral is often symbolically centered.” (237)

The marking of difference is a symbolic boundary used to stabilize a culture, keeping categories “pure” and in their proper places, which provides a cultural identity. Any disruption of these categories threatens that identity and causes a culture to tighten its boundaries. This process of purification, of marking difference, is clearly defined in the world of purebred dogs, and that same marking has been used to both define and destroy American Indian identity. The issue of self and other is prevalent throughout Indian rhetoric, as it is prevalent in the rhetoric of any
colonized peoples. The question, what does it mean to be Indian? is not one that is easily answered. As history attests, American Indians were seen as savage and less-than-human, and for centuries were treated like children (consistently referred to as wards in many legal documents). Indian beliefs in the equality of all living things, their ties to the land, and the fact that most tribes were matriarchal, were a major threat to the patriarchal society of the white man. The solution was to assimilate Indians, in essence remaking them in the image of the white hegemony. Gerald Vizenor uses the term “indian” to represent a simulated Indian, since American Indians were mislabeled by Columbus and have been stuck with that label ever since. The very name “Indian” and the stereotype of the “savage” are misrepresentations of a cultural identity.

About Indian identity I have a revolutionary fervor. The hardest part of it is I believe we’re all invented as Indians.... So what I’m pursuing now in much of my writing is this idea of the invented Indian. The inventions have become disguises.... we’re invented and we’re invented from traditional static standards.... Some upsetting is necessary. (Pulitano 151, citing Bowers and Silet)

To continue Vizenor’s upsetting, throughout this dissertation I’m going to refer to American Indians as “ndns.” This spelling is both reflective of oral tradition (n-d-n) and it removes the reference to the country of India. By making it lower-case, I’m also emphasizing the marginalized state of ndns in this country. But to fully understand how ndns were “invented”—as well as the technologies involved in marginalizing them—I need to first address complex and controversial issue of blood quantum.

Blood quantum is a racial ideology that conflates identity with genetics, determining how “ndn” a person is based on what percentage Indian blood the person has. “Blood quantum was
widely embraced by nineteenth-century scientific thought as a *rational measure of racial identity and racial ‘purity’*” (Sturm 80; italics mine). Faced with a growing ndn population, the U.S. government needed a way to minimize its payments to tribes for their land without invalidating the existing treaties. Maintaining the “purity” of the ndn became a way for the U.S. government “to limit their number, thereby diminishing the cost associated with underwriting their entitlements on a per capita basis” (Jaimes 126). The General Allotment Act of 1887, commonly called the Dawes Act, did precisely that (notice that this is only three years after the founding of the AKC). A brilliant set of political tools to destroy native traditions by eliminating communal property and forcing ndns into the capitalist notion of individual property ownership, the Dawes Act was a way for the U.S. government to appear to be upholding its treaties with the tribes, while at the same time severely reducing the population that would receive land, and therefore open up much of ndn territory to white settlers. Since ndn identity is intimately tied to the land, divvying up the communal land was essentially a way of fracturing ndn identity, the first step in recreating them as whites. Not only did the government decide that only 160 acres would be allotted to each ndn (which was far less per person than owned by the tribes as a whole), but it decided that only full or halfbloods qualified as “ndn,” *and* they had to be living on the reservation in Oklahoma Territory. All others were excluded, even if they were fullblood and had simply moved off the reservation (Sturm 78). President Andrew Jackson had stated that he wanted to see the ndn bred to extinction, and these extremely constrictive “rules” about who was an ndn nearly accomplished that goal.

The final Dawes rolls were compiled between 1899 and 1906, and had two additional requirements: individuals had to apply for enrollment during this time frame, and they also had to be listed on a previous tribal roll from 1880 or 1896, which further limited the number of ndns
who qualified for allotments and federal services (cherokee.org). The rolls list the name, age, sex, degree of ndn blood in percentages, the family’s census card number, and assigns each individual a unique roll number. By defining ndns in this way, the federal government exercised a severe form of Foucauldian discipline, hierarchizing “the ‘nature’ of individuals” (Foucault 183). Not only did this act both “normalize” and “other” the ndn, but through exclusion it also served to “other” ndns from themselves, which in essence meant that they were no longer “ndn.” Additionally, many ndns were highly suspicious of putting their names on lists that the government could then use to track or hunt them, so they opted not to sign any of the tribal rolls.

The final Dawes rolls also included additional classes of enrollment by dividing the rolls into racial lines, as can be seen with the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, where the government created three categories of Cherokee: those who were Cherokee by blood, the Cherokee Freedmen (black slaves previously owned by the Cherokee and may or may not have had Cherokee blood), and the intermarried whites. All three groups were entitled to land allotments, but blood quantum determined “the trust status of those allotments—in essence, who was in control of the land” (Sturm 79). Those who were at least half Cherokee received land that was held in trust by the federal government, and it was exempt from sale or taxation. The Freedmen and intermarried whites, on the other hand, being less than half Cherokee, were forced to pay taxes. While they had the option of selling their land, selling also meant tribal land loss.

The government further broke up tribal identity by the allotment selection process: frequently, family members were given allotments on opposite sides of the reservation, forcing them to either split up the family or sell the disconnected parcels. The government also assigned parcels of land that couldn’t be used for farming, while then opening up prime farmland on the reservation for white settlers. When the Dawes Act was passed in 1887, “there had been 138
million acres of ndn land in the United States. By 1934, that number had plummeted 65%, to 48 million acres” (Hanscom). Additionally, since most ndns couldn’t read or write and therefore had no wills, the Dawes Act included an inheritance clause where, when an owner died, all of the person’s children inherited an undivided interest, meaning the land belonged to all of them. While this joint ownership is very much one of the communal principles of ndns, as each generation passed, more and more people owned the same plot of land. “Today, many parcels of land have hundreds of owners spread around the country. Intermarriage between tribes means ndns often inherit interest in land on several reservations” (Hanscom). The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) still requires the consensus of the majority of owners before a house can be built, the land farmed, or a portion sold. To make matters even more difficult, the BIA maintains the records of all owners, but uses the Privacy Act as the reason it cannot share those records with the other owners, so getting a consensus is nearly impossible. If the land is not being used, the BIA retains the right to lease it to non-ndns for farming or forestry (Hanscom).

In response to being othered, many ndn tribes became “trapped by the stereotype, unconsciously confirming it by the very terms in which they [tried] to oppose and resist it” (Hall, *Representation* 263). Over the years, the technology created to marginalize ndns was, in the classic reversal of stereotypes, used by them. As Sturm states, since the BIA has used blood quantum “in the administration of Native-American boarding schools and land allotments and in census reports... the significance of blood quantum was internalized and then codified by the tribes themselves” (87). The tribes began to use blood quantum as a measure of ndnness and the majority of the tribes include blood quantum in their regulations for tribal enrollment. For instance, to become a member of the Cherokee Nation, a person first has to obtain a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) from the BIA. The CDIB is a small white card that lists the
person’s name and the degree of ndn blood in fractions, but it is essential to a person’s legal and political recognition as a tribal member (87). The CDIB is a person’s “pedigree,” both genetically and socio-politically. In fact, CDIBs are “referred to as ‘pedigree slips’ by opponents” of the blood/culture concept (Jaimes 131). Obtaining a CDIB, however, can be a very complicated process: a person must first apply to the Cherokee registration department, which handles applications for the BIA, and provide legal documents showing the person’s lineal descent from his or her Cherokee ancestors (Sturm 87). But the Cherokee ancestor must be listed on the Dawes rolls with the degree of ndn blood. Without that key element, even a fullblood Cherokee is denied tribal membership. Applicants must also include either the roll number or the CDIB number of the ndn relative in each generation tracing back to the rolls, as well as original birth and death certificates (photocopies are not allowed). The Cherokee Nation reserves the right to deny anyone eligibility if the application is not supported by the documents submitted. And so the Dawes rolls, created by the white man, become the quintessential documents—a bible—for determining who is Cherokee and who is not.

Blood became a technology in the representation of a race, and genetics were conflated with culture. As one Cherokee man put it, “If we continue to mix ourselves, then the blood heritage runs out. The blood of a Cherokee is not just a biological thing, but a lot of heritage. There are a lot of real Cherokee people running through our veins. There’s a cultural heritage in there” (Sturm 98). In fact, the message to maintain the bloodlines to preserve the culture has become so prominent that Cherokees are “instructed” to “choose marriage partners based on their shared notions of who has the right kind of blood and what kind of person will produce offspring with an acceptable blood mixture” (Strum 145). They are indeed closing ranks and attempting to breed out “impurities.” Or they can marry another ndn, but there is no dual-
citizenship for their offspring; the conflation of blood with culture is so complete that Cherokee law requires that they can only belong to one tribe (Cherokee.org). This fixing of an identity (“being Cherokee”) by blood is exactly the same technology used to fix a standard in the dog world. Breeders select dogs that best typify certain aspects of the standard and then breed to meet that standard. The truly “great” dogs are the dogs that come the closest to the standard and thus are the best representatives of the breed. In constructing a tribal identity, the Cherokee Nation has recreated the binary of self and other—one is either Cherokee or one is not.

However, the same argument can be made for those who believe that “being Cherokee” is about culture, tradition, and lifestyle, rather than genetics. As Cherokee writer Christina Berry puts it in her online article, Blood Quantum: Why It Matters and Why It Shouldn’t, “[h]ave you ever been talking to someone who mentioned that they were part Hispanic, part African-American, part Jewish, part Italian, part Korean, etc.? Have you ever asked them what percentage?” For those ethnicities, there is no question of authenticity based upon percentage. She notes that prior to the Euro American invasion, the Cherokee frequently intermarried with other tribes and practiced adoption, where a non-member would, over time, become recognized as a “fully functioning member of the group.” Blood was never important.

The federal government has only served to confuse the issue of Cherokee identity. In order to be eligible for health benefits and some social services, the government imposes a minimum blood quantum standard of one-quarter degree ndn blood. However, at other times documentation showing proof of lineage and tribal enrollment is all that is required. Other agencies, such as the Census Bureau, only ask for self-identification (Sturm 89). The Cherokee Nation primarily aligns itself with federal standards, but it does not require a specific blood quantum. This lack of a quantum came about through the dissolution of the Cherokee Nation
when Oklahoma became a state in 1907, and it wasn’t until the Indian Claims Act in 1946 that the Cherokee government rebuilt itself. By this time, however, so many Cherokee that identified as such (and met all of the CDIB requirements) had significantly less than the one-quarter ndn blood required for social services. In fact, the majority of the Cherokee Nation is now less than one-sixteenth “Cherokee” and imposing a blood quantum would therefore exclude members of one’s own family: children or grandchildren that did not meet the quantum (100). By setting rules that denote membership in a community, a normalizing technology is created that determines who is included and who is excluded. As Andrew Feenberg has explained, “[t]he technical choices that establish roles are simultaneously normative choices that are imposed on everyone who chooses to belong to the organization” (103). The “watering down” of Cherokee bloodlines has created a panopticon: in order to keep its current members, the Cherokee cannot impose a blood quantum, but at the same time, they are now self-policing to try and strengthen the bloodlines. In fact, in the past twenty years, the Cherokee citizens have been electing tribal leaders that “look” Cherokee in the phenotypic sense, as well as being more versed in cultural practices than earlier leaders. “As a result, the public face of the Cherokee Nation reflects not the tribe’s demographic reality but its imagined center” (Sturm 107). Reflecting the imagined center is exactly what Hall meant when he stated, “what is socially peripheral is often symbolically centered” (237). Ndns have placed this imagined center on a pedestal, reflecting a 150-year-old definition of “ndn,” instead of who they are today.
4. Survivance in Multiplicity

There is one additional argument for eliminating the “blood quantum” standard: how many “fullbloods” are really fully Cherokee, Choctaw, or any other tribe? When I’ve mentioned that my great grandmother was Cherokee and Choctaw to other Cherokees, the usual comment is that most Cherokee are part Choctaw, as the tribes lived in close proximity to one-another on the reservation. And even prior to removal, all of the tribes migrated and inter-married (and, in fact, it was encouraged as ndns recognized that too much “inbreeding” produced genetic abnormalities).

The real question, I believe, becomes one of who wins and who loses when claiming an ndn identity. Many registered ndns see people claiming ndn ancestry as “wannabe ndns,” who see the exoticness of the other, the stereotyped ndn, and maybe see the possibility for getting federal money, without having a clue about the culture. So what makes an ndn: the blood or the culture?

In X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent, Scott Lyons relates a story about his daughter that really reflects the question of ndn identity. Scott, having married a white woman, has a daughter with blonde hair and a fair complexion. One day she was approached by two ndn boys on the reservation, one of whom who taunted her, saying she couldn’t be ndn because she didn’t look like one; she replied to them in fluent Ojibwemowin, which the boy did not speak (35). In fact, Lyons states that ndn intellectuals are in constant conflict over the issue of ndn identity, with “one writer talking about blood over here, another arguing for the social importance of language and culture over there, and nearly everyone quietly troubled about the colonial roots of tribal roles” (40). Resa Bizzaro argues that by excluding unenrolled mixedbloods, ndns are only
hurting themselves by denying voices that could argue on their behalf. “If nations strengthen their voices by adding more members, it will become easier to change the stereotypes and misapprehensions held against Native Americans in this country, perhaps even affecting legislation” (73). As Hall also pointed out, once an identity is fixed, it becomes the banner under which a people fight, “as if we don’t have any other politics to argue except about whether something’s [ndn] or not” (Stuart Hall 472). Including unenrolled mixedbloods would also affect who received government funding and even private grants and scholarships, something the government would definitely fight against.

This is a story. My father was born on a small farm in Hinton, Oklahoma, in the thirties. His father, half Cherokee and part Choctaw, never completed the eighth grade. His mother came from a poor white family and never completed high school. Already assimilated into white society, both parents not only supported school literacy, they emphasized how it could help my father be something better than just a farmer. Both parents also maintained close ties to their primary discourse community: the large, extended family in the area. During World War II, they moved to Oregon, where my father completed high school and went on to college. He married and received his Master’s in abstract mathematics. The additional degree provided him a job in the aerospace industry, so he and my mother moved to California. By this time his new literacies had made him question not just his religion, but also the values of the extended family in Oklahoma. He felt he couldn’t explain to family members what it was he did in a language they would understand. He also felt as if he’d grown beyond their base values and had entered a new social class that was “above” them. The U.S. government and school system had made a proper “white” man out of him. While he maintained contact with his parents and a cousin that also
went to college, he dropped all other ties to the extended family. Literacy allowed him to escape the lower-class lifestyle that his parents had endured, but it also alienated him from his mixedblood heritage.

While my father’s story is a story of assimilation, a recent visit to ancestry.com has turned up some interesting new threads of that story. His great-grandfather, William Albert Chisum (senior), wasn’t even “William Albert”—his name was James Madison Chisum, and he’s one generation after the Trail of Tears. James’ wife, Parthenia Ann Knapp, is listed on an 1890 Chickasaw census in Arkansas. James and Parthenia were only married a year when he died (cause not listed). And they did have a son named William Albert. The thirteen-year-old daughter was from Parthenia’s first marriage, and was indeed sent to live with Uncle John on his big New Mexico ranch. Parthenia married a third time, minister Thomas Quaid, and they obtained a license to live on reservation land. William Albert is listed on a 1910 census as living in Talequah Ward 4, Cherokee, Oklahoma. My great-grandmother, Naomi Couch, was supposedly Cherokee and Choctaw, but as with Parthenia, I’ve only found her on a Choctaw census. There is no documentation of having ever been Cherokee.

These facts bring up some interesting questions for me and my story. Was Parthenia Chickasaw and not Cherokee, and the Cherokee part came from the location name (being from Cherokee versus being Cherokee)? Or was she both? Did the Cherokee come from Naomi, and it’s simply not recorded? Since the Cherokee do not allow dual-citizenship, she may have simply identified more with her Choctaw heritage and thus only listed it. Or, as my father put it, did it not matter to the census takers back then, as “an ndn was an ndn” and that was all that mattered? These questions highlight the complexity of both ndn identity and oral history. My family history is also an example of how the policies put in place by the Dawes Act continued to shrink
reservation land over time: Parthenia and Thomas “owned” a plot of reservation land, and as it happens, the “small farm” that my father grew up on was 160 acres.

This story has only just begun and will continue to become more complex. Am I ndn by blood? Yes. Am I ndn by culture? Not really—I don’t know the Cherokee, Choctaw, or Chickasaw languages (although I started to learn Cherokee several years ago, but my new findings make me wonder if I should be studying Choctaw or Chickasaw instead), I didn’t grow up on a reservation, and I don’t belong to a tribe. Am I ndn spiritually/philosophically? Absolutely. So where does one draw the line at who is ndn and who is not? And can that line ever really be drawn? As Stuart Hall states, it really is a complex matter:

[w]hat is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category [“ndn”]; that is, the recognition that [“ndn”] is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature…. This inevitably entails a weakening or fading of the notion that “race” or some composite notion of race around the term [ndn] will either guarantee the effectivity of any cultural practice or determine in any final sense its aesthetic value. (Stuart Hall 443)

Hall is saying that as a politically and culturally constructed category, there is no way to use fixed scientific definitions of race to determine who is an ndn and who is not. In fact, science itself is now challenging those concepts of identity and race. The Mendelian theory of dominant and recessive genes strictly controlling biology is unraveling; a recent discovery of gene-protein interactions has produced evidence that the environment does indeed influence inheritable traits
(Anderson). And that means that the environment literally helps shape who we are, making it a part of our identities. In short, science is now proving that the ndn holistic identity is more “real” than the static, individual sense of identity that the white hegemony has long upheld.

The real issue here is not one of racial identity but one of representation. It’s not about who is from what country or tribe, but where the power exists. Identity is not a bodily thing: it’s an issue of representation, and who controls that representation. In Chapter Two, I discuss how the figure of the trickster complicates issues of representation and the strict drawing of boundaries or categories. I show how the mixedblood can be compared to a trickster in ndn scholarship, and then I reflect on postmodern theories of identity as fragmented and always in-process. Taking the trickster into the twenty-first century, I introduce Haraway’s theory of the cyborg and show how the cyborg is a kind of postmodern trickster. I then introduce the concept of social proprioception: a group of people creating a shared sense of a collective, holistic self. The virtual opposite of biological determinism and embodiment, social proprioception might be seen as a trickster hermeneutic, consistent with ndn understandings of identity. I tie these theories together through the creation of what I call the NDN Cyborg Trickster (NCT), which I then use in Chapter 3 to examine the convergence of digital and ndn identity construction. Through a case study of identity representation in the social media platform of Twitter, I analyze how ndns are moving beyond simulations of the “ndn” by controlling their own representations online, both as tribes and as individual members of tribes, and by using social media for pan-tribal cooperation. In my final chapter, I present classroom experience and discuss the implications of my findings for the digital classroom. I conclude with areas for further research.
How People Were Made

(Miwok)

At one time, quite a while ago, the animals were like people. Falcon said to Coyote: “You have great magic powers. Why don’t you make some human beings?”

“It is too much work,” said Coyote.

“No matter,” said Falcon. “You must do it, because you can do it.”

“Well, all right,” said Coyote.

Coyote laid down and played dead. Then many crows and buzzards came. They pecked at Coyote’s backside. They made a big hole in Coyote’s left buttock. They worked their way inside. Then Coyote quickly closed the hole, trapping the scavengers. He went back to his home. He opened the hole in the buttock. He told Falcon to pick the crows and buzzards out. Then he told Falcon to pluck them.

“Now,” said Coyote, “we will stick their feathers into various places in all the four directions.”

Coyote and Falcon went to work. On every hill they planted one crow and one buzzard feather. The crow feathers became just people. The buzzard feathers became chiefs. As Coyote planted the feathers he gave every site a name, and the next day there were human beings living in all those places.

Coyote said to Falcon: “These new human beings look exactly like us. So now we must assume a different shape. We must become animals. It is your fault. You forced me into making
those humans. So now you shall have wings and a beak, and I shall have a tail and fur all over. I shall be Coyote and creep around hunting. You will fly about. You can be the chief if you want.”

At once all the original people were transformed into animals and birds. Coyote named them all. “Now I’m tired,” he said. “I will rest.”

(American Indian Trickster Tales 20)
Chapter Two:
Tricksters, Cyborgs, and Social Proprioception

Chapter One outlined federal policies regarding American Indians (I specifically use the lower-case spelling, “ndn,” to highlight their marginalized state), the use of blood quantum to “other” by defining who is an ndn and who is not, and my own narrative of colonization/assimilation. In this chapter, I will explore the role of the trickster in ndn lore, and how the trickster operates to unsettle/challenge/question the usually unacknowledged rules of society, thereby allowing those of us interested in digital and cultural rhetorics to reconsider how those rules help shape who we are and the choices we make. I then turn to postmodern theory and show how it creates a crisis between the real and the virtual, between the body and the environment, between self and other. By combining images of the trickster as described in classic stories and as redefined through ndn scholars Scott Lyons and Gerald Vizenor, with the theories of Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Henri LeFebvre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I examine how a postmodern trickster provides a way to for us to view formerly accepted boundaries of identity from new perspectives, especially through the concept of social proprioception. I conclude by establishing a new theory of the NDN Cyborg Trickster (capitalized to represent a way out of that marginalized state), which I use in the next chapter as a lens for viewing how ndns are reclaiming agency online.
1. The Trickster

To understand the roles the trickster plays, we must first understand the basics of ndn identity—beyond issues of blood quantum (all identity is complex, so I’m doing some serious summarizing here, and it won’t be accurate for all tribes). One important point about animals in ndn culture (at least, before the fur trade), is that animals were considered close relatives of humans, and in many cultures, still are. They were not inferior creatures to be exploited, but instead seen as “our relatives in the universal community of humans, holy people, and animals, and we are bound to them by certain obligations just as we are to our human relatives” (Ballinger 44). In many myths, animals represent the First People, and in some stories they actually unzip their animal exterior to reveal the persons underneath. For the Ojibwe, the First People were a mythic race that lived before humans existed, and when humans came, the First People were transformed into the animals that still bear their names. But the First People were not animals; they were non-human persons, but persons nevertheless. Bright states that “‘in the Native American context, Frog, Bluejay, Bear, and Coyote are not animals: they are First People [who] more resembled gods, although they were not much like any gods ever worshipped in Europe’” (qtd. in Ballinger 45). In fact, John Epes Brown “has written how ‘relationships do not stop [with family, clan, and tribe] but extend out to embrace and relate to the environment; to the land, to the animals, to the plants, and to the clouds, the elements, the heavens, the stars; and ultimately those relationships that people express and live, extend to embrace the universe’” (qtd. in Ballinger 46). The individual self or hero who goes out and forms his own destiny is a Euro-centric idea of the self; in ndn communities, the self is always formed within and through the community, and the community’s well-being almost always comes first.
Tricksters often embody the powers of the spiritual world, and they change forms between animals, spiritual forces, and humans. In the majority of stories, the trickster is in animal form at least part of the time, reinforcing the idea that humans are part of the animal world and have an immediate connection and responsibility to that world. The trickster’s actions orchestrate some type of transformation of the world, making the trickster a sort of mythic character. However, rarely does a trickster set out to change something for the benefit of humans; typically his transformations are to the physical world (like landscape features or animal and place names), and are a result of his self-indulgence or laziness. In one Hopi creation story, Coyote is tasked with carrying a heavy jar. Seeking to free himself of his burden, he opens the jar, and fragments of light fly out to become the stars (49). It should be noted, though, that tricksters don’t generally create something out of nothing; they shape the world by manipulating what already exists.

There are three key elements of trickster stories that are almost always present. The first is that the trickster is always on a journey, or simply wandering from place to place. Many trickster stories begin with phrases such as: “Coyote was going there” and “As he was walking along.” In some stories, a reason is given for the wandering, like punishment for his gluttony or shame he has brought on himself and everyone knows it, so he wanders in search of a place where his shame is not known. The second is the use of humor and irony; the antics that cause his punishment are frequently laughable. And the third is his wandering away from the rules. Trickster stories highlight the dangers of extremism, as well as the fact that things are not always as they seem.

He is always a somewhat ambiguous figure, and his powers are “derived from his ability to live interstitially [in the cracks, betwixt and between, marginally], to confuse and to escape the
structures of society and the order of cultural things” (Ballinger 23). He allows us to see the structures of our society that we frequently take for granted, and he casts new light on those structures, showing how they are both beneficial and constraining. He is always at the margins of society, or even beyond, “dramatizing new ways of perceiving and the possibility of new orders but also leading us to the ‘rediscovery of essential truths, a transvaluation of values, and the affirmation of a primal order’” (24). An example of the trickster’s ability to comment on social structures and essential truths can be seen in the following story from the Gros Ventre (Algonquian) oral tradition, and is typical of trickster myths.

“Nix’ant was traveling. As he went he heard the noise of a sundance.” Searching about for the source of the sounds, he discovers mice holding a dance in an elk skull. Commanding the hole through which he looks to enlarge, he puts his head in the skull, scattering the mice in the process, and becomes stuck in the skull. Unable to see, he stumbles off, bumping into trees (which identify themselves for him, thereby revealing that he is getting closer to the river) until he falls into the river. As he floats toward a camp, he frightens swimmers who think that he is bax’aan, that is, a water monster. When Nix’ant says, “I allow only girls to get me,” two girls wade in, catch the skull by the horns, and pull him to shore. He grabs one of the girls and begins to have sex with her. Now aware of his identity, everyone else runs back to camp spreading the word that Nix’ant is raping a virgin. The girl’s mother runs to where the trickster is violating the girl and begins pummeling him with a club. He merely laughs, proclaiming that the blows make him thrust into the girl more vigorously and that “the place where you can kill me
is in the middle of my head.” The woman strikes there, breaking the skull. Nix’ant runs off pursued by all the women. (16-17)

In this single episode the trickster does all of the following: notes that we need to be aware of our physical limitations (cramming a large head into a small hole); that humans believe in indulging their sexuality; warns us against using our power for idle things; parodies human gullibility (both with the girls pulling him to shore and telling the mother she would kill him by striking in the middle of the skull, which actually frees him); teaches about water-loving trees; comments on the interaction of humans with spirits; reminds us that the mythic world is a part of human experience; and entertains us (16-17). This list represents the complexity of trickster stories, and that complexity is perhaps why many non-ndn scholars have had such difficulty understanding the trickster.

Traditional Euro-centric myths are often about the binary of good versus evil, and typically, in the end good triumphs over evil. Such stories reinforce the unwritten rules of Western society: that there is always a hierarchy, and whoever “wins” is “better than” whoever “loses.” And Western scholars tend to interpret trickster stories through that lens. Radin is frequently cited for his description of the ndn trickster. While he does posit that the trickster doesn’t have a fixed form and “no well-defined meaning,” he goes on to state that while the trickster is “neither good nor evil,” he is “‘responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being’” (qtd. in Ballinger 21). While much of what Radin says is supported by trickster stories, he is reading in the concept of good and evil, when, in fact, the trickster teaches us about natural balance and learning to adapt to a constantly changing world. The trickster’s acts aren’t evil and certainly don’t create evil; they merely demonstrate that extremes can be dangerous. There is
“bad,” which usually entails making a choice inappropriate for the situation, but there is no outright “evil.”

Claude Levi-Strauss remains an influential scholar of trickster studies. Levi-Strauss calls the trickster a mediator, occupying a position between polar opposites (love/hate, right/wrong, life/death, civilized/wild, etc.) and because of that position, “must retain something of that duality—namely an ambiguous and equivocal character” (226). He argues that trickster stories aren’t simple folktales of a simple people, but instead use the same kind of logic and reasoning that is used in science today, it’s just a different area (science) that is employing it. While I appreciate Levi-Strauss’ idea that the minds of our ancestors were every bit as complex as ours today, he characterizes the mind as “unchanged” with “unchanging powers,” when one of the trickster’s key roles is to remind us that nothing remains the same; the entire world is changing every moment, and as a part of the world, we are also constantly changing.

Building on Levi-Strauss’ position of the trickster being between two opposites, Barbara Babcock-Abraham argues that the trickster lives in the margins: a place just outside the main group, but not entirely separated from it. In her essay, “A ‘Tolerated Margin of Mess’: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered,” she states that a “‘situation of ‘marginality’ exists whenever commonly held boundaries [of the social structure, of law and custom, of kinship, family structure, and sexuality, of the human person, or of nature] are violated’” (qtd. in Ballinger 23). Clearly, this is true of nearly all trickster tales. But it is when those boundaries are violated that we really begin to see the structure of those boundaries and how they operate in our society. Babcock-Abraham’s trickster is one that allows us to see from multiple perspectives, and sometimes see the unwritten cultural rules that we live within, but never necessarily knew existed before.
The most comprehensive trickster study I have come across is a recent book by Franchot Ballinger, *Living Sideways: Tricksters in American Indian Oral Tradition*. Ballinger takes an in-depth look at trickster stories, noting in particular that all trickster stories that we read have been translated, and most of them not by ndns, so they don’t truly reflect the role of the story in the culture (and a written story can never truly reflect the role of the story when the story comes from an oral tradition, where the process of storytelling adds multiple dimensions to the story’s meanings). Gerald Vizenor also emphasizes this point:

> The elusive and clever trickster characters in tribal imagination are seldom heard or understood in translation. Missionaries and anthropologists were the first to misconstrue silence, transformation, and figuration in tribal stories; they were not trained to hear stories as creative literature and translated many stories are mere cultural representations. (Ruins of Representation 12)

As with Radin imparting the concept of “evil” onto trickster stories, the translators may have unconsciously incorporated their viewpoints into their translations. Ballinger also asks in the foreward if we can really understand the roles of the stories if we are not part of ndn culture? He does, in my opinion, an excellent job of explaining the ndn point of view, how the rhetoric works, and how the ndn concept of storytelling is very different from Euro-centric traditions. In each chapter, he covers various stories about specific trickster traits: social relations, sex and gender, kinship stories, the buffoon, etc.

Ballinger notes that while the concept of living in the margins is generally true for trickster stories, Babcock-Abraham’s use of “in the cracks” isn’t true for all tricksters (he compares it to Huck Finn’s living in the cracks), and they don’t fall through the cracks into some dark underworld. He states that tricksters “never settle or shape themselves so as to allow
closure, either fictional or moral” and they can never be fixed, again emphasizing that change is the only constant (30). Unlike Levi-Strauss, who characterizes the trickster as occupying the midpoint between dualities, Ballinger points out that that viewpoint is limiting. “Tricksters elude all attempts to place them within the categories of definition and classification, especially in ‘either/or’ or ‘both’ terms. At most we can say only that tricksters are, in fact, neither/nor, either/and, and both. Most ndn traditions seem to accept this state of affairs (30).” Ballinger argues that it is best of think of tricksters in terms of polyvalence rather than bivalence. The Euro-centric viewpoint may define the world primary in terms of binaries; tricksters help ndns remember that world is many-sided and constantly in flux.

While tricksters have often been buffoons, always violating social rules and twisting things for their own egos, some more modern takes on the trickster in ndn culture see him as the symbol of survival. Vizenor and Lyons see the mixedblood as the trickster, living in both cultures and learning how to balance them. In Earthdiver: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent, Vizenor casts mixedbloods as cultural heroes, calling them the survivors of the union between white fur traders and ndn women. He has them dive into the unknown to create a new reality of coexistence in the modern world. For Vizenor, the mixedblood trickster is the epitome of survivance (survival and resistance) because he embraces both cultures, rather than choosing one over the other. He states that they make up a “‘postmodern tribal bloodline,’ and their encounters with repressive and colonialist authorities are ‘comic and communal, rather than tragic and sacrificial’” (qtd. in Murray 347). And by “crossing the frontiers of human community, one has also passed the limits of self, thereby binding self and human community to the larger community” of life (Ballinger 78). Unlike Radin and Levi-Strauss, Babcock-Abrahams, Ballinger, Vizenor, and Lyons all see the trickster as a complex creature that defies
categorization and provides us with new perspectives from which to view the world. The trickster is thus either/or/and—he is at once all of these things and at the same time, none of them.

The final truth of the matter is that tricksters roam across all levels of experience in ways that the dominant culture will not recognize. As they roam, many tricksters transform themselves and the realities around them, thereby reinforcing their roles as the image of life’s many-sidedness and its source, even while acting the fool. (Ballinger 31)

2. Going Cyborg

Now that I have briefly described the trickster and his role in ndn culture, I want to take a look at how this role is reflected in postmodernist theory. According to Lyons, “[c]olonialism left Indian identity in tatters: fragmented, uncertain, endlessly questioned, and something people squabble about” (X-marks 49). This “tattered” identity experienced by ndns for hundreds of years is also a postmodern one: one prominent postmodern theory posits that identity is fractured, that there is no “whole” self any longer, but rather that identity is “‘fluid, emergent, decentralized, multiplicitous, flexible, and ever in process’” (Zuern vi). Postmodernism asks us to consider how we experience “being in the world” and to consider new ways of shaping that ever-in-process experience. Where modernism posited that the self remained stable and separate, postmodernism contends that the self cannot be constructed in isolation; in fact, there is no way to isolate ourselves from the world—we are always in and constructed by our environment. The trickster,
then, is shattering the Euro-centric concept of a stable self and is reaffirming that there is a connection to the world that is an inherent part of everyone’s identity.

Donna Haraway extends the concept of identity always being (re)created in relation to the environment, to social situations, by including technologies as part of identity, part of the body. Haraway’s father was left paraplegic from childhood tuberculosis; he got around on crutches and in a wheelchair. As a child, Haraway considered the crutches to be an extension of her father; they were his “legs” and as such, a part of his body. Haraway’s work explores the relationship between “nature” and “culture,” looking at how science is enmeshed in social and political environments. She shows how metaphors both open up and constrict our thinking, often creating new metaphors like the cyborg, that cross traditional boundaries, merging feminism with social science, that act to defy what she sees as the traditional, white, male structures of our society. Her work brings to light situational contexts that are frequently overlooked or never acknowledged, when in fact, those contexts help define how our civilization operates. Her interest in the etymology of things shows how material objects can be understood as having complex and contradictory histories, and how those histories operate on us. For her, all living and non-living things exist in a tangled web of relations, relations to each other and to their histories, and that without being aware of these relations, we live life completely ignorant of the many forces that shape us.

With a doctorate in biology, one would expect Haraway to be interested in relations, however, what comes as unexpected is her description of scientific practice as “a kind of storytelling practice—a rule governed, constrained, historically changing craft of narrating the history of nature. Scientific practice and scientific theories produce and are embedded in particular kinds of stories” (Vint 290). Haraway’s stories do not seek to distill science down to some sort of
absolute Truth; rather, she seeks to complicate scientific theories, to show new subjectivities and ways of life. She explains that, “it’s almost like my examples are the theories… if one were going to characterize my way of theorizing, it would be to redescribe, to redescribe something so that it becomes thicker than it first seems” (290). To make something “thicker,” Haraway uses irony, creating juxtapositions that cause us to reconsider how we previously viewed something. Irony, for her, becomes a political tool: “[i]rony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true” (270).

Holding incompatible things together is exactly what Haraway does in her 1985 article, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s.” She begins by examining and then breaking down three boundaries that have always been central to human identity: human/animal, organism/machine, and physical/non-physical. With these categories in flux, Haraway says we’re now in a paradigm shift, where we can reconceptualize the subject based on other ways of knowing, and therefore discover new ways of living. Here Haraway creates a definition of identity that is not stable and clearly defined; instead, she shows a postmodern identity that is constantly in flux, where the binary of self/other no longer exist. She asks, “[w]hich identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called ‘us,’ and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity” (270)? By calling the term “us” a political myth, she complicates the meaning of the word, drawing attention to how political rhetoric always uses “us” as a means of grouping together and separating, because there is always a “them,” a “we” that “we” don’t want to be associated with.

“A Manifesto for Cyborgs” was a response to a classic science fiction theme that was prominent at the time: that if we’re not careful, we will create machines so complex that they
will eventually come to dominate humanity, rather than humans remaining in control of the machines. That fear pits the machine against the organic, human body. Haraway instead states that social feminists must embrace technology, creating a technoculture that they can then use to shape their political futures. Since the cyborg is born neither of nature nor culture, but of both, it demonstrates that “the boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other” (Haraway 23). The cyborg myth is a way to escape the “maze of dualisms” that we use to describe ourselves; it is a way to analyze technoculture (and the feminist’s place in it), rather than simply rejecting it as masculine and dominating. Haraway’s cyborg, then, is acting as a trickster, making use of irony and the juxtaposition of incompatible ideas/ideals to provide us with a new understanding of society and our place in it.

While much of Haraway’s work has been considered groundbreaking postmodernist theory, what she’s arguing for is not new; in fact, it is very old. And Haraway herself went back and rethought her cyborg theory, as she found it, rather ironically, too exclusive: the cyborg failed to describe other relationships that continue to shape her. In A Manifesto for Cyborgs, she describes the problem with the self/other binary as:

The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the service of the other; the other is the one who holds the future, who knows that by the experience of domination, which gives the lie to the autonomy of the self. To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be
multiplied, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many. *(Haraway Reader 35)*

What Haraway is commenting on here is the traditional Euro-centric concept of the independent, stable self that exists no matter what one’s surroundings might be. And that is the lie: we can never fully separate ourselves from our environment, and we are constantly being shaped by it, while at the same time, we are shaping it. There is an “independent” self but it is always connected to the social; it is interdependent. And thus, one is too few (separated from the world), and two are indeed too many (separated from each other and creating a relationship of power).

So Haraway’s groundbreaking postmodern text is simply saying what NDNs have always known: we are part of our environment, and we have a responsibility to it, as it literally is a part of us. Identity is not this solid, stable sense of self, but rather created through relations with everything around us: identity as relation. As Native philosopher Adam Arola describes, in most native thought, “[t]he identity of any particular entity in the world can never be discovered by distilling the essence out of a particular object such that one could arrive at an eternal eidos that shines out of this particular encapsulation; rather, identity emerges through the constant act of relating,” *(3)* and that all things are “only knowable insofar as we have an understanding of the whole in which the thing participates. The universal is (rejected) in lieu of knowledge of the network that this thing sustains, and that sustains the thing itself” *(4)*.

This new network, Haraway realized, involved much more than just humans and machines. While I know many ndns take issue with Haraway’s appropriation of Coyote, comments that she has “kidnapped coyote from the kinship structures within which it flourishes and forced upon it a language which is not its own” *(Valentine 4)*, clearly reflect on colonization, and display the immediate defensiveness that comes with what is perceived as an attack on one’s
identity through said appropriation. But these types of reactions only reinforce the self/other binary—the very binary Haraway is arguing against—rather than looking at why she needed a trickster figure like Coyote in the first place. Such attitudes also don’t give Coyote credit for his trickster abilities to shape shift and adjust to new situations. Working through the layers of white male hegemony that dominated her life for so long, Haraway was trying to come to a new understanding of identity as relation, and I personally find it fitting that she needed an iconic ndn figure to do that; the while male world didn’t have the knowledge she sought, but the ndn world did. The other, as she mentions above, being multiple and “without clear boundary,” reflects this new concept of identity and the fact that relations are an ongoing process, “co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all” (Haraway 300). It is in this way that the other is the one that “holds the keys to the future,” because it is through the ongoing dynamic of relations that we shape each other and come to new ways of knowing. Haraway’s problem with her cyborg theory was that it remained rooted in the white male concept of identity being about humans and the objects we create. By adding Coyote to her cyborg theory, Haraway extended identity into the animal world, both upsetting the colonial concept that humans are “better” than animals, and acknowledging that all living beings are in “co-constitutive relationships.”

Echoing Haraway, feminist scholars Vivian Sobchack and N. Katherine Hayles also explore our relationship to new technologies and how they are changing us. Sobchack lost a leg in an accident and uses a prosthesis. In Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture, she explains that the prosthetic leg is a part of her, but at the same time it is separate; when she takes it off at night and puts it “over there,” she sees herself in two separate spaces: the leg might be disembodied (literally), but it is still her leg, a part of her (217-218). And in her
essay, “What My Fingers Knew: The Cynesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh,” she describes how the creation of the typewriter completely changed the process of writing and how we think about writing. Sobchack describes our relationships to technologies as reflexive ones: “[w]e make material artifacts in order to interiorize them: we make things so that they will in turn remake us, revising the interior of embodied consciousness” (117). Hayles sees humans and one specific artifact, the computer, “as partners in a dynamic hierarchy bound together... in complex physical, psychological, economic, and social formations” and that people are “literally being reengineered through their interactions with computational devices” (47).

3. A Trickster Trait: Social Proprioception

With the creation of the Internet, one of the spaces where this reengineering is rapidly taking place is in virtual space, a place that both exists and doesn’t exist; we can’t reach out and touch it and yet it remains a very real thing. And with the Internet came social networking sites: virtual spaces where we can interact with friends, family, co-workers, and literally millions of people we’ve never met. Online tools such as Twitter and LinkedIn, which can also update other social networks like Facebook and MySpace, allow users to share the same information to different social groups at the same time. Many tools also integrate Google Maps, so users can have a visual location of where people are—in what town, city, state, and part of the world. This ability to link various communication methods as well as linking people together all over the world creates a new form of socially-networked space that contains millions (one for each user) of micro-spaces. Graphically charted, these micro-spaces and how they link up to other micro-spaces, shows just how interconnected social network users are. This chart shows the
communication between one individual and the one hundred and thirty eight people he followed for a course of three weeks. Although he was situated in the Silicon Valley, his contacts spread as far as Istanbul (fig. 1)(Arikan).

![Social Networking Graphically Charted](image)

**Figure 1: Social Networking Graphically Charted**

Any user in this communication web is aware of what is going on with some or all of the other people that form it, and that is the unique space that social networks create. If we consider Lefebvre’s concepts of social space creating and being created by the members of that space, we can see social networks as a new form of self-location within a broader framework. “[T]he social relations of production have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself” (Lefebvre 129). By participating in social networking conversations, we are inscribing ourselves into a new social space, one that is constantly changing with each new update, and one that is constantly reforming ourselves in relation to that space. Or as Sobchack puts it, “[e]ach technology not only differently mediates our figurations of bodily existence but also constitutes them. That is, each offers our lived bodies radically different ways of ‘being in
the world”” (136). While viewing social networks through a web browser provides one way of “being in the world,” the ability to send and receive text messages means that we can connect with this virtual community via smart phones, tablets, and any other handheld device with Internet capability. Not only does this additional technology “feel” different from sitting at a computer, it provides a constant awareness of a connection to this broader social network, and leads to a greater sense of self.

According to Lefebvre, “[t]he form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity… social space implies actual or potential assembly at a single point, or around that point. It implies, therefore, the possibility of accumulation” (101). If we consider the “assembly at a single point” to be a person, an identity, then we can see identity as accumulation, constantly becoming something more by its interaction in social space. Lester Faigley asserts that, “[w]hile electronic discourse explodes the belief in a stable unified self, it offers a means of exploring how identity is multiply constructed and how agency resides in the power of connecting with others and building alliances” (199). Social networks emphasizes the concept of a “multiply-constructed identity” through their very design: a single posting (or tweet) doesn’t say much about a person, but cumulatively, over time, those tweets begin to create distinct online identities, both as individuals and as groups of people. This interaction creates a form of social proprioception (Thompson). Proprioception is our body’s ability to be aware of its limbs in time and space—the floor under our feet, how low to duck under a doorway to avoid hitting it, knowing when the glass is in our hand and exactly when it touches the table. Computers expand this notion of proprioception into the social network we develop online. “A buddy list isn’t just a vehicle to chat with friends but a way to sense their presence” (Thompson). It creates a kind of “social sixth sense” giving “a group of people a sense of itself… the real appeal of Social
networks is almost the inverse of narcissism. It’s practically collectivist—you’re creating a shared understanding larger than yourself” (Thompson). That shared understanding can only be created by our constant rewriting of our selves in relation to others and our environment, both online and off.

As these new technologies mediate and constitute our experiences, they blur the lines between corporeal and incorporeal, between physical space and virtual space—and this ambiguous space is the realm of the trickster. “Spaces are strange: homogeneous, rationalized, and as such constraining; yet at the same time utterly dislocated. Formal boundaries are gone between town and country, between centre and periphery, between suburbs and city centers” (Lefebvre 97). Merleau-Ponty theorized that the self, just as with space, is always constructed in relation to others. “The perceived thing itself is paradoxical; it exists only in so far as someone can perceive it… in the perception of another, I find myself in relation with another ‘myself,’ who is, in principle, open to the same truths a I am, in relation to the same being that I am” (18).

Social networks thus merge a number of different spaces that we have previously viewed as “separate” or “distinct” in Cartesian philosophy and allow a merging of the private and the social, the corporeal body and the incorporeality of cyberspace. Sobchack states that “electronic presence randomly disperses its being across a network, its kinetic gestures describing and lighting on the surface of the screen rather than inscribing it with bodily dimension” and that since it is “[a]ll surface, electronic space cannot be inhabited by any body that is not also an electronic body” (159). So in order to participate in electronic or online worlds, we have to create an electronic “self”—a cyborg. According Merleau-Ponty that “self” is created the moment we think it: “I attempt to imagine some place in the world which has never been seen, the very fact
that I imagine it makes me present at that place. I thus cannot conceive a perceptible place in
which I am not myself present” (16).

As Haraway has argued, we are constantly shaping our environment and our environment
is constantly shaping us, and that includes our interaction with virtual worlds. “[T]he machine
and the organism are each communication systems joined in a symbiosis that transforms both”
(Haraway 299). By creating an electronic identity, we have indeed become cyborgs in Haraway’s
sense: when we use social networks, we have a location in cyberspace, an electronic self, and
being embodied by it, cyberspace has a location within us. The blurring of these boundaries
allows us to reconsider new ways of “being” in the world, and this is a classic trickster
maneuver. “The ambiguous marginal trickster brings new meaning and force to the language of
experience, liberating us in the process from conventional notions, just as the ambiguity of
metaphor infuses perception with creative meaning and reveals the limitations of stereotyped
seeing” (Ballinger, “Sacred Reversals” 56). Put simply, the trickster, being ever-elusive, found
his way into the computer.

5. Cyborg Trickster Hermeneutics

In this section, I want to look at specifically at how, by going cyborg, the trickster is
both/and: while in the “system,” the trickster is also enacting change by exposing the social
fictions, the stereotypes, that the dominant culture has used to define what an ndn is, and how
this new trickster, which can be called the NDN Cyborg Trickster (NCT), can be used as a lens
with which we can analyze acts of survivance online. I am, however, somewhat redefining
survivance; Vizenor considers trickster hermeneutics as an aspect of survivance, whereas I’m
considering all acts of survivance to be trickster undertakings, as the very act of combining “survival” and “resistance” is a trickster characteristic, allowing us a new way of perceiving the world and our acts in it.

To see how the NCT functions, I want to take my redefined survivance and break it down into some of its component parts in order to better understand it. Combining characteristics of the cyborg with those of the trickster, I propose the following code for NCT hermeneutics: decolonization, humor and irony, dissolution of boundaries/ambiguity/transvaluation of values, social proprioception, and tribal languages. Each of these codes covers essential aspects of how, by using the NCT, we can see how ndns are reclaiming agency in online spaces, something I will unpack more fully in the next chapter.

**Decolonization**

Decolonization has become a very prominent theme in ndn conversations in online social media. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, colonization resulted in ndns being defined as “savages” and “children” (or “wards” as they were often referred to in treaties) that had to be “civilized” to fit into white society, so they had to give up their languages and much of their culture to assimilate. Decolonization is now being used to promote self and tribal representation, to dispel stereotypes, and to remind the world of much of the history of ndns that has been left out of textbooks. It is frequently used with a hashtag (the pound sign), which stands for both a call-out (practice decolonizing) and as a searchable term in social media, so a Twitter search on “#decolonize” will return all entries that contain that word. I include under this term a current resistance to representations of victimry (as opposed to many historical representations, where ndns clearly were victims of broken treaties and outright slaughter).
Humor and Irony

As noted throughout this chapter, humor, irony, and sarcasm are very indicative of the trickster, and as Haraway stated, she uses irony to show how incompatible things butt up against each other, but that they can’t be resolved into some greater whole, because both are “necessary or true.” For the NCT, this category is representative of ndn rhetoric; a simple statement like, “I didn’t like the white sauce,” isn’t just talking about a sauce; it is reflecting back on the history of ndns under the white colonial government, and the “sauce” could either be the government or what the government was “dishing out” to ndns. It is a reminder that the conflict still exists, but also that ndns and whites still exist, and that there’s no simple solution when there are very different, but valid, points of view.

Dissolution of Boundaries/Ambiguity/Transvaluation of Values

In my discussion of the cyborg earlier in this chapter, I mentioned how some postmodern theorists see the dissolution of boundaries that is occurring with the Internet and virtual spaces as fracturing identity. The NCT metaphor helps to show us new ways of viewing formerly accepted boundaries, the unseen sociopolitical structures that guide our daily life. By making these structures evident, the NCT emphasizes how the underlying political agenda controls us, making us conform to certain social conventions and not to others. Recognizing the ambiguous nature of many of these conventions, such as the notion of “self” and “other” being distinct, separate things, we can begin to reconstruct new boundaries or recognize that there is no clear boundary, all of which provide new ways of seeing and being in the world.

Social Proprioception

The postmodern concept of social proprioception reflects the general ndn belief of identity being formed through interaction, both with other people, animals, environments, and
spiritual practices, creating a sense of identity greater than oneself. Social proprioception has created an online ndn community that reaches beyond the boundaries of city, state, tribe, or nation. This new community is very much aware of itself as a whole, even as it is aware that it made up of different tribes, ndns living on reservations, ndns living in cities, and ndns who were “othered” (as I described in Chapter One) and either cannot meet tribal enrollment requirements, or belong to tribes not recognized by the federal government. In my analysis of this NCT attribute, I will specifically be looking at the use of hashtags as they represent awareness of this online community, and how, by interacting with this community, ndns are encouraging and supporting one another.

_Tribal Languages_

One of the primary methods the U.S. government used to force ndns to assimilate into the dominant culture was to require them to speak in English, and only English. Treaties were written in English, so to understand what they were signing, it became a necessity to learn the language. Boarding schools forbade the students from speaking in their own languages and they were physically punished when caught doing so. Not being able to speak their native language was the equivalent of stripping them of a significant part of who they were. “It is solely through the utterance that language makes contact with communication, is imbued with its vital power, and becomes a reality” (Volosinov 123). The reality of “being ndn” as their parents and grandparents experienced it was something that many younger generations would never know, and the inability to communicate with their elders also acted to strip them of their families, resulting in a further fracturing of ndn identity. As a result of hundreds of years of colonization, many ndn tribes lost their languages, and even now, many more tribes are at risk of losing their languages. With the Internet, however, tribes can not only promote the importance of learning
their languages, but also preserve them by creating online dictionaries and storing audio and video files of elders speaking the language, so the pronunciations are preserved as well. And the recent passing of a bill in Colorado allowing the teaching of ndn languages in the public school system has encouraged ndns in other states to seek similar legislation.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed the trickster as represented in ndn stories and why the trickster is so important to ndn culture and identity. We know that the trickster is an ambiguous figure, always at the margins of society, and his antics serve to show how the structures of society that we take for granted are acting on us. He warns of the dangers of extremes, that our relationship to the world around us can never be “fixed” because it is constantly changing, and we must learn to change with it. He is always on a journey (again emphasizing a constantly-changing world), and through the use of humor and irony, he provides us with new ways of perceiving which can lead to a rediscovery of essential truths. I then discussed Haraway’s cyborg and cyborg theory as several postmodern scholars have interpreted it, as well as how the cyborg calls into question formerly accepted boundaries between the binaries so pervasive in modern society (male/female, public/private, online/offline, self/other, etc.). I showed how social proprioception is creating a communal sense of identity that allows for an awareness of “being in the world” in a way not formerly possible. And finally, I introduced the NDN Cyborg Trickster (NCT) and set up a code for understanding how we can use the NCT as a lens with which to analyze survivance online, also in a way not formerly possible.
As I mentioned earlier, tricksters rarely create something from nothing, but instead take what is currently available to them to make something new. In the next chapter, I do an in-depth analysis of exactly how we can see the NCT’s survivance code play out in online social media, and specifically, in the medium of Twitter, and how, by taking the tools available to them (the Internet, social media, inexpensive smartphones/tablets), ndns are becoming NDNs (capitalized to highlight a renewed sense of agency), in the visible-yet-invisible space of the Internet.
Something Fishy Going On

(Athapascan)

Coyote was walking along. He saw two young girls by a lake about to take a bath. He thought: “I sure would like to have these girls. I sure would like to cohabit with them.” He hid himself among the reeds and watched. The girls were taking their clothes off. Coyote turned himself into a fish and slipped into the water. He was darting back and forth.

One of the girls said to the other: “Look at that pretty fish.”

“It’s just a fish,” said the other.

They were naked. They waded into the lake. When it was deep enough, they began to swim. One girl said to the other: “I feel something tickling me between the legs, something slippery.” Coyote entered that girl. Her body almost swallowed him up. “I feel something strange down there,” said the girl. After a while Coyote slipped out of her.

Then the other girl said: “Something is tickling me, too, between my legs.” Coyote entered her. The girl said: “I also feel something strange wiggling down there, but it feels rather good.” Coyote did what he wanted and slipped out of her. The girls finished bathing, dressed, and went home.

After some time, one of these girls said to the other: “My belly has swelled up. It must be all the good fatty meat and kidneys we are eating.”

“That must be it,” said the other girl. “We are luck that our father is such a good hunter.”

After some more time one of these two girls said to the other: “My belly is really big now. What can be the matter?”
“My belly is swollen up, too,” said the other girl. “I think we are pregnant.”

“How can this be?” asked the first girl.

“Remember when we were swimming in the lake? It must have been that little fish that got between our legs.”

“But how can a fish get us pregnant?”

“It was Coyote, that evil fellow, who played this trick on us.”

“I hope we’ll be giving birth to humans,” said the other, “and not little coyotes.”

Well, Coyote was on his way to make mischief again. He came to a stream. One the far shore he saw two girls digging. “These girls are pretty, even from this far away,” Coyote said to himself. “I will enter them.” He sent his penis across the water. It came out on the other riverbank. With his Trickster power, he made it look like a stalk.

“I have been sitting on some plant stem,” one of the girls said to the other. “It got into me by accident.” The penis was enjoying himself. Coyote, on the far bank, was enjoying it. He took his penis out of this girl and slipped it into the other.

“I, too, sat on some kind of root,” said the other girl. “It also got into me.” Coyote was having a good time.

“There is something strange about these roots,” said the first girl. “Let’s look and see what it is.”

They looked. “It’s just some kind of plant,” said the first girl. She gave the stalk a whack with her camas-digger. At once there was a loud cry of pain from the other side of the river. “Oh, oh, it hurts, it hurts!” The girls looked to where the cry was coming from. They saw Coyote there, howling. They examined the strange stalk again and discovered it was a part of Coyote’s
body. The girls got very angry and shook their fists at Coyote, crying: “It’s that evil, scabrous lecher who has tricked us.”

“Someday,” one of the girls shouted, “I’ll get him with my skinning knife!”

“This is not the day,” Coyote shouted back, pulling his member across the stream. He rolled his penis up and flung it over his shoulder. He laughed, waved at the girls, and ran off.

(American Indian Trickster Tales 69-71)
[Debates about authentic voices or authentic communities] are designed to
fragment and marginalize those who speak for, or in support of, indigenous
issues. They frequently have the effect also of silencing and making invisible the
presence of other groups within the indigenous society like women, the urban
non-status tribal person and those whose ancestry or ‘blood quantum’ is ‘too
white’.... At the heart of such a view of authenticity is a belief that indigenous
cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be
indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory.
Only the West has that privilege. (Smith 72-74)

In Chapter One, I outlined federal policies regarding ndns, the use of blood quantum to
“other” by defining who is an ndn and who is not, and I included my own narrative of
colonization/assimilation. In Chapter Two, I reviewed the trickster’s role in ndn culture and set
up a theory of the ndn cyborg trickster (NCT). In this chapter, I want to look at how, by going
cyborg, the trickster is enacting survivance (survival + resistance) in ways formerly not possible,
and to an extent much greater that ever before. As discussed in Chapter Two, I am redefining
Vizenor’s concept of survivance; Vizenor considers trickster hermeneutics as an aspect of
survivance, whereas I’m considering all acts of survivance to be evidence of trickster
undertakings, as the very act of combining survival and resistance is a trickster characteristic: by
combining two seemingly disparate things, we are provided with new ways of perceiving/understanding/valuing/doing.

In this chapter, I’m going to briefly discuss the criteria through which we can see the NCT codes being enacted online. I will describe my methodology for using these criteria as a lens through which to view ndn tweeting. I will then look at numerous examples of how this lens allows us to see ndns (re)inventing their identities in online spaces, and how they are creating a virtual web of relations, providing additional ways to (re)claim a sense of agency that 500 years of colonization has denied them.

1. Methodologies Part 1: Background & Participants/Subjects

When considering how ndns were utilizing virtual spaces, I had to account for one very important thing: the availability of technology. Who would have access to what forms of technology? Since poverty is widespread on the reservations, I would not necessarily expect that many reservation ndns (frequently referred to as “rez” ndns) would have laptops or home computers; whereas I would expect that most urban ndns do. Cell phones, however, are very common, and the two most common social media sites, Facebook and Twitter, are easily accessed with even the most basic smartphone. I opted for Twitter because it is more “public” than Facebook; with Facebook, most users have their accounts locked down, so they have to approve a new “friend.” While Twitter does allow users to make their accounts private, the vast majority of accounts are public. Clearly not all ndns use Twitter, but with its accessibility for both the user and myself as a researcher, it seemed a productive way to explore how ndns utilize virtual spaces.
Twitter, as a form of social media, was created in 2006. Its original purpose was to expose company employees to brief updates throughout the day, and it asked users to post answers to the tagline: “what are you doing right now” (crunchbase)? Users create an account and then “follow” other people. Limited to 140 characters (the maximum number of characters allowed in the technology being used, SMS text), users are forced to be very concise, but as mentioned in Chapter Two, it is the accumulation of these tweets over time that really provide a sense of who that person is. In fact, the prompt, along with the timestamp, basically demands that we narrate our lives. And because of the social networking nature of Twitter, a single tweet can reach thousands, even millions, of users at the same time.

Initially, my research started in a very basic manner: I thought it would be interesting to see how many ndns were tweeting and what they were saying. So I did a key word search in Twitter on the terms “American Indian” and “Native American.” These terms produced a wide variety of responses, including everything from people selling ndn artifacts and jewelry (both legally and illegally; I saw a lot of people selling “ndn” products when the seller wasn’t ndn), people who identified as ndn, and quite a collection of racist tweets about ndns and other minorities. I scrolled through the results and picked a few people who identified as ndn to start following. Based on their conversations with others, I began following some of their followers; sometimes I would select people because they were clearly activists; other times, all it would take was a witty remark for me to decide I wanted to see what else this person had to say. Over time, I was introduced to ndn lawers, academics, nurses, artists, stay-at-home moms, single parents… ndns living on the reservation, those who return to the rez frequently, and those whose families have not lived on the rez for several generations. All of them, however, practice survivance on a daily basis, as I show later in this chapter. I wanted to see how, viewed through
the lens of the cyborg trickster, they disrupted/dislodged/challenged/reformed traditional narratives of what it means to be an ndn.

I then needed a way to save their tweets to begin my analysis, so I downloaded an XML script that allowed me to specify user names and the number of tweets I wished to download. Since, as described in Chapter Two, online identity is formed through the accumulation of information over time, collecting six to seven months’ worth of data would allow me to better understand how ndns were using Twitter for survivance. Twitter stores an “average” of two weeks of data, but that depends on how frequently a user tweets. I did an initial download in May, which, for some users, included tweets from February, and a second download in September. I then imported these files into an Excel spreadsheet for data parsing. My original sampling included eighteen users, which I then narrowed down to five that I felt most clearly represented the NCT. Although these five have public accounts, ndns are very sensitive about issues of appropriation, so I emailed and/or tweeted them asking permission to use their tweets. Of the five, three responded, all saying I was welcome to use their tweets, with two of them asking to see the finished product (and one wanting to read my entire dissertation). The two that did not respond are public figures, but one of them (the @1491s) retweeted my comment about using them in this study, so I inferred that they were in favor of it.

2. The Participants/Subjects

To begin, I will introduce my five participants: @IAmNotAMascot, @Slow_ro, @RedIndianGirl, @1491s, and @Sherman_Alexie, describing briefly how they construct themselves within the framework of Twitter.
We learn quite a bit about @IAmNotAMascot from his home page (fig. 2), including his gender, his name, what he looks like, and that he follows me. From his bio we find out that he considers himself “a contemporary American Indian journalist,” that he works for @indiancountry (Indian Country Today Media Network), he’s an Oglala Lakota, he’ll be graduating with an M.A. in politics in 2013, he’s in New York, and he has a link to his blog. We also see that while he’s following 1,050 people, he has 2,362 followers. His homepage background includes an image of what could be viewed as a “stereotypical” ndn with the ceremonial headdress, but that is countered with the words “I’m not a Mascot,” reminding viewers that ndns are real people and ndn culture should not be stereotyped.
I think it’s important to note that Simon uses his own name; he is in no way trying to remain anonymous. He is a journalist, and journalists want to be known for the work they produce.

@Slow_ro

Figure 3: @Slo_ro

@Slow_ro’s Twitter profile doesn’t include nearly as much information as did @IAMnotAMascot’s. The name only displays as RPS (through tweets I concluded he was male, which was later confirmed with his first name, Roland), he follows me, and his bio reads “Living In Occupied Lands… Know Your Culture…Knowledge is Power…‘Walk in Beauty’” and we see he is in Arizona. We also see that he is a very prolific tweeter, having tweeted 13,342 times. He has a few more followers than people he follows, but both are over 1,100. His background image is from TwitterBackgrounds.com, but it represents what could be considered an ndn view
of the natural world, with the tree, the grasslands, and then the sky split into the night with stars in the upper left and the day with the sun and clouds on the right, giving a sense of wholeness. From his recent images and his portrait (a river), we see that he posts a lot of natural images; there is nothing man-made in these photos.

@RedIndianGirl

Figure 4: @RedIndianGirl

One of the first things we learn about @RedIndianGirl is that she’s Iroquois, she opts to retain some anonymity as she only goes by RedIndianGirl, and her profile picture is a graphic design rather than a picture of her. Her bio states, “Urban Rotinnonshonni Kanienka’hakehon channeling her inner flint and being an indigenous girl living in a settler-occupied land.” Her location is Toronto, and, like @IAmNotAMascot, she includes a link to her blog. Her background image is of a traditional Iroquois wampum belt, with the words “oh so Iroquois.”
The color choices of purple and white are significant: the purple beads represent suffering and war, and the white represent friendship and peace (Iroquois Indian Museum). A Google search on “Rotinnonshonni Kanienka’hakehon” only returns results linking back to her Twitter profile (one gave her real name, but I’ll respect her wish to remain anonymous), which tells me that her specific Iroquois tribe does not yet have an online dictionary. At 4,564 tweets, she’s a fairly prolific tweeter; however, her network isn’t as wide as @SloRo and @IAMNotAMascot: she’s following 616 people and has 872 followers. From the six “recent images” she’s posted, we know she likes roller derby, crème brûlée, and that she recently read an academic article titled, “Decolonization is not a metaphor.”

@1491s

Figure 5: @1491s
The @1491s, along with @Sherman_Alexie who I will discuss next, are the two participants who did not reply to my query emails. Given that they are both public figures and have public Twitter accounts that anyone can follow, I inferred that privacy was not an issue and thus chose to include both in my study. As with @RedIndianGirl, the @1491s opted not to display their names, and their profile picture is of their logo. Between the name, The 1491s, and the logo, it is easy to infer that this is a group of ndns who are going to be dealing with issues of colonization. Their bio tells us very clearly that more than one person make up the @1491s: “The 1491s is a sketch comedy group, based in the wooded ghettos of Minnesota and buffalo grass of Oklahoma. They are a gaggle of Indians chock full of cynicism” and that cynicism is reflected in their location name: Tipi Creeping Somewhere. They also include a link to their website, where we learn that they produce a lot of short videos that they upload to YouTube. While I am following them, they are not following me; they are only following 120 people, but with 2,974 followers, they are clearly very popular. Yet, in spite of this popularity they only have 1,900 tweets. Their background image leaves a lot to the imagination: it is almost ominous, with the solid black on the right hand side and then rays of grey, or rays of darkness, reaching out towards the viewer on the left. Or, one could interpret the rays representing a vortex into which their followers will be sucked. I chose the @1491s precisely because they are a group; ndns have both individual and communal senses of identity, as members of a specific tribe (and, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, the well-being of the tribe almost always comes before the well-being of the individual), so the @1491s represent the collective identity of ndns.
@Sherman_Alexie

@Sherman_Alexie is the only one in this analysis that I actively sought out. As a famous author who now lives in Seattle, one might think that his fame and fortune have “corrupted” him, but as his tweets reveal, he uses his fame to expose society to ndns and ndn issues. His bio changes as he publishes, so it usually lists his most recent works, in this case, a collection of poetry titled, “Face,” and a collection of poetry and short stories called, “War Dances.” He does not list a location, but there is a link to his website. He’s not a prolific tweeter, having made 871 posts total. He’s very specific about the individuals he follows (only 38), but he has a huge number of followers (26,497) and the majority of his tweets are directed to that audience. His profile picture immediately conveys humor, so one would tend to expect his posts to be witty. And his background image contrasts with his photo; the pale color is calming, and the birds in
flight might signify always being in motion, but anyone familiar with his work knows he tends to use a lot of bird images, so he may consider a flock of birds as representative of himself.

4. Methodologies Part 2: Trickster Hermeneutics

Based on the codes I developed in Chapter Two, I created the following criteria which collectively act as a lens with which to view my subjects and come to some understanding how they enact the NCT. While I first formulated a set of criteria based on my codes, they became more fixed and fleshed out as I read through my data. What you see in table 1 is the final set of criteria I used in my final analysis of my data set.

Table 1: NDN Cyborg Trickster Codes and Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decolonization</td>
<td>Self- and Tribal- representation, rejection of: stereotypes and representations of victimry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor and Irony</td>
<td>Use of humor, irony, and satire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissolution of boundaries/ambiguity/transvaluation of values</td>
<td>Destabilization of categories of race, identity, gender, public/private, physical/virtual, depictions of societal values from different perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Proprioception</td>
<td>Awareness of target community, principally through the use of hashtags, and multiply-constructed identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal Languages</td>
<td>Use of tribal languages in sentences, phrases, or entire texts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These key features are present in nearly all of the tweets I examined, and they form the basis for my rhetorical analysis of ndns online. Each of these criteria will be discussed in more detail in the sections below. Given the ambiguous nature of the NCT, and remembering that the trickster is “neither/nor, either/and, and both” (Ballinger 30), there is significant overlap in these criteria,
and rarely is only one criterion used; more often than not, several of these criteria are employed in a single tweet.

Table 2: Enactment of NCT Codes by ndns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>IAmNotAMascot</th>
<th>Slow_ro</th>
<th>RedIndianGirl</th>
<th>l491s</th>
<th>Sherman_Alexie</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decolonization</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor &amp; Irony</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissolution of boundaries, ambiguity, transvaluation of values</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Proprioception</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal languages</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>1591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will now describe how these five criteria manifest themselves in my participant’s tweets. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the ways in which the NCT provides new ways to see how ndns practice survivance in digital spaces.

5. Self-Representation

The third counter-strategy [of stereotyping] locates itself within the complexities and ambivalences of representation itself, and tries to contest it from within... It accepts and works with the shifting, unstable character of meaning, and enters, as it were, into a struggle over representation, while acknowledging that, since meaning can never be finally fixed, there can never be any final victories. (Hall, Representation 274)
By going cyborg, the trickster has allowed ndns to do the one thing colonial rule has tried to prevent for the last five-hundred years: self-represent. Self-representation is essential in the fight against stereotyping; the only way to counter the still very prevalent stereotypes of the ndn as a “noble savage” or as “children” that need “civilizing,” is by showing the dominant culture who ndns really are. Sociologist Manuel Castells writes that all identities are constructed, but the crucial issue is “how, from what, by whom, and for what” (7). For centuries, ndns have lived in the shadow of how the colonizers represented them. As Hall writes, stereotyping “is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order” (258), so the ability to represent oneself is extremely important to counter stereotypes. Online social media provide a way to upset that social and symbolic order, and that is exactly what is happening with ndns online. Social media allow ndns to subvert the cultural controls that have kept them from being seen and heard. I will be using the term (re)present, as, through the lens the NCT, we can see the re-presentation of the ndn to society.

(Re)presentation starts with addressing some of the common myths about ndns, and one of those is that ndns still live on reservations, completely out-of-touch with modern society. @Sherman_Alexie nicely sums up this myth with this tweet:

You realize that approximately 70% of Natives live in cities, right? We are not Amish-in-eagle-feathers.

Here, Alexie is implying that if seventy percent of ndns live in cities, then they often have jobs, are using modern technology, and are contributing members of society. His “Amish-in-eagle-feathers” satirically reflects this fact. But it also brings up issues of how our modern society is still representing ndns, particularly in movies and television. @RedIndianGirl had this to say about A&E’s new series, _Longmire_, which is advertised as being a “modern” western:
Watching show on AMC #Longmire about NDN kids in care - all these well meaning white people I want to throw up.

Clearly, her reality on the rez is very different from what was being portrayed. She goes on to comment on how they’re representing ndns:

Grrr this show is making me want to scream! Subtext is quaint NDNs clinging to past & mythology.

These are the standard stereotypes of ndns, which is somewhat ironic, since one of the show’s goals is to expose many of the ongoing issues on reservations (some of the “well meaning white people” turned out to be the villains), but, it’s Hollywood, and it’s much easier to “sell” the mythic ndn than it is to sell the truth. @IAmNotAMascot also tweets about the objectification of ndn culture and the use of school mascots. While he currently attends graduate school in New York, he frequently comments on ongoing issues in Denver, as he does here, addressing his tweet to the art district in Denver:

I love art, but this kind of art is inexcusable @ArtDistrict_DEN. It further objectifies American Indian culture: http://t.co/f47LvTBY

The link takes us to this photo (fig. 7):
The store owner probably thought it was “cute” to put headdresses on Sesame Street characters, and perhaps thought it promoted ndn culture by including them in the Sesame Street narrative. Unfortunately, the owner clearly did not consider how such depictions reduce ndns not just to being non-human, childish characters, but actual puppets. And the problem with being a puppet is that it is not alive; it is simply a thing to be used by people however they see fit. By displaying this type of art, the store owner is only reinforcing stereotypes. (If, however, the artist who painted these depictions is ndn, then a whole new interpretation is required; I doubt this is the case, though, as @IAMNotAMascot is a journalist and most likely would have looked up the artist.)
In another tweet, @IAmNotAMascot states that he has a film critique presentation to deliver, titled, “True Grit (2010): A Reinforcement of the Shutting Out/Shutting Up of American Indians.” The ability to share this information publicly, and to reach a wide audience, is indeed powerful for the (re)presentation of ndns. In fact, in response to someone about his presentation, he tweeted:

@billywdick Sadly, rejection is one of the many effects of Divide & Conquer. Though social media is doing well to reverse the epidemic.

He, and all of the ndns on Twitter, are using it because they recognize they are being heard. As a journalist, he has taken on the task of keeping the ndn community informed of issues in ndn country, but he is aware that his audience is much greater than just the ndn community; through the network that Twitter creates, ndns are being heard by people all over the planet.

IAmNotAMascot seeks to inform all of his followers of ndn issues and the complexities of a “regulated” identity (both federally and tribally regulated, as I discussed in Chapter One). In another tweet, he addresses the issue of blood quantum:

“Papers do not determine one’s identity, and neither does the putrid process of blood quantum ...” http://t.co/FEo33bmz

The link takes us to a blog post titled, “Of Pigdins, Primos, Documents and Dingbats,” where he discusses the frustrating hunt for his official tribal transcript “which confirms I am indeed a half-breed whose blood is also mixed with southern indigenous (Mexicano) ancestry.” We learn that his Lakota mother gave the document to an extended family member during a time when she was homeless, sleeping under a tree in a park. Without it, the federal government won’t recognize him as an official member of the Lakota, even though, as he points out, he’s fluent in the language. He concludes that he may never find the transcript, but takes pride in the fact that he is
“a bi-dialectical pidgin speaker who can rip and rant in both Spanglish and Lakotish. As a matter of fact, I can bitch and bellow in Spakotish!” And he signs off with the phrase, “Still Not A Mascot,” reasserting his self-representation as an ndn.

The @1491s take self-representation to a whole new level, through their tweets, Facebook ndn “creation” stories (completely fictional, humorous and sarcastic tales about each of the tribes), and their videos. They have a series of videos they call “Represent,” which they then upload to YouTube and tweet the link. These videos cover everything from a student “sneaking” up to a vending machine, whipping out a bow and arrow and shooting the button for the desired product, looking around to make sure no one saw her, and sneaking off again, to the 1491s using their fame to encourage people to vote.

Check out this new REPRESENT video! Made by a friend of ours, Hillary Abe.

Represent NATIVE VOTE! http://t.co/99KIUPJq

In another video, we see a student studying on the back porch of her apartment in a large city. Ryan Red Corn (one of the @1491s) and another man are walking by below, and she throws lollipops at them in what is termed a “Pueblo throw.” There is no talking, so we are left to consider the gesture (Red Corn even looks confused at being “assaulted” with candy, as if he isn’t sure if it’s an attack or a gift). In the text below the video, we learn that this student is from the Nambe Pueblo tribe, was accepted to Yale when she was sixteen, and when this was filmed, she was twenty, finishing her Master’s in political science, and debating about going on for a Ph.D. This text is extremely important as it counters the “ndns are less-than” and “stupid” stereotypes with an example of a ndn girl who completed both her undergraduate and an M.A. program at an Ivy League school in a total of four years, a feat few people (of any racial descent)
accomplish. As with all of their “Represent” videos, it ends with the word REPRESENT in all caps.

The question of authenticity is a frequent subject, but typically the tweets are expressing frustration/outrage at people who may or may not be part native, but have no ties to the culture whatsoever. The now infamous claim by Senator Elizabeth Warren to be part Cherokee elicited a variety of tweets, everything from @Slow_ro’s outright anger:

Elizabeth Warren trying too hard to be something she ain’t. #DancesWith Lies
to @IAmNotAMascot taking the time to educate a non-ndn follower on the issue:

@Bill_Cimbrelo Listen to the language used. Wannabes & Feather Freaks speak in
generalities. We can spot them (Warren) like oil on snow.

@Bill_Cimbrelo BTW, a Wannabe is a person who irresponsibly claims to be First
Nation. A Feather Freak is someone who lives the illusion.

@Bill_Cimbrelo @Bill_Cimbrelo It’s evident that Warren used that vestige, one she
knows diddly about, for her own cultural/capital gain.

Here again we see how ndn identity is regulated, both from within and from without the tribe. With the use of the terms “Wannabe” and “Feather Freak,” @IAmNotAMascot displays a form of “policing” of ndn identity: who is and who isn’t. Scott Lyons refers to such people as “culture cops” (Xmarks 76). However, as we learned from @IAmNotAMascot’s blog post, he is also mixedblood and he does not support blood quantum, so what he’s really emphasizing here is being involved in the culture, which Warren clearly hasn’t been. He also mentions the continuing controversy of how the government defines ndns:

@Bill_Cimbrelo More than 560 (federally recognized) nations, but that number often
changes & it doesn’t include the non-recognized nations.
And then drops in the fact that has rarely made it into history books:

@Bill_Cimbrelo That’s a relatively puny count since demographers today argue that our population pre-Columbus was upward of 120 million.

One of the most significant aspects of self-representation is the use of indigenous languages, which I will cover further in the Tribal Languages section, but the ability to see the languages being used is something that offers many ndns hope for the preservation of their cultures, and encourages others to learn their language.

These are just a few examples of the ways that the NCT criteria of self-representation manifests online. Since ndns have been misunderstood/misrepresented in American culture for so many generations, self-representation is essential to rearticulating the ndn into American society. As Hall has pointed out, “stereotyping tends to occur when there are gross inequalities of power” (Representation 258). By participating in online social media, the NCT is working to dispel myths about ndns being savages, not being very intelligent (a Master’s degree at age twenty is impressive in any society), and even simply still existing. Self-representation is essential to altering the power relationship between ndns and the dominant hegemony and changing the symbolic order. And the ability to protest the cultural commodifications by such companies as Urban Outfitters—and to have the company respond by pulling the offending products—is a major step in changing the balance of power. By viewing social media activity through the lens of the NCT, we can see how ndns are subverting the cultural controls that have prevented them from being seen and heard, and how they are (re)presenting the ndn to society.
6. Humor and Irony

As I noted in the beginning of Chapter Two in my discussion about the trickster, ndns use humor, irony, and satire to a great extent in their discourse, both in their storytelling and in their daily lives. Frequently used against the agents of oppression in the dominant culture, against the tribal community, and even against themselves, humor and irony help prevent ndns from becoming victims: if you can laugh at your situation, then you still have some power, a sense of identity that cannot be stripped from you. In an interview with Indian Country Today Media Network, Dallas Goldtooth of the @1491s described ndn humor as “satirical humor,” stating that

I think the Indian people are the most cynical people on the planet. You can’t help but be cynical when you wake up and go through your daily life and see some of the tragically funny things around you; the behavior of your leaders, even some of the dysfunction in your own home. It’s at such an absurd level that you can just go mad, or just be cynical about it and make light of it all. I think that’s really strong, I think that’s what’s kept us alive as a people, making light of our situations. (Murg)

Humor and irony are often used in a tricksterish manner: exposing the power structures of society that we frequently forget are in place because they’ve become so much a part of our lives. Lyons states that we need to “revisit those old ‘trickster’ linguistic games and highlight through irony, humor, and explicit subversion the invisible presence of the dominant discourse and thereby the visible absence of the Indian who speaks” (X-Marks 30). But these linguistic games are played in a somewhat ambiguous way (another trickster trait): the use of humor, irony,
and satire create layers of meaning, so a seemingly mundane comment may be operating on multiple levels. The ability to comment on something without directly addressing the issue is a skill that ndns have learned through the centuries, as it is also a product of colonization: something might be implied, but if it is not actually said, then the authority figure can’t (or isn’t supposed to) punish the person for it.

There are, perhaps, no better examples of the use of humor and irony to highlight these discourses than the linguistic games employed by the @1491s. Consider the following conversation, which starts off with another typical trickster trait: talking about genitalia and all things deemed “uncouth” in Christian society (but discussed openly in traditional ndn culture):

Announcement: We will no longer tweet about penises, farts, and bathroom jokes. ....that is until Mr Redcorn signs in and starts tweeting.

And yes, “penises” is the correct spelling. I googled that shit. “Penes” is acceptable too.

#TheMoreYouKnow

@RedIndianGirl replied to them with:

@1491s I thought that “pene” is what birds have not the plural of penis #confused

They responded with:

@RedIndianGirl - oh yeah...well..yo...yo...your just plain wrong! **plugs ears and starts to sing loudly** La la la!

At this point, @SettlerColonial (who is not ndn, but tweets sarcastically about all things racist), clearly chimed in with a comment about “penne” being pasta and something about “white” sauce, as @RedIndianGirl then quipped:

@SettlerColonial @1491s But a red sauce is so much meatier.

To which the @1491s said:
@SettlerColonial @RedIndianGirl - Yeah, I tried it once. The thing is, I didn’t like the White sauce. .. Oooohh!! ...#Zing

@SettlerColonial @RedIndianGirl - yo u..you...you get it? You see what I did just there? I made a double entendre. Hooray for me.

The @1491s are employing the practice of trans-coding, where they take an existing meaning and then re-appropriate it to create new meanings (Hall, *Representation* 270). In this short exchange, we’ve got the play on red (ndn) and white (White) sauce (specifically, what the American government has been “dishing out” to ndns), “meatier” representing both the complexity or depth of ndn identities and the epidemic of obesity in ndn country, and then the @1491s use of satire directed at himself by complimenting himself on the double entendre (and the fact that he knows what a double entendre is—once again countering the stereotype of ndns not being as smart as whites).

Other examples of the use of humor, irony, and satire to subvert the dominant discourse can be just plain funny, as is this one, re-tweeted (RT) by @Slow_ro:

RT @N8tiveWhispers My parents told me, “You’ve got to stop watching so much TV and read more!” So I turned on the subtitles.

That is a classic example of an ndn doing what he was told, but in a way that subverts authority: N8tiveWhispers is both complying and not complying with the request. Direct counters to/commentary on colonization and, once again, stereotypes, are also prevalent, and can be both funny and bitter at the same time, as @RedIndianGirl shows in this tweet:

@tantooC A college student once asked her American Indian professor, “What’s the epitome of happiness for Indians?” His response: “1491.”
Or here, where @IAmNotAMascot specifically points out the discourse that continues to confirm stereotypes of ndns:

#Fact: When the climate’s arid, you can bet your brimming basket of beets that someone will quip, “Maybe an Indian should do a rain dance!”

This particular example is significant because it shows how society continues to denigrate ndn culture, but instead of just being bitter or angry about it, @IAmNotAMascot employs irony and satire to lessen the impact of the statement, to make it easier to accept that such attitudes still exist.

@Sherman_Alexie frequently comments on social “institutions” like religion and politics, using humor and irony to imply what he thinks without actually stating it outright:

Lightning storms are forecast for this Saturday’s atheist march on Washington DC. If God exists then God is hilarious.

In this instance, God is hilarious because if God is in heaven and there are lightning storms during an atheist march, then God is clearly commenting on what he thinks about atheists. Or, in this example, Alexie sums up the first debate between Obama and Romney very succinctly:

Missing: Pair of balls. If found, please return to 1600 Pennsylvania Ave, Washington DC.

Here, the play on words is “pair of balls” as representing a man having the strength to stand up for what he believes in and fight for it. But a reader would also have to know that 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is the address for the White House to understand that Alexie was saying that Obama clearly lost that debate.

The use of humor and irony is extremely prevalent in ndn discourse, and it almost always functions at multiple levels of meaning. They are used against the agents of oppression, against the tribal community, and even against themselves as a way to avoid representations/feelings of
victimry and despair. As I’ve shown in this section, in ndn country, rarely is something only what it appears to be; the NCT shows us how ndns use humor, irony, and satire to make light of being a colonized people, while at the same time promoting survivance.

7. Dissolution of Boundaries/Ambiguity/Transvaluation of Values

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the trickster is known for his ability to expose the sociopolitical structures or values that underpin our society and how they act on us, leading to either a new way to perceive things or a rediscovery of essential truths. The NCT calls into question the boundaries of the self, since we are extending ourselves into virtual spaces, which elude traditional definitions of “space and place.” Virtual selves do not have to reflect our physical selves, and that fact can call into question traditional boundaries (male/female, white/ndn, etc.). And through social proprioception, we become part of a greater identity; in this case, the participants represent a number of different tribes, but they all also consider themselves ndn, which blurs the boundaries between tribal-specific identity and that of this larger category of “ndn.” Add to that the mixedblood, and the boundaries of traditional identity completely dissolve, because now a person’s identity is comprised of several different cultures (in my case, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Scottish, English), effectively putting the person in the trickster position of either/or/and/both. The person can then shift between these identities—just as the trickster shifts between human, animal, and spiritual forms—to view the world from multiple perspectives.

The @1491s are a perfect example of the dissolution of boundaries/ambiguity/transvaluation of values, as their very identity is a collective one, and we never know which member of the group is doing the tweeting (although, over time, it becomes
easier to recognize the different personalities involved), so the identity is somewhat ambiguous, and we are literally presented with multiple perspectives. As with the earlier example under *Humor and Irony*, they are always calling boundaries into question, exposing the social fictions that underpin our society, and asking us to rethink our values. One of the clearest examples of this type of behavior came while they (or one of them) were traveling:

I prefer taking a train across vast expanses of America as opposed to flying. The land passes by slower. Allows you to take it all in.

Here, he’s just another American reaffirming the values of traveling by train, one of them being enjoying the scenery, appreciating this great land. However, in a classic NCT reversal, two minutes later this was posted:

Shit..that means instead of a 2hr flight watching stolen land pass me by...I get a 9hr train ride watching stolen land pass me by. #assholes

So he took the pastoral concept of “looking out the window and appreciating how great this country is” (even his tone is relaxed) to the revaluation of it through the lens of colonization, and suddenly the pastoral has gone, well, out the window. The tone is angry and bitter, as evidenced by the use of “shit” and “assholes,” and the simple change of “land” to “stolen land.” Granted, this is said with the irony typical of the @1491s, but it reverses the pastoral value and serves as a reminder that what is a value for one society comes at an often forgotten cost to another. It also shows the multi-facetedness of identity, because he went from just being a person appreciating the land to suddenly viewing the same situation from an ndn perspective.

Similarly, the topic of illegal immigration generates tweets that ask us to reconsider our stance on what it means to be a “legal” American. @IAMNotAMascot tweets:
It’s stunning that the descendants of a continent ACROSS AN OCEAN would refer to the southern indigenous ppl of this continent as #illegal. ‘What do you think about illegal immigration?’ Well, 1492 was a shitty year.

Further complicating issues of identity and the transvaluation of values, there is also the concept of “good” and “bad” ndns. @RedIndianGirl provided this definition:

@Native_Problems Cos the “good” Indians are on the rez; the “bad” ones go off and raise all kinds of uncomfortable (for settlers) hell.

Her initial tweet was about being a “bad ndn” was in reference to a video-poem that Ryan Red Corn of the @1491s put together and uploaded to YouTube. The @1491s then tweeted the link, which quickly went viral, with ndns everywhere retweeting it, stating that they were “bad ndns” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FUgDutdauQ). It was, in fact, one of these tweets that introduced me to the @1491s. As of this writing, the video-poem has been viewed on YouTube 33,217 times. Not only is the @1491s use of Twitter to promote works like this another example of the dissolution of boundaries, but the poem itself addresses issues of identity and viewing the “ndn situation” from multiple perspectives. Because it is such an important work, and it informs/reminds us of the travesties ndns have survived, I am including the original poem here.

Bad Indians

I was told by those old ones
that every song has a special time and a place where its sang
this is our song
and this our time
they used to say the only good indian is a dead indian
i must be a no good at being indian
cuz I feel alive and kicking
we are the bastard reject children of manifest destiny
the offspring of fornicating aimsters
raised by our grandparents who told us
not to confuse being warriors with gangsters
the edward curtis groupies get jazzed by anyone fitting the bill
and America gets jazzed by every Bury My Heart at Walmart film
here i stand before you
this crowd of nations
this life of sanctions
an awkward patience
like five hundred BIA buildings vs. a fathers’ unfiltered hate
right next to the IHS building with a two and a half week wait.
a cinderblock battlefield where few are left standing
and the people its failing, its’ marginalized estate.
i am armed to the teeth with words from the ivory tower
and those good indians told me its borrowed power if...
if i talk loud enough
if i talk clear enough
that i would be heard
that for some talking is singing
that for some singing is praying
but i guess that depends on who is doing the talking
and i guess that depends on who is doing the listening

...so understand me in english,

you have been robbed of your tongues

the taproot of thought

in the middle of resisting

the language got caught

and she only shows her face during ceremony

like she’s ashamed of her scars

like what she has to say is never really heard. at all.

and the violence she knows is enough to never sing again

but i killed the cameraman and stripped him of his lense.

i photographed the body and asked him to forgive.

forgive me as i cut out your tongue

forgive me as i put you in this powdered wig

forgive me when i put your body in a museum

forgive me of all my sins

for not being a good indian

the balls of your forefathers will be traded for whiskey

to fuel the molotov cocktails to be tossed at your cities

and the breasts of your mothers severed and bloody

will be sold to the freak show for the revelers money

your children will witness their whole world collapse

as kidnapped siblings must erase names off maps
so forgive me of all my sins
for not being a good indian
i was taught better than that
i have more respect than that
there is no history book with my story
there is no newspaper to give me my glory
because no one has heard this language in years
cept kokopelli, dream catchers and a trail of beers
my voice is a small pox blanket
that spreads like fire on the prairie
infecting both fist and hatchet
in the spirit of fucking crazy

The poem helps to summarize not just what has happened to ndns, but what continues to happen. The combination of images/events and the straight-forward manner in which they are presented is very powerful. And the ambiguity of both the “I” and the “you” in the poem causes the viewer/reader to reflect on whether Red Corn is addressing a white audience or an ndn audience, emphasizing his point that it depends on who is talking and who is listening. It also highlights Red Corn’s own heritage as a mixedblood; with an Osage father and white mother, he represents both colonized and colonizer. But what is particularly important is that this video-poem wasn’t just uploaded to YouTube; by tweeting the link, the @1491s made sure his voice “spread like fire on the prairie,” enabling his message to be heard all over the world, by ndns and non-ndns alike. There is also another layer to the transvaluation of values in this poem: while it
was initially just filmed as an amateur video and posted to YouTube, the video was recently included in the Bedford St. Martin’s online textbook, *ix: Visualizing Composition*, so it is now being viewed and analyzed in college composition classrooms. Red Corn’s voice has infected the Academy.

For the mixedblood and the unenrolled, the question of identity always remains an ambiguous one. Take, for instance, this series of tweets from @RedIndianGirl on the subjects of “being” ndn:

@SomebodyToSome I know. I always get the “Funny, you don’t look like an NDN” which isn’t funny either.

@SomebodyToSome LOL I always maintain the only reason I’ve survived off-Rez for 31 yrs is cos I’m a stealth Mohawk

Wow, I should ask Pauline Marois if I can get citizenship in her country since I’m 1/16th Quebecoise and all.

My great-grandmother on my dad’s dad’s side was a Villeneuve from Hochelaga. Family lore says my dotah “stole” her. #bloodquantum is bull.

But all my life people say “You don’t look like an Indian.” Piss off, this is what a #Mohawk looks like.

By calling herself a “stealth Mohawk,” she is once again using humor to make light of an otherwise frustrating experience of being told she doesn’t look like what she is. Then she goes straight to the stereotype of what an ndn should look like and the controversial issue of blood quantum. As Resa Crane Bizzaro pointed out in *Shooting Our Last Arrow*, “The Handbook of Federal Indian Law* comments that ‘if a person is three-fourths Caucasian and one-fourth Indian, it is absurd, from the ethnological standpoint, to assign him to the Indian race’. Yet legally such a
person may be an Indian” (17). @RedIndianGirl’s tweet about being one-sixteenth white satirizes the federal laws that determines who is ndn and who is not, since a person can be one-sixteenth ndn and be considered an ndn, but someone one-sixteenth white isn’t considered white. The next tweet about getting citizenship in Quebec, while still using irony, highlights the underlying pain of being defined by an oppressive government. And her final tweet on the issue, stating “this is what a #Mohawk looks like” includes a photo of herself (fig. 8):

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

**Figure 8: @RedIndianGirl Self Portrait**

The idea of “looking” like an ndn is another complication to questions of identity, because once again people are looking to stereotypes for their definitions of what an ndn should be. In *X-Marks*, Lyons writes that “Indian identities are constructed… they do not come from biology, soil, or the whims of a Great Spirit, but from discourse, action, and history; and finally,
that this thing is not so much a thing at all, but rather a social process. Indian identity is something people do, not what they are” (40). By tweeting about these types of issues, @RedIndianGirl is doing ndn identity, but it’s an identity that primarily remains one only recognized by other ndns.

The dissolution of boundaries/ambiguity/transvaluation of values in ndn rhetoric serves as a constant reminder of the many-sidedness of life, that there is always another perspective, and by combining multiple perspectives, we can disrupt/challenge/transform traditional notions of identity. By exposing the sociopolitical structures and values that underpin our society, the lens of the NCT can lead us to a rediscovery of essential truths and new ways of being in the world.

8. Social Proprioception

When I developed my criteria, I mentioned that at times there would be significant overlap in the categories, and social proprioception is one of those cases. As discussed above, the dissolution of boundaries creates multiple-levels of identity (self/tribe/nation/nationality). Social proprioception is an awareness of being part of a larger identity, of having a sense of self that is connected to all these other people, even when they are not physically present. While ndns have always had a holistic sense of identity, being stripped of land, culture, language, and religious practices has left many ndns with a very fractured sense of self. Social proprioception, as it is fostered through online media, provides that larger community. This aspect is of particular importance to ndns who, as I discussed in Chapter One, have been “othered”—be it through blood quantum, the Dawes Act, missing documentation (like @IAmNotAMascot), or simply
tribal regulations that do not allow members to belong to more than one tribe (forcing an individual to choose one identity over another)—and have not been able to maintain close tribal affiliations. Social proprioception has created a larger identity of “ndn,” which is inclusive of all tribes, and itself part of yet an even larger group, the “indigenous.” These communal identities reinforce the concept of identity being multiply-constructed and always in process. Graphically charted, the interaction of these various communities might look something like this:

![Figure 9: Connecting Social Networks](image)

So any user in this community is aware of what is happening with any other user, creating that social “sixth sense.” This type of networking is exactly what the U.S. government tried to prevent through removal acts and the reservation system; small, scattered groups of ndns don’t pose much of a threat to the dominant hegemony, but once those groups begin to join forces, they become much more dangerous. @IAMNOTAMascot describes this larger, communal identity as a “cyber tribe”:

Cyber Tribe: an online community of #Native artists/activists of various nations w/ a shared objective: challenge the American hegemony.
And by enacting the NCT, ndns are indeed challenging the American hegemony, reminding each other of their heritages, what they’ve survived in the past 500 years, and to be proud of themselves and their culture.

I could argue that all tweets are representative of social proprioception, since anyone joining Twitter is joining a specific discourse community, but in order to really focus on the awareness of specific communities/values, I’m primarily focusing on the use of hashtags (the pound sign) and how their usage promotes survivance. (This selection does skew my data, as @Sherman_Alexie doesn’t use hashtags at all, and @IAmNotAMascot only uses them in about a quarter of his tweets, but of the 280 tweets I collected from him, only three were not specifically about ndn issues.) As I mentioned in *Self-Representation*, hashtags such as #represent or #REZpresent are common, and act as a call to other ndns to act. #NDN, #indigenous, and #Native are all used to call attention to the fact that these people are ndns and are (re)presenting themselves and their tribes.

AnotherREPRESENT video! This time with the ever cool @NativeApprops
http://t.co/UuPspE5h … #REPRESENT

Here, the @1491s are promoting one of their videos and reminding their fellow ndns to represent. Similarly, @RedIndianGirl reminds everyone that the Mohawks are still very much alive and active.

Bonus: Ran into the awesome #ShelleyNiro at the hotel this morning. #Mohawks in Peg!

She has a show tonite so NDNs #rezpresent

The hashtag #decolonize is frequently employed to remind ndns of traditional practices and not to give in to assimilation. @RedIndianGirl shared the following, both informing us of practices that we might not have been aware of, and asking us to act:
Watching a film about a woman reclaiming the art of Inuit face tattoos & marvelling at the power inherent in ancient traditions #decolonize

Maybe I should think about reviving Iroquoian facial tattoos on women. Then I’d be scarier than usual #reclaim #decolonize #tradition

And the @1491s remind us that the “stoic ndn” is very much a stereotype, again employing humor to make their point:

Being stoic is a product of colonization. Before Columbus, Natives mastered the art of the pun, dick joke and prank. #Decolonizeyourface

@IAmNotAMascot also uses hashtags to draw attention to specific subjects, as he does here to notify everyone that Urban Outfitters is (once again) misappropriating ndn tradition and promoting stereotypes:

Genocide was committed upon American Indians, but these shirts are deemed fashionable, permissible. #UrbanOutfitters http://t.co/PeBDaNYZ

The link takes us to the picture he took with his phone’s camera:

Figure 10: Urban Outfitters ndn

For many people, this image will immediately bring to mind the phrase, “the only good ndn is a dead ndn.” @IAmNotAMascot’s tweet very quickly went viral (remember, he has over 2,000
followers), and Urban Outfitters was quickly flooded with emails calling for them to remove these offensive t-shirts from their stores. These types of tweets really make apparent the impact of colonization on indigenous cultures, and at the same time, are indicative of the NCT in the call to reclaim traditions and decolonize.

Social proprioception has created a new kind of survivance by creating an online community that ndns can participate in at any time. There are a lot of tweets about upcoming pow-wows or tweets sharing a link to a pow-wow video, usually with a comment along the lines of, “in case you couldn’t make it, you can enjoy it here.” There are references to fry bread (one person actually pointed out that fry bread isn’t technically ndn, as it was introduced by the settlers), respecting one’s elders, comments about living in harmony with the land, and comments (both good and bad) about their specific tribes. The hashtag #represent is used on a lot of tweets, or, as @RedIndianGirl and a number of others use it, #REZpresent, so they’re not just (re)presenting ndns, but reservation ndns. The use of hashtags serves as a reminder to ndns to remember their history, to act in the now, and to interact with other ndns online. This is of particular importance to the unenrolled and those who live far from a reservation, so they are not able to participate in traditional ndn gatherings. As a marginalized people, there is tremendous comfort in knowing that we can tweet our frustrations and our accomplishments, and the cyber tribe will listen and respond. @RedIndianGirl had this to say:

So energized by all the smart, thoughtful, #decolonized NDNs who Tweet. Starting to feel like (dare I say) a movement. #indigenous

Social proprioception is a key component of the NCT, clearly demonstrating how ndns enact survivance in/through social media. It creates a sense of identity that is greater than oneself, and serves as a reminder that we are always in and constructed by our environment.
While that environment might be a virtual one, it still very much shapes us through our interaction with it. For ndns who live far away from their families and reservations, social proprioception provides a sense of community online. Through this aspect of the NCT, we can see how ndns have created a communal identity that is very aware of itself and its role in supporting and encouraging ndns to do, #reclaim, #decolonize, and most importantly, #represent.

9. Tribal Languages

“We dwell not on earth but in language” (Garrard 47).

As I discussed in Chapter One, a major part of the government’s “civilizing” of the ndn was to strip ndns of their identities as ndns, and one of the quickest ways to do that was to forbid them from speaking their languages. The ndn boarding schools would physically punish the students for speaking even a word of their languages, resulting in many ndns growing up not knowing their languages and being unable to communicate with their elders (including family members) that did not speak English. On his blog, @IAmNotAMascot states that, “according to a study conducted by the Linguistic Society of America, only 194 North American Indigenous languages remain out of hundreds.” And of those, “73 are spoken almost entirely by adults over 50” (“Not Your Average Term Paper”). Preserving their languages has become a huge issue in ndn country, and the Internet is playing a key role in that process.

Of the ndns I’ve been following, many of them tweet greetings to the Twitterverse in their own languages. While Vizenor’s survivance code specifically stated speaking in their native languages without translation into English, the majority of the people I see using their languages
online are providing translations, which allows the rest of us to learn a little of their languages. But not only are ndns tweeting in their languages, they are combining their languages with Twitter’s Internet protocol: the limitation of writing in 140 characters or less, which, as we saw with @RedIndianGirl’s description of herself as a “Urban Rotinnonshonni Kanienka’hakehon,” can be quite a challenge when the native language has very long words.

@IAmNotAMascot almost always greets his followers with a welcome to the day:

Iyuha hau e chi ciya pelo, mitakuyepi. Anpetu wáste yúha po. Hoka hey! I say hello to all of you, my relatives. Have a good day. Let’s go!

And he also reminds us of the importance of maintaining a sense of humor:

Blihič’iyapo na ikȟat’a pi kí ek’tuŋ že šíŋ yo. Lakȟota for “Be strong ... and always remember to laugh.”

@IAmNotAMascot has tweeted links to several articles he’s written for Indian Country Today Media Network, including Colorado now allowing the teaching of indigenous languages in the public schools. And, furthering ndn representation online, he frequently includes photos in his tweets:
Following that post came this tweet:

Today & tomorrow I’ll hunker down to draft a 25-page academic piece about the importance of revitalizing American Indian #languages.

In another tweet, he explains why he thinks indigenous languages are so important:

@avinenKB I hope the children don’t lose their mother tongue in U.S. schools. In my opinion, language & cultural identity are inseparable.

While some scholars, such as Abram de Swan, might dispute the claim that language and cultural identity are inseparable, many others agree, as do many ndns (Moya-Smith, “Not Your Average Term Paper”). In another article on Indian Country Today Media Network, one ndn woman was lamenting the loss of her language, as so few of the tribal youth spoke it, and she said that they had also lost a great deal of their humor, as the language itself incorporated humor and promoted laughter (Austin).
Another tweet alerted me to a huge repository of online dictionaries at www.freelang.net. They have dictionaries for thirty-three different ndn tribes. As more of these types of sources are put out on the web, the more there are calls for tribal elders and those who are fluent in their languages to get online and assist with the translations. While I did not capture it in this study, I saw a tweet advertising an online repository for voice recordings for a tribe that had fewer than fifty members that still spoke the language. They wanted to make sure that their language was not completely lost, and by doing this, they could ensure that their children would learn to speak the language with the correct pronunciations. In fact, in just the group of ndns that I follow, over fourteen different languages are represented. @Slow_ro actually asks another follower here to speak more in his/her language:

Can I get more (Hello) in your Native tongue. Mine is Ya’at’eeh (Hello) #dine

Even the 1491s make a plea for ndns to learn their languages:

Hey Indian Country, step up your cultural game, or this guy will learn all our languages for us. :) This isn’t a... http://t.co/xLRBuk0m

The link takes us to a YouTube video of a young man speaking nearly fluent Ojibwe after ten days in a language immersion program (and he promptly informs us that he’s not a member of the tribe). This tweet both informs ndns of a language program that they may not have known existed, and also serves as a reminder that if they don’t learn their languages, then the dominant hegemony will have succeeded in its goal to “kill the ndn and save the man.”

Clearly, we can see ndns enacting the NCT by promoting the preservation and speaking of tribal languages. Just seeing the languages in tweets is encouraging to all ndns. Using the Internet to share information about language immersion programs, states passing laws allowing the teaching of indigenous languages in public schools, and simply to put out the call to learn
their languages, all point to the importance of tribal languages, and a renewed vigor in ndn
country to reclaim their right to speak their own languages and preserve/practice their cultures.

10. Conclusion

In Chapter Two, I outlined the survivance code of the NCT, and in this chapter I specified the criteria for that code, analyzing how ndns are enacting survivance online through self-representation, the use of humor and irony, dissolution of boundaries/ambiguity/transvaluation of values, social proprioception, and the use of tribal languages. I reviewed my methodologies for using these criteria as a lens through which to view ndn tweeting, and then took an in-depth look at how these criteria are being used by ndns online.

I opened this chapter with a quote from Linda Smith, discussing a definition of authenticity that stated, “indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory” (74). While this chapter has not focused on authenticity per se, any portrayal of a culture by someone not of that culture is not going to be an entirely accurate representation. Inaccurate representations result in stereotypes and a reinforcement of the self/other binary. Through my discussion of the NCT and how it allows us to see new ways for ndns to practice survivance online, I have shown that ndns can (re)create themselves while remaining indigenous, and certainly that they are “complicated, internally diverse [and] contradictory.” As I have mentioned, one of Vizenor’s survivance traits was tribal specificity, meaning that the person would only refer to himself or herself by tribe and not by the more generic terms of American Indian or Native American. Viewed through the lens of the NCT, however, we can begin to
recognize the importance of tribes coming together and sharing resources, so while they are Mohawk, Lakhota, Diné, Cheyenne, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Osage, etc., they are also part of a larger, extremely active, cyber tribe: the NDN.

In the next chapter, I look more in-depth at the collective actions of the NDN cyber tribe and how we can see the NCT’s codes actively being used to promote survivance and create agency in ways never formerly possible. I consider the pedagogical implications of my research and how the NCT can be used as a gateway to foster discussion about other cultures and other ways of knowing/doing.
Glooskap Turns Men into Rattlesnakes

(Passamaquoddy)

There was a certain tribe. Its people were rowdy and lecherous. Whatever they wanted to do, they did. They were disrespectful. They thought about nothing but copulating and gorging themselves with food.

Glooskap told those people: “A great flood is coming.”

They said: “We do not care.”

He told them: “The water will be so high it will go way above your heads.”

They said: “We are good swimmers.”

“The flood will sweep you away,” Glooskap told them.

They said: “We like to take baths.”

Glooskap told them: “This will be a really tremendous flood.”

They said: “We don’t mind.”

Glooskap told them: “Be good and pray!”

They said: “Don’t bother us. Go away!”

These people decided to have a big feast of eating, singing, and dancing. They made rattles out of turtle shells filled with pebbles. They danced in rhythm with their rattles. It began to rain, but these people kept dancing. It thundered, but still they danced. Lightning struck the ground around them. They only laughed and kept dancing.
Glooskap became angry. He did not drown them in the flood. He turned them into rattlesnakes.

So now, when the snakes hear somebody coming, they rise up and lift their heads, while their bodies sway as if in a dance. And they shake their rattles as they did when they were still human beings.

“I like this kind of music,” said Glooskap.

(American Indian Trickster Tales 218-19)
Chapter Four: Becoming Visible in Invisible Space

“[C]ultural politics is empowering and endangering, oppositional and hegemonic; culture is neither the ‘authentic’ practice of the ‘people’ nor simply a means of ‘manipulation’ by capitalism, but the site of active local struggle, everyday and anywhere” (Chen 312).

“There is no Native American alive today who has not experienced oppression and continues to experience oppression” (Gonzalez).

Chapter One covered federal ndn policy and the use of blood quantum as a technology to reinforce the “othering” of ndns, including my own family. In Chapter Two, I described the trickster’s role in ndn culture, the cyborg trickster in postmodern theory, and the concept of social proprioception, showing how the Internet creates a sense of identity greater than any one person that participates in social media. I then introduced the figure of the NDN cyborg trickster (NCT), and showed how, in Chapter Three, the NCT helps us see how survivance is being enacted online. In this chapter, I want to look at the broader implications of digital cultural rhetorics of identity and the role social media play in enabling agency. In particular, I want to focus on those unseen power structures that shape our daily lives, and how the NCT can push against them, helping to enact change and create new meanings/knowledges/ways-of-knowing—in essence, creating a new language, or discourse—that subvert many of the existing sociocultural controls. I lay out how people and the media still cling to binaries, thus illustrating
why the NCT matters. Finally, I offer a pedagogical way of teaching with/thru the NCT so as to
instill a critical awareness in our students and ourselves.

1. Settler Colonialism

This is a story. Last summer I was in the English department’s computer lab and
overheard part of a conversation between two students. One was a white male who was
graduating in August. The other was a white female, one of the lab consultants (although she
wasn’t on duty at the time), who was about to start her senior year. The young man was relating
his latest hunting exploit, which wasn’t that successful because, in his opinion, the area was
over-hunted and the animals had migrated to the local reservation (I don’t know what game he
was hunting). He then complained that there were all these animals living on the reservation and
dying of disease and old age, when they could’ve been on someone’s table, but the ndns weren’t
killing them because they were either too stupid or didn’t know how to hunt. What really
bothered him was that, as a white man, he wasn’t allowed to hunt on the rez. He didn’t
understand that law at all, especially since the rez was physically a part of America, and yet, as
an American, he didn’t have the right to hunt where he wanted. The young woman started
explaining to him some of the legalities involved and asked him to consider everything that they,
as white people, had taken from the ndns over several hundred years, and that ndns had a right to
their land and their laws. He was having none of it. In fact, he went so far as to say that, well, if
the ndns wanted their own land and their ways, then they needed to live only on the reservations,
and that they needed to go back to how they lived before Columbus, so they couldn’t wear jeans
or t-shirts and shouldn’t have any electronics whatsoever, but live as they did 500 years ago. He
was absolutely convinced that all the technological progress that has occurred over the past 500 years was done by the European settlers, and ndns had absolutely no part in it. He argued that if ndns want to participate in “modern” society, then they have to give up their “quaint” and “traditional” ways and become modern people. His point was that if he wasn’t allowed to hunt on their lands, then they shouldn’t be allowed to participate in what he saw as society (albeit white society), because it was unfair for them to move about freely and him not to have that same freedom.

Given that WSU is very much a multicultural campus, I was quite shocked at not just this student’s attitude towards ndns (I’m using the lower-case here because in this instance, ndns are very much marginalized), but also at his hubris. And it goes back to the concept of the ndn as savage; the west was “conquered” and so therefore no ndns remain. We’re dead. For this student, his concept of “ndn” was fixed in the stereotype of the savage, and the media’s continual portrayal of the ndn as figures like Tonto in The Lone Ranger, speaking very broken English, and “stupid” about white society, has done nothing to change this stereotype. These portrayals illustrate Roy Harvey Pearce’s theory of the savage, where “Indians [are created] as the past, a formative stage which is the absolute opposite of the European American, who becomes the present and the future” (Powell 44). At a panel at the 2013 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Scott Lyons explained that in their “conquering” of ndns, the U.S. and Canada employ(ed) a form of colonialism known as “settler colonialism” (this began long before the countries split with the British Crown and became countries in their own right). Relying on Lorenzo Veracini’s work, Lyons describes that, as opposed to “exploitation colonialism,” where the conquering body declares, “you work for me,” and exploits the labor of the indigenous people (this is what happened in Australia, where the colonizers basically recreated the structure
of the Crown), “settler colonialism” says that in order to declare the land as “theirs,” the land had to be conceived of as uncultivated wilderness, and one where there was no recognizable form of sovereign government. This form of colonialism is founded on the concept of, “you, go away.” In other words, the ndns had to disappear, or, as Lyons put it, the west had to become “[a place] where there was no law, no civility, and ‘might makes right’” (“Beyond Cultural Rhetoric”).

Certainly, nearly every Western ever made promotes this mindset. Settler colonialism is so much a foundation of our society that the dominant culture doesn’t even recognize that it existed or, worse, that it still exists.

Growing up in America, we have all been raised in the settler colonialist tradition to some extent, but the young man in the lab reminded me of the extremes to which such notions can be taken. The incident left me wondering what would’ve happened if he had been one of my students? How would I have dealt with that? He was completely closed to any other realities; after nearly twenty minutes of conversation, the young woman gave up and quit answering, and he seemed very content that she’d given up—the dominant white male prevailed.

Sadly, these extremes remain widespread. In early 2013, for example, Canada’s *The Daily News* newspaper published a letter to the editor that argues from a settler colonialist perspective, making such preposterous claims as, ndns didn’t discover the wheel, made no medical discoveries whatsoever, and are obviously incapable of taking care of themselves (fig. 12):
I was shocked that The Daily News would even consider running a piece such as this, let alone actually publish it. Clearly, the author is completely ignorant of NDN culture. No astronomy or math? Then why is the Mayan calendar so much more accurate than the Western one? No science? Doesn’t the genetic manipulation of corn through careful cross-breeding for over 2,000 years count as science? These are but two examples, but the Canadian author, like the student, is completely closed off to accepting that a conquered people could have ever survived on their own, let alone accomplished anything that contributed to Western society. While it would be nice to assume that such notions were limited to a handful of naïve people, popular media representations—which I discuss later in the next section—illustrate that sadly this is not the case. Settler colonialism is part of the fabric of North America.
The ideology of a settler colonial mindset whereby the idea persists that ndns only live in the past left me reflecting on the Academy and how the very structures of our academic system reinforce traditional colonial values and the self/other binary. There is no “we,” no community, in that binary: there is only self and other, that thing that allows me to define who I am by seeing (or not-seeing, in the sense of completely misunderstanding) what I am not. As I discussed in Chapter Two with Haraway’s theory of the cyborg, binaries represent asymmetrical power relations, because if there are two, then one must be “better” than the other. And in school we measure “better” in terms of grades. The “A” student is clearly “better” than the “C” student. So how do we change the system? How do we create a community environment where each member can contribute to the overall learning? How do we teach students to see those invisible power structures that rule their daily lives? And how can new technologies and social media help us to accomplish these goals?

2. Enabling Agency through Social Media

Haraway presented the cyborg as providing a way out of the maze of dualisms Western rhetoric has created. Malea Powell echoes Haraway in her discussion of the binaries of disciplinary discourses, stating that, “the language in which this struggle is named—dominant/oppressed, center/margins, colonizer/colonized—is itself a trap, and integral part of the rhetoric of empire” (41). In this language, ndn identity is complicated and regulated, and often subscribes not only to stereotypes of what is and isn’t an ndn in the eyes of non-ndns, but also a binary for those within the culture of what “counts” as native: is it to be born on the rez? have a tribal card? speak the language? In all of these cases, people are dealing with binaries
of identity: THIS is ndn and THIS is not. For whites, sometimes it’s that the stereotypes are ndns (feathers, teepees, black hair, etc.) and those who don’t fit the stereotypes are automatically not ndns. For ndns, sometimes it’s the identity/culture cop game whereby one isn’t ndn enough unless they know the traditions or speak the language (whether or not the person carries a tribal card; throughout my research I’ve encountered many instances of, “how can someone who has blonde hair and blue eyes and is one-sixty-fourth Cherokee know what it means to be Cherokee?”). In her examination of successful (and thus capitalized) NDN rhetors and how they have been able to negotiate ndn and non-ndn audiences, Powell conceptualized the term “rhetorical alliance.” Just as Haraway expanded upon her cyborg metaphor to create what she calls “companion species,” Powell argues that to overcome the traditional narratives of competition in the Academy, we “need a new language… that allows us to imagine respectful and reciprocal relationships that acknowledge the degree to which we need one another (have needed one another) in order to survive and flourish” (41). This is an important concept for the field of rhetoric and composition, as we need new words, new discourses to move beyond the binaries inherent in Euro-centric academic discourse. And, we need the ability to recognize which languages are not encouraging “respectful and reciprocal relationships.”

This new language, new discourse, is what I see NDNs employing online. I have turned to a theory of the NCT because it disrupts these binaries. It does this by making visible the social and political ideas/motives/devices employed in/by/through binaries and by blurring the boundaries of self and other. As I’ve shown throughout Chapter Three, NDNs are empowering themselves through online conversations, using the language of the Internet to reconnect to one another and create the more-than-one-but-fewer-than-two-ness of traditional ndn relations: we shape each other through our interactions and create that social proprioception that grounds all of
us in one community, one holistic self. And the lens of the NCT allows us to see how NDNs use, for example, online spaces to assert their agency and disrupt media representations and other binaries.

Social media such as Twitter and Facebook are extremely powerful tools for agency. As I discussed in my NCT code and criteria, one of the key elements of survivance is self- and tribal-representation to combat the stereotypical representations of ndns in the media, and ndns are doing precisely that. Take, for example, last November’s Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show. One of the scantily clad models was wearing a bra and panties designed to look ndn, high-heeled ankle-high boots with leather fringe, and (as if that wasn’t enough), she was also wearing a floor-length headdress. This representation isn’t just stereotypical in its appropriation of ndn culture; it also exoticizes and sexualizes ndnness, making ndns objects of sexual desire. Women on reservations face startlingly high incidences of sexual violence, and images that objectify women show no sensitivity to this issue. An audience member took a picture of the model with a camera phone and posted it on Twitter and Reddit. As with the Urban Outfitters’ images, this photo instantly went viral (even I retweeted it and posted it to Facebook) (fig. 13).

![Figure 13: Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show](image)
By the next morning, there were thousands of tweets, from both ndns and non-ndns alike, criticizing Victoria’s Secret for this outfit. One person even tweeted the customer service phone number for Victoria’s Secret and encouraged everyone to call. Another person said she was met with silence when she called and explained to the representative that to ndns, this was the equivalent of taking a white model and having her walk down the runway in black face. The representative, clearly shocked, finally said, “I had no idea.” The company’s poor choice of outfits was written about in numerous periodicals across the U.S. and Canada over the next few days. I initially saw the tweet on a Tuesday; despite thousands of complaints via phone, email, Twitter, and Facebook, Victoria’s Secret didn’t issue an apology until late Saturday. However, they did apologize, and they removed the offensive footage from the televised broadcast the following month. Without social media, this kind of instantaneous collective action would never have been possible, and Victoria’s Secret might not have removed the footage. Similar moves have happened with other media representations, such as fashion icon Paul Frank’s “Dream Catchin’ Powwow” event. After massive collective action via social media, apologies were made and the t-shirts associated with the event were discontinued (nativeappropriations). This type of collective action provides NDNs with a means of educating the rest of the world about their culture.

The networking taking place in and through social media is both inspiring and amazing. By connecting to other tribal members online, one woman in Oregon was able to gather together documentation that was scattered across the U.S. in various BIA offices that allowed her to reclaim over 3,000 acres of land for her tribe (Hanscom). However, this type of networking is exactly what the government tried to prevent through removal acts and the reservation system; small, scattered groups of ndns don’t pose much of a threat to the dominant hegemony, but once
those groups begin to join forces, they become much more powerful. And the combination of marginalized/dominated people using their cell phones to photograph or videotape atrocities committed against them by their government or opposing factions, and then posting them online, is indeed powerful.

Making use of social media to subvert the dominant hegemony is exactly what has been happening in Canada. In December 2012, the Canadian parliament decided it would be to its benefit to rewrite a finance reform bill (Bill C-45) requiring financial documentation and standards of First Nations’ (FN) businesses that far exceed those required of any other Canadian businesses. But, as has become common in politics, it contained a “few” provisions that modified a couple of other bills: it overhauled the Environmental Protection Act, the Fisheries Act, the Navigable Waters Protection Act, proposed changes to the Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act, and, significantly rewrote portions of the Indian Act to allow for leasing of FN land to non-FN entities (IdleNoMore.org). While the changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act were the most contentious, the changes to the Indian Act eliminated tribal sovereignty: the bill said that FN peoples had the right to vote on whether or not to lease tribal land, but if a quorum consensus was not achieved, the government had the right to overturn the tribes’ decision if it was deemed to be in the best economic interest of Canada. All of these sweeping changes might have come to pass were it not for the ndns using social media for survivance. Two FN women found out about these proposed reforms, and they tweeted not just about the bill’s provisions, but also included links to the actual legal documents. Those first few tweets reached out to a great audience online: the indigenous peoples of the world and their supporters. Thus began one of the largest indigenous protest movements ever seen, and it started on Twitter with the hashtag, #IdleNoMore. Unlike the Occupy Wall Street movement, which lost momentum after the first
few months, #IdleNoMore has enraged/inspired/encouraged indigenous peoples worldwide and has gained the support of many other countries, as well as that of the United Nations. As a result, the Canadian government has had to deal with the very public exposure of political policies it would have preferred to keep hidden.

Twitter is not the only space where this networking is taking place. Facebook contains a feature that allows users to create group pages, and then invite others to join the group, so they have a space dedicated to their particular topic/issue, where members can exchange ideas and engage in further networking. I am a member of the Indigenous Rhetorics @ CCCC group (CCCC: Conference on College Composition and Communication); a group created specifically for faculty and graduate students whose work focuses on indigenous issues. This forum provides a space for us to share presentation ideas and form panels for the coming year’s submission, and to continue conversations that began at the conference. There are also call-to-action groups encouraging members to add their voices to everything from proposed labeling law changes to fighting social injustices. For instance, in March 2013, WSU professor Dr. David Warner, an NDN teaching in American Studies, suffered a serious head injury while trying to break up a fight outside a local bar. Within twenty-four hours, two Facebook pages had been created: one called “Rally for David Warner,” asking for help to find out what happened and who the other people involved in the assault were, and one for a traditional healing ceremony, bringing people together to celebrate his life and pray for his continued healing. A few days later, a third page showed up, asking for donations to help cover his medical bills. Within twenty-four hours of the page’s creation, the original goal of $1,000 had been met, and a new goal of $5,000 was then established. On Twitter, the hashtag #DrDave trended for several days, and tweets pointed people over to the Facebook pages. Dave’s family has been giving updates to the close friends
who started those pages, and these updates are then shared with the entire community on Facebook. More importantly, these types of pages create communities of people of all nationalities/races/religions, bringing them together over a single topic and promoting additional action.

These are just a few examples of how, using the lens of the NCT, we can clearly see NDNs utilizing the Internet and social media to create a web of relations, often done so in the spirit of working against settler colonialism. In this web of relations, each small, communal group, is then linked to other groups, and all of that information is being shared instantly. This networking creates both personal agency for the members involved, as well as agency for the groups by enabling collective action. Individuals can represent themselves and their cultures, and they can speak out on issues that are important to them. Collectively, social media allow people to use this sense of agency to come together to create change, and that change then reinforces the personal sense of agency. After centuries of having been silenced, the knowledge that they can speak out, both personally and collectively to enact change—and then see that change happen—is of particular importance to ndns and all marginalized peoples.

However, these new webs also allow for the furthering of hatred and stereotyping. As suspects in Dave’s case have been identified, their names also have been posted on the Facebook pages, and that resulted in a family member of one suspect posting this on the “Rally for David Warner” page:

[person’s name] posted: everything on this page is ignorant and stupid, whoever caused the injury was most likely David Warner himself for being a stupid drunk. Reports say that he was trying to interrupt a fight between an associate of his and the “suspects” in this case. What happened next was that he fell, probably due to
intoxication, and then they fell on him. What reason is there to go on this witch
hunt for people that really haven’t committed any serious crime except for maybe
being drunk in public, just as Mr. Warner had been that night. (Chisum, FB
screenshot 2013-04-10)

That post immediately received several comments, all of which were then removed as they were
on the “rally” page and the page owner wanted to keep the discussion positive. However, the
original post was reposted to a new “Justice for David Warner” page, with the comment that “I
post this – so that folks can see what kind of INJUSTICE and IGNORANCE we have in store for
this journey.” Several things are going on here. First of all, we have the stereotype of the drunken
ndn. And while the people that “fell” on Dave were “maybe” drunk, the only “serious crime”
they committed was “being drunk in public” (which posits two things: that they might have been
drunk in public, and that being drunk in public isn’t a serious crime). Second, one of the page
owners felt that these types of comments didn’t belong on the “rally” page, but were important
enough to merit a new page, so that they remained in the public venue. And third, the NCT is
further carried out through people like me: I promptly took a screen capture of the conversation,
so that even if the conversation was removed, it remained available as an image on my computer,
which I could then use as an example here and in future work.

New technologies are allowing us to connect with one-another in ways never formerly
possible, enabling agency for individuals and groups alike. Ojibwe programmer Darrick Baxter,
for instance, noticed that his six-year-old daughter wasn’t using many Ojibwe words, even
though the language was spoken in the house, so he wrote an iPad application to help his
daughter learn the language. After seeing how quickly she was learning through the app, Baxter
decided to donate the code to other NDN tribes rather than sell it, as he considered it too
important to tribal cultural survival. While working within the capitalist system and running his own business, his decision to give back to all NDNs is very much an NDN one: what is best for the community is more important than personal gain. And he is very much holding the keys to the future for many, many NDNs seeking to reclaim their languages (Dadigan). Baxter is an excellent example of NDNs enacting the NCT through technology. Not only is he a computer programmer (countering the ndns-don’t-have-technology stereotype), but he is also working with several other tribes to teach them how to program their languages into the app (countering the “warring savages” stereotype). NDNs are using technology to work together to (re)claim their identities, not just as members of individual tribes, but as part of the larger, collective identity of NDN, again showing how NDNs are enacting the NCT to create agency through social media and collective action. I believe bringing awareness of these types of actions to the university classroom, and finding ways to incorporate a pedagogy of the NCT, are crucial for the continual disruption of settler colonialism.

3. The NCT in the Academy

While there are broad-reaching implications for the NCT and ndns becoming NDNs—from being marginalized “ndns” to reclaiming agency as “NDNs”—the fact of the matter is that in Academia, and particularly in something like freshman composition and technical communication classrooms, the discourse we are told the students must learn is the language of the victors, the colonizers. So how do we decolonize the classroom? Angela Haas states that, “[a] decolonial pedagogy interrogates how colonialism has impacted the experiential and formal education of all learners and teachers of all cultural backgrounds” (158). Haas makes an
important point here, because it’s not just about NDNs; it’s about every minority and how “adapting” to U.S. and Canadian culture has affected them. Invariably, some of their adaptations are to accept the colonial underpinnings of our society. But it is also about everyone who has grown up in the U.S. without obvious ties to a different culture—not just whites, but students of other ethnicities, and mixed ethnicities, who have been raised with the traditional (white) values of this country. These are the students who don’t see how colonialism operates because it is the only thing they have ever known, making it “normal.”

In Chapter Two, I mentioned Haraway’s theory that the other “holds the keys to the future” (35). It is the other, the not-us, that can teach us about ourselves, and help show us those unseen sociopolitical power structures that govern our lives. In her essay, ”Ethnography and the Problem of the ‘Other,’” Patricia Sullivan asks, “how can we conceive and reflect the ‘other,’ the not-us, in the process of inquiry such that we convey otherness in its own terms” (97)? Similarly, Robert Brooke, in an article about an ethnographic study he did, asks, “who would I become, as teacher and writer and member of the classroom community I had been in, if I explained what I had seen one way rather than another” (22)? We have grown up in a culture that commodifies other cultural representations (furthering the concept of dominant and submissive), and so students often have the fictional narratives they have learned from television, movies, and pop culture as the representations of entire cultures. And that is all they know about them. We have to learn about these other cultures in order to start seeing from their perspectives, and the NCT is making that possible. Not only is there a huge wealth of information that is available online, and more being added every day, but, as evidenced in my earlier examples, people are able to respond to cultural misrepresentations immediately, so the myths and stereotypes are being countered.
Lyons describes that while the rhetorical constructions of ndns and settlers—both historically and today—are about land, and that ndns are seen as trying to recover their land, languages, and culture, this is done at the expense of things like rhetoric and writing, “yet the latter is what has allowed real natives to address the problems with settler colonialism in the past two centuries” (“Beyond Cultural Rhetoric”). Basically, the best way to resist the “go away” command is not to go away, and that idea reflects a phrase I have seen over and over again on Twitter, particularly since #IdleNoMore started: NDNs tweeting the very simple, very powerful statement, “we are still here.”

I will also note that Lyons, perhaps unintentionally, complicated his statement by using the term “real natives.” As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Lyons is a mixedblood and firmly supports the mixedblood-as-trickster concept, as he operates in both the ndn and the white worlds, and he is enacting change through his scholarship and his teaching. But just as with IAmNotAMascot explaining Feather Freaks and Wannabees to one of his followers, the “policing” of ndn identity is something that has been internalized by so many ndns, that even those in favor of dispensing with blood quantum find themselves using terms like “real” to differentiate between those who know the culture (but not necessarily the language), and those who don’t.

The concept of a “real” ndn is also a problem in that it reinforces the self/other, ndn/white binary, which is of particular concern when it comes to education. Indeed, many American Indian tribes are very skeptical about school, and even just learning to read and write “white.” As a result, even now “[r]eading and writing are not valued among many of the people on the reservations of the Upper Plains, and sometimes even the very act of acquiring an education is represented as ‘turning white’” (Lyons, “A Captivity Narrative” 97). These ndns are, as Hall
describes it in the language of stereotyping, closing up ranks against the colonial system. Closing up ranks is a defensive mechanism, but it is not a solution. The solution, I believe, comes from learning new ways to perceive.

Kenneth Burke claims that there are three ways to perceive an act or idea: there is local perception, where understanding is arrived at by being directly involved in the issue; there is “perception from without, made possible through non-participation” and there is a third type of perception that combines the first two, which results in “the fullest kind of understanding, wherein one gets the immediacy of participation in a local act, yet sees in and through this act an over-all design” (195). In order to truly understand an issue, we must look at it both from within and from without; to enact change in the system, we need to be part of the system, working inside it, but also viewing it in terms of the overall web, seeing all the various pieces that come together to form it.

While many of these ndns are resisting white ways, they have already been profoundly affected by colonization, and, as I have discussed, many of them no longer speak their tribal language. Bizzell and Royster discuss how many minority students see the language of the academy as the “correct” language, making it somehow better or more pure than their own. With each new subject in school, students expand their vocabulary in the language of the academy, but frequently that new language is at odds with their home language, and results in a contraction of their linguistic abilities: they feel that they have to choose one language over the other (Kutz 165). As I mentioned in Chapter One, my father went through this linguistic contraction, and he dismissed much of the extended family as “lesser-than.” My grandfather had gone through a similar contraction, although his was an alienation from his ndn identity. In one of many conversations I had with him about his childhood, he recalled that his mother used to “speak
injun” when talking to herself, or sometimes saying something to his father or one of the other kids. But while some of his older siblings spoke a little “injun,” he was told that English was all that mattered and he had to learn it to succeed in the world.

This contraction is also seen with ndn students attending college (traditional or tribal college). Christie Toth noted that of her students in a Diné college, about eighty percent of students over twenty were fluent or near-fluent in Navajo, but of those under twenty, only about twenty percent were fluent. Most of the under-twenty group said they understood their parents and grandparents when they spoke the language, but the students themselves were not comfortable speaking it; it had become the language of the other. Whether or not the students spoke Navajo, Toth noted that all of them dreaded further writing instruction in Standard American English (SAE): for them, learning to write in SAE had consisted of grammar drills. So rather than focusing on grammar (despite the college’s focus on it), Toth sought to incorporate the rhetoric of settler colonialism, drawing attention to it and then showing the class how, historically, the lack of SAE amongst their people had resulted in broken treaties, removal, and stolen land. But she didn’t stop there. She then turned to the executive orders that allowed the Diné to return to their ancestral lands, and how the initial treaty and the orders that followed only came about because these students grandparents and in some cases, great-grandparents, had learned to read and write SAE, so they could negotiate with full awareness of all of the clauses in the treaty (Toth).

By showing her students what their grandparents were able to do by learning to read and write SAE, she was able to show them positive examples of how change can be enacted by working within the colonial system. Learning to read and write the language of the victors empowered them. She also encourages her students to learn their languages, as she understands
that culture and language are inextricably linked. And this is another example of the NCT’s transvaluation of values: Toth is a white woman encouraging ndn students to use these tools to become NDNs. Her knowledge and mindfulness of ndn culture allows her to do this work, and as such, enacts an NCT of her own. Thus, the NCT enacts agency not just for ndns, but also for non-ndn educators to teach a critical pedagogy.

In my second semester of teaching freshman composition, I also encountered an instance where the NCT allowed me to enact agency, not for other NDNs, but for other minorities. I had only fourteen students, a mix of Hmong, Hispanic, Egyptian, and Syrian students, with two American white males. I used a Faigley text that presented different points of view on everything from cloning to racism to religion. About halfway through the semester, after reading Silko’s “Border Patrol State,” the two white students were discussing the issues of racism and police brutality in the story, but the minority students didn’t want to engage in the conversation. Suspecting that they did not see themselves as belonging to our classroom community (or at least, not as full members of it) and were uneasy about present their point of views, I mentioned that, according to the U.S. government, I was an ndn, a minority. Up until that point, I had been a white woman in the position of power. Immediately, my two white students’ eyes widened and they straightened up in their chairs. My twelve minority students visibly relaxed, as if now that I was one of them, they could share their thoughts. The conversation became lively. All of the students had to re-articulate who I was in relation to them and how that changed the context of the classroom. The ideological took on “special significance in that in it and through it those relations [were] represented, produced and reproduced” (Grossberg qtd. in Slack 117). Even though the minority students were the physical majority in this class, it took my disclosure for them to feel like they could relate to me. My mixedblood status allowed me to reach across that
almost-visible barrier between the white students and the othered students, bringing both groups into the conversation. I was able to take what had been an either/or situation and turn it into an and/both: the students understood that I was both white and NDN, and as such, I identified with both groups and understand, as much as is possible from a middle position, the varying perspectives each group had on particular issues.

While my mixedblood status allowed me to act as a bridge between white and minority students, there are many other ways to incorporate the NCT into the classroom. One obvious way is to include more NDN texts. For example, as I discussed in Chapter Three, Ryan Red Corn’s video-poem, “Bad Indians,” was included in the Bedford St. Martin online text, ix: Visualizing Composition by Kristin Arola and Cheryl Ball. The text is set up so that students view the video and then respond to a series of questions analyzing the design of the video, the intended audience, and its overall effectiveness. The students typed responses are then emailed to the instructor. I found this to be an extremely valuable tool, because I now have written responses from twenty-five different students to help me understand how they perceive ndns and what knowledge they have about the culture. Responses ranged from “making an audience member like me (one who has no connection to the native culture) understand the situation. It reverses the roles so that I am the one out of my natural cultural context,” to comments like, “the fact that Indians, white people and people of a multitude of other ethnic backgrounds were involved made the poem that much more powerful.” The second comment was made by a student who didn’t understand that everyone in the video was NDN; he assumed they were of other ethnicities because they didn’t “look” NDN. Another student commented that, “this element is effective in conveying a message because it shows to people that there are a lot of people who are part Native American who are affected by this poem.” Texts like this are extremely valuable tools for
assessing a class’ knowledge base, and educators can then use this type of feedback to adjust their pedagogy.

Another way to incorporate the lens of the NCT into the classroom is by presenting students with pop culture images of ndns. When I showed my class with the image of the Victoria’s Secret model, several students began to understand why it was offensive, but several others used the discourse that is so common when dealing with issues of colonization/assimilation: “they should just get over it,” “what’s the big deal? We dress up for Halloween,” and, like the student in the computer lab, “they need to get with modern times.” It was clear to me that further contextualization was needed; or, to paraphrase Volosinov, I needed to use words as a bridge to connect them to me, and while one end depends on me, the other end depends on the addressee (86). So I went at it from another angle and asked how many of them were Catholic or had friends/family that were Catholic? About half the class raised their hands. I asked them how they would feel if that same model walked down the runway in a bra and panties designed to look like the Pope’s vestments. Shock and outrage registered on many of their faces. Not only did they then understand the issue, several students commented that it was even more of an insult because the Pope cannot be female. And I responded that, in most tribes (again, compliments of colonization and patriarchy), women were not allowed to wear headdresses, so a female model in headdress was a further insult to the culture. Because our culture has misrepresented ndns for so long, students are generally unaware of the issues with misappropriation and how it can further harm a people/culture, until it is put into terms that they do understand; in this case, my comparison to the Pope’s vestments allowed them to see the issue from an entirely new perspective.
This type of exercise is another example of how to use the NCT lens in the classroom: taking something very foreign to the students (ndn culture) and comparing it to something of equal status in their culture (Catholicism), and thereby enabling them to understand the importance of what they were being shown. It was also very relevant to the class, as this was a three hundred level multimedia authoring class, and the students were tasked with analyzing how rhetoric is used visually, and to what ends, in multimedia texts. In the next section, I take a more in-depth look at specific assignments designed to assist students in learning to see from multiple perspectives and to understand, at least partially, other ways of knowing/being/doing.

4. Decolonizing the Classroom

In an increasing technologized and multicultural world, learning to see from different perspectives—or, perhaps even more importantly, being open to other perspectives—is something that I firmly believe students need to learn. And I think that we, as educators, need to ask our students to consider who they are and how their discourses (dominant and other) filter through them. What do they project? How do they act on others? Where do the concepts come from? And what happens if they take this concept, and put it up against this other concept? By putting together two or more things that may not have traditionally gone together, new meanings can be made. So the following assignments all highlight this notion of hybridization and how those new meanings can change both language and culture. While I envision these assignments taking place in a computer classroom, with students actively participating in the conversation, such assignments could be done in hybrid courses where some of the instruction takes place online, or, with online learning systems such as Canvas, which integrates social
media, multiple email accounts, and students’ cell phones with their online management tools, students could still participate in active discussions in online spaces, while never actually meeting in a face-to-face classroom.

Assignment #1: Online Cultural Representation

This assignment examines how a particular culture is being represented online, both by those who grew up within the culture and by those who comment on it from outside the culture.

Learning Objectives:

1. Gain a new understanding of the cultural impact of digital media.
2. Gain an understanding of how online representations of a culture both counter and further stereotypes.
3. See how different online media affect the ways in which a culture is represented.

Assignment Detail:

This assignment is intended to introduce students to online cultural representations. Preferably this should be a culture the students identify with, as they can then draw from their own knowledge and back up their claims with real-life examples. Students then analyze how the media has covered this cultural identity, correctly or incorrectly, specifically focusing on issues of representation: how the culture is stereotyped, where representations are authentic (or, at least, correct), representations as “cultural commodity,” how different online technologies affect cultural representation, issues of colonialism, and what spaces/places/technologies allow for agency in representation. This assignment might seem fairly clear-cut for minority students, as they can examine how white culture depicts their culture. A white, middle-class student from Seattle, however, might want to look at the media representation of American white culture in
other countries, or simply at how Seattle, as a sub-culture, is represented in American media (in most television shows, for example, Seattle is usually presented as being very liberal).

Assignment #2: Technologies and Cultural Representation

A follow-up to Assignment #1, or as a standalone assignment, this assignment goes into detail on how different technologies affect cultural representation.

Learning Objectives:

1. Learn to rhetorically analyze multimodal texts.
2. See how cultural representation is affected by the format of the media.
3. Critically engage with issues of representation.
4. Practice creating multimodal texts.

Assignment Detail:

This assignment takes a detailed look at how different technologies affect cultural representation. Students compare/contrast representations on a selection of different media, such as Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, LinkedIn, film, television, books, magazines, newspapers, fashion (both clothing and jewelry), music, etc. They will examine how different the modes of communication (aural, visual, linguistic, spatial, gestural) are used in each of the media. Students could then create a multimodal text that rhetorically analyzes these texts for context, content, audience, purpose, and how effective they are at communicating their stated goal/persuading the intended audience.
Assignment #3: Political Movement Analysis

This assignment examines a political movement of the student’s choosing for a specific culture/subculture, analyzing what/how the different technologies employed furthered/hindered the overall goal of the movement.

Learning Objectives:

1. Gain an understanding of the role technology plays in political movements.
2. Gain knowledge of the inner-workings of political movements and why some succeed while others fail.

Assignment Detail:

Students select a political movement that interests them, such as Occupy Wall Street or Idle No More, analyzing how the movement started, what its goal was, what technologies it employed to spread its message, in what ways the movement was or wasn’t successful and why, and how the outcome of that movement affects the political future for that culture/subculture. If the movement is ongoing, discuss what the potential is for success and what steps need to be taken to help ensure its success. The medium for this assignment is flexible: it could be a traditional paper, a multimodal or multimedia text, and/or a presentation.

Assignment #4: Analysis of Culturally-Specific Publications

Analysis of culturally-specific publications (print or online). Students would research a variety of different publications available about a particular culture, examining how those publications are promoting cultural agency.
Learning Objectives:

1. Gain a better understanding of a particular culture, its values, and how it represents itself.
2. Recognition of how various media affect the content of information provided.

Assignment Detail:

Examining a number of different types of publications on a particular culture, students analyze how those publications are promoting cultural agency, working against the constructs of the dominant culture, and what the value is of the particular publications to that culture. Are there scholarly publications for this culture? If so, how do the scholarly publications differ from the popular publications? Who is the target audience? What is the intended purpose of the publication? Students would also analyze which publications are very “tame” in their efforts not to upset the dominant culture, which ones are extremist (or more extreme), and which ones explicitly subvert the dominant discourse, but in ways that respects both cultures. Some examples would be the print journals, American Indian Quarterly, Yellow Medicine Review, and the American Indian Culture and Research Journal; online journals such as Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society; and online newspapers such as Indian Country Today, Native American Times, and The Genocide Daily.

Assignment #5: Cultural Map

This assignment would have students create a map of the area in which a particular culture exists/existed and explain how that location/environment affected the cultural practices of the people.
Learning Objectives:

1. Gain knowledge of place-based theory.

2. Understanding how the environment of a specific location figures into the cultural practices of a people.

3. Based on #2, gain a better understanding of how forced removal and relocation to a different environment affect cultural knowledge, practices, and identity.

4. Awareness of how place figures into the student’s own culture and cultural practices.

Assignment Description/Detail

Students create a map of the geographical location of a particular culture/subculture. Students could specifically look at an individual NDN tribe, a particular European culture, or even back to the Sumerians. They would create a map of the geographical area that culture lived in, and include information on the ecological conditions, the animals and fauna indigenous to the area, the types of food consumed, types of dwellings, music, etc. The map could either be print or multimodal (for multimedia classes, they could create a multimedia map where the viewer could click on a particular link/image and read/listen to more about that particular element).

Assignment #6: New Technologies and Culture

This assignment would look at how new technologies rearticulate/are articulated by cultures.

Learning Objectives:

1. Recognition of how new technologies change a culture and cultural traditions.

2. Awareness of the benefits/detriments of new technologies in cultural change.

3. Effects of new technologies on issues of cultural appropriation.
4. Recognition of the adaptability of cultures.

**Assignment Details:**

Students could look at how cultures adapt to new technologies and incorporate them into their traditions. Specific examples would be the fear of the camera that many indigenous cultures had, to how many religious ceremonies are now captured on video and shared online, or the preservation of indigenous languages in online environments. They could examine how social media are changing cultures/promoting the sharing of cultural traditions/promoting cultural appropriation. I would give students some very specific examples, such as my sister-in-law following a Chinese tradition with the birth of her son: mother and child do not leave the house for the first thirty days (presumably to encourage bonding); but while following this ancient tradition, at the same time, she thought nothing of using her cell phone from the upstairs bedroom to call the house phone (downstairs) to ask my brother to bring up a bottle. Students would examine incongruities such as these in their own lives, and examine how these cultural “adjustments” allow (or don’t allow) the culture to continue to exist in modern society.

7. Invisible Space, Visible Survivance

“He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions” *Declaration of Independence*.

The NDN Cyborg Trickster plays an important role in digital cultural rhetorics and, as the examples in this chapter suggest, often employs social media in order to enable agency. A sense of NDN agency is important for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that it is not
uncommon to come across an attitude in our students and our popular media that ndns exist only in the past, chained in the stereotype of the savage, and how settler colonialism is still very much a part of our society. The fact that the above quote is from the Declaration of Independence reinforces how the very foundations of our society are built upon the concept of the ndn as savage; the proclamation of freedom that defined the U.S. as a country independent of England, incarcerated ndns in the stereotype/theory of the savage. “All men are created equal,” except for the ndns, who therefore weren’t/aren’t “men,” or even human. And our children still learn that narrative in grade school. Yet, social media allow NDNs a way of subverting the dominant paradigm. In order to theorize these moments of resistance, I’ve shown how the metaphor of the NCT challenges/dislodges/disrupts the binaries of traditional white male values and is enabling agency through individual and collective action/identity. This theory answers Malea Powell’s call for a new language that subverts binaries and focuses instead on our relations to each other—a very indigenous epistemological stance. Social media is necessarily social, a way of being in relation to one another. As I’ve illustrated, the NCT uses social media, then, to help to create this new language, this new discourse, which in turn creates a new way of doing/being NDN. Engaging with the NCT in the classroom and in the academy at large is one way to subvert the “invisible presence of the dominant discourse” (Lyons, X-Marks 30). I hope these assignments will help students and instructors learn ways of perceiving the invisible colonial underpinnings of our society and how they continue to shape our identities and cultures. Although Scott Lyons may still feel that ndns are visibly absent in the dominant discourse, the NDN Cyborg Trickster is proving that NDNs do have a voice and are being heard, and are visibly present, in the visible absence of the Internet.
Now, when the earth was under water, as the event of the flood was told and translated, Naanabozho was perched on a great raft with his younger brother. “We will create the earth,” Naanabozho said in good humor. When the earth was finished the trickster and his brother created some people for the earth so they would not have to live alone with their own trickeries. A man was imagined first, and then animals and every kind of creature. Then Naanabozho created maji manidoog, or evil spirits, and when he finished with that he told man to find a clear place on the earth to live. The trickster then created a woman, and then birds, and then he created white people so that he and his brother, and men and women, would not have to live alone. “No matter who or how poor one of them may be,” said the first tribal creator and trickster about white people, “they shall purchase land from one another.” (Vizenor 154)
Conclusion

[It was] a large piece made of wires pounded flat, so that edge-on they all but disappeared, making the ovals into which they were fashioned flicker at intervals, vanishing, as did, in certain lights, the two thin, clear bubbles of glass that moved with the oval wires in complexly interwoven ellipsoid orbits about the common center, never quite meeting, never entirely parting. (LeGuin 295)

This is a story. Shortly before my thirteenth birthday, my father accepted an Executive Vice President position at Lockheed, headquartered in Burbank, California. We moved to Northridge, in the San Fernando Valley. I was forced to sell my horse. The rabbits were given to friends. My cat and my brother’s dog came with us. The new house was a large, five bedroom, traditional colonial with two-story high while pillars framing the front porch. There was a half-spiral staircase, a bonus room over the garage that had a wet bar, and a nine-foot-deep swimming pool in the backyard. My father had accomplished the American dream, rising from poverty to the upper-middle class. My mother proceeded to do everything she could to shape me into a proper, white, young woman. We joined the National Charity League, an organization run primarily by mothers and daughters, with the motto, “Mothers and Daughters serving the community together” (nationalcharityleague.org). I worked with disabled children at the Rancho Del Valle Crippled Children’s Society (it was the eighties; the rhetoric of the time wasn’t exactly sensitive to issues of representation), donated clothing and time to one of the League’s thrift shops, and met monthly with the other daughters in my age group. I learned how to serve a
proper English tea—and specifically that when you are offered the tea cup on a saucer, you only take the cup from the person; taking both cup and saucer is a major faux pas. I learned what my “colors” were: based on the undertones in your skin, you end up in a “season” that has all the colors that look good with your skin tones, and learned how to apply makeup that would compliment those tones. I learned to walk in heels with books balanced on my head, and I walked in two Nordstrom fashion shows, with the proceeds going to charity. I lost thirty pounds. I cut my long hair and permed it, completing my transformation.

I remained a “proper white girl” until my second semester at San Francisco State University, where I was majoring in dietetics. While taking chemistry, elementary statistics, sociology, and public speaking, I signed up for a course in science fiction and fantasy literature that met a general education requirement. The course introduced me to Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*. I immediately related to *The Dispossessed*, but still couldn’t see the connections the professor made in lecture. I turned to the literary criticism, which introduced me to the philosophy of Taoism, and suddenly I was back in the ways of knowing that my father and grandfather had taught me: the binaries of yin and yang representing all binaries, defined by one another, in constant relation, and through that relating, transforming the universe. Taoism focuses on the idea of balance, of not going to extremes, because invariably, what is created out-of-balance will crumble and balance will be restored. These were my values, indigenous values, and suddenly I saw underlying patterns in LeGuin’s work, as well as the other authors we read that semester. The course became a conversation between the professor and me; the rest of the class didn’t know how to see the way we did.

That one class changed my life. I took courses in philosophy and religion, world religions, Shakespeare, modern literature; in all of these courses, I could see those underlying
patterns, the connections. I started telling my own stories in creative writing classes. While I failed to make a living as a freelance writer and turned again to my white self to succeed in the business world, that class, and LeGuin, haunted me, until I finally returned to academia fourteen years later.

Throughout this dissertation, I have referred to ndns as “they” at times, and at other times, as “we.” It is a reflection of my own contested/conflicted identity as a mixedblood; I don’t look like an ndn, so both ndns and non-ndns question that identity (at least, the ones concerned with policing identity). It is also a reflection of me coming to terms with the fact that I am either/or/and/both. I stand on top of the wall and I can see NDN Country on one side, and modern (and still very white) America on the other; what I don’t understand is why they both insist on being separate. There is no going forward without moving beyond those boundaries. I can move in either country (albeit with limitations, since I am not an enrolled member of a tribe), and while I remain conflicted about my sense of identity, I know that my ability to walk in both places puts me in a position to enact change in ways that someone raised only ndn or only white cannot. Lauren Chief Elk, another NDN I follow on Twitter, asked me to, “challenge the narrative every chance you get.” This dissertation is my challenge; the first of many, now that I have a better understanding of identity-as-relation (that has always been my perspective; I just didn’t have the words to define it until now), and how I can give back to NDN Country, as well as helping my students learn to see how the sociopolitical and economic forces of our society continue to act on/through them. I hope that this dissertation will encourage others to consider their own constructions of identity, and how colonialism has shaped them—without them necessarily being aware of colonialism’s many manifestations in our society, and how it affects
their students.

Through the lens of the NDN Cyborg Trickster, we can see that the postmodern idea of fractured identity is not really postmodern at all: it is the state of being forced on American Indians for the past several centuries. In this sense, Indians are always already postmodern. But in a classic trickster reversal, while the dominant hegemony is fretting over the loss of a stable self and now very muddied boundaries between self and other, NDNs are embracing these new technologies and the freedom from the colonial narrative that they create: we are tweeting, connecting on Facebook, sharing and preserving our cultures through Youtube videos, alerting one another of rallies, of atrocities still being committed by government entities, and using the Internet to preserve our languages. The Internet was supposed to increase the Digital Divide, especially for ndns, and for a while it did—and still does in many places—but as I have shown in this dissertation, with social media and the prevalence of inexpensive electronics like tablets and smartphones, many more ndns are gaining access, and through collective action, using the white man’s tool of the Internet to “raise all kinds of (for settlers) hell” (RedIndianGirl), and (re)claim agency. I find it both humorous and ironic that the one space where ndns are becoming visible NDNs is in the invisible, place-less locale of the Internet.

As Donna Haraway states, our relationship with others is a “contradictory story of relationships—co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all” (300). To recognize identity and cultural identity as co-constitutive relationships means that the relationships are constantly building upon each other, that there is no fixing of identities because each is shaping the other, and thus “never quite meeting, never entirely parting.”
By recognizing that social influence is embedded in our constructs of identity, and how we can have conversations in spaces that conflate the physical and the virtual—and, by doing so, have an even greater impact on who we are—we can come to a new understanding of how technology has not disembodied us and fractured our self-constructs, but instead how it plays the role of the trickster, and has helped dissolve the traditional walls between self and other, space and place, online and offline, to allow for a new understanding of the individual within the society and the society within the individual. By interacting with you online, I am (re)creating you within me, just as you (re)create me within yourself, and we remain in communication with all of our parts.

#WeAreStillHere
Notes

1. These criteria were inspired by Christie Toth’s presentation at the 2011 *Computers and Writing* conference, titled, “Rhetorical Purpose and Aesthetics of Survivance in *Tribal College Student*, 1999-2008.”

2. I use the term “Western” here as it is currently what most academics use to differentiate from “Eastern” or Asian rhetoric. However, “Euro-centric” would be more accurate, as the settlers brought European values with them, and a term like “Western” should, in my opinion, reflect the values of the indigenous people of that continent. Or, as Victor Villanueva prefers, “Western Hemispherical,” so it is clearly situating a rhetoric to a specific place.
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133


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MEMORANDUM

TO: Kristin Arola and Pamela Chisum,

FROM: Patrick Conner, Office of Research Assurances (3005)

DATE: 3/25/2013

SUBJECT: Certification of Exemption, IRB Number 13049

Based on the Exemption Determination Application submitted for the study titled “Becoming Visible in Invisible Space: How the Cyborg Trickster is (Re)inventing NDN Identity,” and assigned IRB # 13049, the WSU Office of Research Assurances has determined that the study satisfies the criteria for Exempt Research at 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

This study may be conducted according to the protocol described in the Application without further review by the IRB.

It is important to note that certification of exemption is NOT approval by the IRB. You may not include the statement that the WSU IRB has reviewed and approved the study for human subject participation. Remove all statements of IRB Approval and IRB contact information from study materials that will be disseminated to participants.

This certification is valid only for the study protocol as it was submitted to the ORA. Studies certified as Exempt are not subject to continuing review (this Certification does not expire). If any changes are made to the study protocol, you must submit the changes to the ORA for
determination that the study remains Exempt before implementing the changes (The Request for Amendment form is available online at http://www.irb.wsu.edu/documents/forms/rtf/Amendment_Request.rtf).

Exempt certification does NOT relieve the investigator from the responsibility of providing continuing attention to protection of human subjects participating in the study and adherence to ethical standards for research involving human participants.

In accordance with WSU Business Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM), this Certification of Exemption, a copy of the Exemption Determination Application identified by this certification and all materials related to data collection, analysis or reporting must be retained by the Principal Investigator for THREE (3) years following completion of the project (BPPM 90.01). This retention schedule does not apply to audio or visual recordings of participants, which are to be erased, deleted or otherwise destroyed once all transcripts of the recordings are completed and verified.

You may view the current status or download copies of the Certified Application by going to https://myresearch.wsu.edu/IRB.aspx?HumanActivityID=37306

Washington State University is covered under Human Subjects Assurance Number FWA00002946 which is on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

Review Type: New
Review Category: Exempt

Date Received: 3/8/2013

Exemption Category: 45 CFR 46.101 (b)(2)

OGRD No.: N/A

Funding Agency: N/A

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