Identity, Narrative, and the Construction of the Rhetorical Situation in Euro-American and Aboriginal Cultures

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The very concept of a general Native American rhetoric is problematic since rhetorical systems reflect the contexts in which they are formed and used, and Native American tribes differ significantly from one another in terms of their languages, social structures, political systems, and ethical or religious beliefs.[1] Nonetheless, Native critics from a variety of tribal backgrounds have suggested that a number of key commonalities are shared by many aboriginal cultures, some of which have rhetorical significance. Here I focus on two of these commonalities—the relationship between individual and group identity, and the role of narration—with the aim of drawing out their rhetorical implications and examining how they result in rhetorical practices that are distinct in some respects from those of western rhetoric. The political, social, and rhetorical aspects of many tribal societies have been complicated by the imposition of non-aboriginal governmental institutions, majority rule, and the rise of pan-Indianism. I am not arguing that differences between western and Native rhetorics are related to essential differences between Euro-Americans and Native Americans, but that these differences are related to different constructions of the individual and her relation to society and the world. Nor, obviously, am I arguing that someone of aboriginal descent who uses rhetorical strategies more characteristic of the western tradition is in any way less "Native," particularly since the very survival of Native peoples has depended in part on their ability to successfully appropriate

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[1] Because I am examining the practices of aboriginal groups who are for the most part living in the United States, the terminology in this paper reflects, at points, American rather than Canadian usage in order to respect the broadest level of self-representation of the groups I refer to. For instance, I use "Native Americans" rather than "First Nations," and refer to "tribes" rather than "peoples" or "nations." Conversely, for the convenience of general readers, I will generally refer to specific peoples by the names conventionally used for them as opposed to the names they use for themselves within their communities, e.g. *Navajo* rather than *Diné* and *Cree* rather than *Iyiniwok*.

Euro-American rhetorical strategies in order to deal with colonization. What I am positing is the existence of alternative rhetorical traditions that are based on assumptions different from those of western rhetoric, traditions that continue to be manifested within the political and social frameworks imposed by the dominant western culture on aboriginal societies. It is not possible within an article of this length to consider the practices of more than a few Native American oratorical traditions. While Navajo and Pueblo oratory, which have been more extensively studied, are often emphasized here, I also draw on sources that examine or explicate a number of other traditions, including Coast Salish, Cherokee, Choctaw, Sioux, Kiowa, and Iroquois, with the aim of outlining some broad cultural patterns that affect the practice of rhetoric within Native American societies and distinguish it from the western rhetorical tradition. However, the existence of broad patterns should not elide the fact that each tribal group also possesses a unique tradition with its own rhetorical genres, situations, and strategies.

Rhetorical practice is inextricably linked with the nature of subjecthood or identity. It is a rhetorical commonplace that a speaker must adapt the means of persuasion to the character of the audience, but contemporary reconceptions of the nature of the rhetorical situation suggest that rhetoric and identity are even more profoundly intertwined than that ancient guideline suggests. Drawing on poststructuralist theory, Barbara Biesecker asserts that the rhetorical situation should be characterized "neither as an event that merely induces an audience to act one way or another nor as an incident that, in representing the interests of a particular collectivity, merely wrestles the probable within the realm of the actualizable. Rather, we would see the rhetorical situation as an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations" (Biesecker 243). In her analysis of the rhetorical situation, Biesecker distinguishes between what she calls "a logic of influence and a logic of articulation" (232-33). Under a logic of influence, the rhetor and

audience are framed as autonomous entities existing within a given rhetorical situation, and rhetoric is a means for the rhetor to influence the audience in line with the exigencies and constraints that already exist within the situation. Under a logic of articulation, rhetor, audience, and situation have a more reciprocal relationship with one another. To a degree, the existing situation can determine what rhetorical action is possible but, by shifting the terms that interlocutors use to define each other and the context in which they exist, symbolic action actually creates the roles of rhetor and audience and brings into being the rhetorical situation. Biesecker's observations imply not only that the nature of the audience determines the means of persuasion, but that a shift in how identity is constructed can change the entire framework within which rhetorical action occurs, in part because shifts in subjectivity effect and reflect corresponding shifts in the linguistic and political contexts encompassing both speaker and audience.

Such corresponding shifts in the nature of subjectivity and rhetoric have occurred within the western rhetorical tradition. The shift in classical Rome from republic to empire and the corresponding shift in the status of free Romans from citizen to subject led to changes in Roman rhetorical practice. As political freedom became constrained during the transition to empire, political and forensic rhetoric became increasingly constrained, and rhetorical amplification was frowned upon. In contrast, an entire culture of private declamation arose in which the more Oriental styles of oratory were practiced to the fullest (see, for example, Quintilian's remarks on corrupt declamation in *Institutio Oratoria* 2.10). As Rome became increasingly autocratic, the stylistic features that most defined the individuality of the rhetor were increasingly confined to the private realm. But these variations in subjectivity and rhetorical practice can be even more pronounced between cultures, leading to the construction of radically different rhetorical

systems. It is tempting to characterize the differences in rhetorical practice between cultures as the adoption of culturally specific means to reach similar ends. However, as Carolyn R. Miller suggests, the selection of rhetorical means determines to a degree what ends a speaker can have (138); that is, cultures may differ not only in their available means of persuasion, but also in the ends to which those means might be applied. The ways in which differing cultural constructions of the rhetorical situation can influence both the means and ends of symbolic action become particularly apparent when we compare western and Native American rhetorical practice.

In *Comparative Rhetoric*, George A. Kennedy suggests, "The most distinctive feature of Greek public address in contrast to that of many other cultures is its eristic qualities. In the traditional oral and early literate societies . . . the goal of deliberative rhetoric is usually consensus and concord in accordance with conservative values, and sharp altercation is avoided if possible" (197).[2] For an ancient Greek steeped in the tradition of *dissoi logoi*, aggressive disputation is the very medium that constitutes society, but for people in other traditions, open verbal combat is a sign that the social structure which allows people to mediate differences has already broken down. Gary Witherspoon, in his study of Navajo social organization, observes that

> Navajos emphasize the freedom of the individual to pursue his own course. . . . Desirable actions on
> the part of others are hoped for and even expected, but they are not required or demanded. Coercion
> is always deplored. In intragroup relations no individual, regardless of position or status, has the

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[2] Kennedy's book, while a pioneering effort, has come under some justified criticism. Although Kennedy avows that he "has no intention of trying to impose Western assumptions about rhetoric on exotic cultures" (5-6), his search for a "General Theory of Rhetoric" (1) sometimes leads him to apply Greek categories too loosely to other cultures, and to construct an evolutionary trajectory which frames the communication practices of other cultures as successive approximations of classical western rhetoric: it is symptomatic that Kennedy begins with animal communication, moves on to non-literate indigenous cultures, and then to literate cultures such as those in the ancient near east, India, and China, and then ends with Greek and Roman rhetoric, a movement that LuMing Mao characterizes as "rhetorical Darwinism" (410). While the present paper is a comparative study which draws, to some degree, on Kennedy's observations, I hope to present a more emic perspective on aboriginal traditions.

right to impose his will or decision on a group. Likewise, the group does not have the right to

impose its will on the individual. (533)

This valuing of personal autonomy is balanced by a commitment to communalism, so

that "unanimity is the only basis of collective action" (533). Ancient Greek and Navajo orators

differ not just in the rhetorical resources that are available to them, but also in their concepts of

what rhetorical action is intended to achieve. Gladys A. Reichard emphasizes that rhetoric within

Navajo society delicately balances suasion and respect for autonomy, eschewing the eristic: "The

right to come to one's own conclusion is respected, though the decision itself may be 'talked

down' in a family or local council. The individual is persuaded; he is not high-pressured into a

judgment contrary to his own" (xxxix).

George Kennedy's research on comparative rhetoric suggests that rhetorical differences

can be related to differing concepts of how the individual relates to his or her social group.

Kennedy points out that the focus on eristic rhetoric in Greek society is linked to the

development of voting and majority decision:

> The acceptance of majority decision, even a majority of one, has significant effect on rhetorical
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> practice. If a speaker does not need to secure consensus, he need not try to conciliate the more
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> extreme opponents, can largely ignore some of their concerns, and can concentrate on solidifying
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> support with those already inclined to agree and winning over the doubtful. Vigorous, even
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> personal, attack on opponents and their motives contributes to this end. (201)

Political process is intimately associated with political and social institutions, which in turn

constitute subjects in given ways by situating them within particular power relationships.

Rhetoric may always be, as Kenneth Burke suggests, a matter of identification, of making the

audience consubstantial with the rhetor, and it may also be that identification is always

"compensatory to division," a unification that requires the construction of an Other (22).

However, there is a difference between traditional tribal societies and western democratic societies in how the individual is framed, and in how identification and division function within them.

In *Ravensong*, a novel by Coast Salish writer Lee Maracle, the young Native Canadian protagonist, Stacey, puzzles over how the attitude to death differs between the members of her own Native village and the Euro-Canadian occupants of a nearby town. In her own culture, each individual death seems more of a crisis because "Every single person served the community, each one becoming a wedge of the family circle around which good health and well-being revolved. A missing person became a missing piece of the circle that could not be replaced. White people didn't seem to live this way. No one individual was indispensable. Their parts didn't seem bonded to the whole" (26). Stacey's observations revolve around a signal difference in tribal and western conceptions of the relationship between self and group: tribal peoples are not contained within a social circle, but rather are themselves the circle. Sioux critic Vine Deloria asserts that "Indian tribes are communities in fundamental ways that other American communities or organizations are not. Tribal communities are wholly defined by family relationships, whereas non-Indian communities are defined primarily by residence or agreement with sets of intellectual beliefs" (17). In democratic societies, and in particular the modern nation-state, the social structure is an abstract entity (in Benedict Anderson's phrase, an imagined community [6]) that exists independently of the population it contains or embodies, and so it is possible for a speaker to alienate a fellow member of that community without distending or destroying the structure that contains them both. For many Native American tribes, however, the tribe traditionally is not an abstract entity but is rather consubstantial with the actual people who form it; indeed, the vernacular label that many Native American tribespeople

apply to themselves—such as *Inuit*, Cree *Iyiniwok*, Navajo *Diné*, Arapaho *hinomo eino*, Comanche *nimini*, Ojibwa *Anishinaabe*—is often translatable simply as "the people" (one might compare this to the more abstract names commonly given to western empires or nation-states). Jace Weaver points out that "Native societies are synecdochic (part-to-whole), while the more Western conception is metonymic (part-to-part)…Natives tend to see themselves in terms of 'self in society' rather than 'self and society'" (39). Paula Gunn Allen asserts that these differences between Euro-American and Native American perceptions of the self also manifest themselves in differing orientations toward individualism in both social relations and narratives:

> Singularity of consciousness is a central characteristic of modern Western fiction. . . . But, in the Indian way, singularity is antithetical to community. For Indians, relationships are based on commonalities of consciousness, reflected in thought and behavior; blood is only a reflection of that central definitive bond. In such a system, individualism (as distinct from autonomy or self-responsibility) becomes a negatively valued trait. Nor does the tribal community of relatives end with human kin: the supernaturals, spirit people, animal people of all varieties, the thunders, snows, rains, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains, fire, water, rock, and plants are perceived to be members of one's community. (10)

This basic difference in the relationship of individual to group (and, ultimately, to the world) has significant rhetorical implications, since one cannot make a fellow tribal member into an Other without threatening the actual structure of the tribe. In the imagined democratic nation-state, identification is abstract, but in a tribal society that operates mainly on consensus, it is division that is abstract, a realm of Otherness that by definition exists outside the tribe, and so the rhetor must carefully manage the divisive aspects of rhetorical action. Given how concretely interwoven tribal members are, an individual rhetorical triumph that alienates another member may be in the end a pyrrhic victory that reduces the overall stability of the entire group. Michael K. Foster, in his analysis of Iroquois longhouse speech events, stresses that discretion is a prime

factor in public oratory; even when a leader is required to give a public speech dealing with a community problem, indirectness is required: "When a problem must be dealt with publicly, great efforts are made to avoid naming the person directly, and the problem itself is treated in circumspect language" (33, 85-86). Paula Gunn Allen's comments on Native literature apply as well to Native rhetorics: "Right relationship, or right kinship, is fundamental to Native aesthetics. Right relationship is dictated by custom within a given tribe or cultural grouping, but everywhere it is characterized by considerations of proportion, harmony, balance, and communality" (9).

   I am not saying that division and disagreement do not occur within Native American societies, but that the potential impact of division and disagreement requires rhetorical strategies that preserve the overall integrity of the tribe. Both Elsie Clews Parsons, in her study of Pueblo religion, and Clyde Kluckhohn, in his examination of Navajo witchcraft, point out that irreconcilable, overt division in traditional tribal societies often results in accusations of witchcraft. The power of witches may resemble that of shamans or chanters, but witches are individualistic and antisocial, and to identify someone as a witch is to make her into a scapegoat whose rejection serves to reinforce rather than to undermine the unity of the tribe (Parson 63). Indeed, insofar as the witch comes to stand for extreme individualism and self-centeredness, a rejection of her constitutes an assertion of intertribal identification and collectivism: "The witch is the person whom the ideal patterns of the culture say it is not only proper but necessary to hate" (Kluckhohn 96). Burke, in his *Rhetoric of Motives*, cites Kluckhohn's book as evidence of a "rhetoric of witchcraft," suggesting that witchcraft serves as a kind of topos that functions in conflicts over the rate of cultural change or over the balance between individualism and collectivism (45).

How then, given the avoidance of eristic rhetoric, does rhetorical practice occur in Native American societies? Kimberly Roppolo, in her study of how indigenous rhetorics might be used in reading Native literature, asserts that the continued existence of Native peoples "hinges, both on a spiritual level from one perspective and on a cultural level from another, on the fact that we remain 'storied Peoples'. . . . Native articulation of philosophy—of who we are and how we see the world, of what our position in it is in relation to the rest of Creation—has been accomplished by indirect discourse. We are taught by story, and we explain by story, not by exposition" (261-74). Roppolo's remarks suggest that narrative is more central in Native American rhetorics than it is in western rhetoric. Narrative has played an important role in the western rhetorical tradition; indeed, we see in Plato's dialogues how even Socrates, who expels the poets from his republic and castigates sophistic rhetoric, regularly employs myths for rhetorical purposes at the climax of dialogues such as the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. In ancient rhetoric the second of the four classical divisions of a speech (which are derived from the realm of forensic rhetoric but are often, in Greek and Roman texts on rhetoric, applied to the deliberative and epideictic genres as well) is the *diegesis* (Greek) or *narratio* (Latin), an account of the facts of a case, and rhetorical figures such as *energeia* (a general figure which refers to the use of lively description) and *ekphrasis* (the used of vivid details) are particularly important in relation to the pathetic appeal. The importance of narrative in classical rhetoric is further reflected in the *progymnasmata*, the traditional exercises used to train young orators. Of the fourteen exercises described by the fourth-century rhetorician Aphthonius of Antioch, five deal with various forms and facets of narrative: *mythos* (fable), *diegma* (tale), *chreia* (advice), *ethopoeia*, *idolopoeia*, and *prosopopoeia* (characterization), and *ekphrasis* (description).

Yet the relationship between rhetoric and story is very different in Native and western cultures, largely because the ends of their rhetorics differ in accordance with their differing views of the relation of individual and society. Walter Benjamin's analysis of the decline of storytelling in western society serves as an interesting illustration of the differences between western and Native attitudes toward story. According to Benjamin, every real story

> contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would first have to be able to tell the story. (Quite apart from the fact that a man is receptive to counsel only to the extent that he allows his situation to speak.) Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom. The art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out. (86-87)

Benjamin suggests that storytelling in western society is dying because, with the invention of the printing press, the rise of the middle class, and the dominance of print journalism, information has replaced story, and, unlike story, information seeks to be self-sufficient and complete. Storytelling "does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (91-92). Storytelling is deliberately local, personal, and experiential, and that, paradoxically, is why it is so universal for the audience, not in the sense that it communicates a single meaning, but in the sense that it allows anyone to derive meaning from the story. The listener is not merely a receiver of the story, but a participant in the construction of

it. Disembodied information, in its self-sufficiency, communicates content and also specifies its relevance for the receiver, but storytelling requires the audience members to create relevance by relating the storyteller's experience to their own: in order to receive counsel, they must allow their situations to speak. Western modes of discourse such as news and advertising, however replete they may be with narrative, still present us with information rather than stories because

> no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. . . . Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. . . . the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (Benjamin 89)

Story blurs the roles of producer and consumer, and perhaps this is one reason why its demise in western society begins with the rise of capitalism. Information is a finished but transient product fashioned in and for the present, ready for sale and consumption; story is incomplete and fragmentary, challenging the passive consumer to become an active producer. Furthermore, story is based on experience, and, as Benjamin points out, "experience has fallen in value" because modernity has thrown into question the relevance of the past to a radically different present and to an unknown future:

> For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body. (83-84)

Narrative operates rhetorically in accordance with the ends the particular rhetorical system allows. *Narratio* in classical eristic rhetoric is narrative as information, a weapon

deployed to illustrate, exemplify, or provoke in the service of a particular cause. Benjamin suggests that plausibility is the prime requirement for information, that it be "understandable in itself" (89), an observation in line with Quintilian's remark that in the *narratio* "there are many things which are true, but scarcely credible, just as there are many things which are plausible though false. It will therefore require just as much exertion on our part to make the judge believe what we say when it is true as it will when it is fictitious" (4.2.34). Indeed, within the rhetorical situation, there is no difference between narrative and argumentation: "what difference is there between a *proof* [*probatio*] and a *statement of facts* [*narratio*] save that the latter is a *proof* put forward in continuous form, while a *proof* is a verification of the facts as put forward in the *statement*?" (4.2.79). Nor is this linkage of narrative and proof restricted to forensic speech, since "just as panegyric applied to practical matters requires proof, so too a certain semblance of proof is at times required by speeches composed entirely for display" (3.7.4). To fulfill its function in eristic rhetoric, *narratio* must not only state the facts plausibly but, overtly or covertly, control their interpretation.

The role of narrative in Native American rhetorics, however, is often the opposite. Betty Booth Donahue cites Randy Jacob, a Choctaw scholar, who explains that "the well-composed American Indian text is designed to confuse the hearer or reader. In the oral tradition, good story-tellers do not tell all of the story. The hearer/reader must supply the missing parts of a narrative and comprehend the point of the work by means of his or her own intellectual efforts" (Roppollo 270). An anonymous Navajo elder who explains how to ask for and receive a story from a storyteller makes a similar observation:

> The storyteller will tell you a story here, then skip one or two and tell you another story, then tell
> you another. If there were another person there, he would tell that person the part that he didn't tell
> you, and the part that he told you, he will not tell to him. Then after he has finished telling you

everything you wanted to know, he will say, "GO, go tell each other the stories that I have told

you." In that way, the complete story does not come from his mouth. So no two people hear the

complete story from one man. That is the way it is.

You cannot tell everything. You MUST not tell everything. This protects you and shields you. You

walk behind this shield. It protects you, and you walk behind it. It is like that. (Rock Point 89)

In western rhetoric, narrative moves toward closure, a narrowing of interpretive possibilities that

reflects both the self-evidence that is characteristic of information and the desire to win the

audience over to a specific, limited viewpoint. David Carroll asserts that any "narrative that

predetermines all responses or prohibits any counter-narratives puts an end to narrative itself, by

making itself its own end and the end of all other narratives" (75). In Native American rhetorics,

narrative tends to move toward openness, and this openness is effected by merging the

hermeneutic with the personal. Story is not pure information because in storytelling, one cannot

listen to the tale without listening to the teller: the question "What does this story mean?" is

equivalent to the questions "Who are you to me, and who am I to you?" Walter Ong points out

that, in oral cultures, language is always an event and words are always "soundings" produced by

someone in reaction to someone or something else, rather than static, independent things;

paraphrasing Malinowski, Ong states that among oral peoples "language is a mode of action and

not simply a countersign of thought" (32). Story is a form of personal action that demands

personal reaction, and the validity of the words spoken cannot be divorced from the authority of

the speaker.

Further, Benjamin's assertion that "counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal

concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding" suggests that any given story is

not complete in itself, but derives its meaning from a context composed of other stories, and of

other speakers and audiences. In the storytelling method described by the Navajo elder,

interpretation is a process that requires both telling and listening, since each listener knows only part of the story; and, if each teller operates as the original storyteller does, telling only some of the stories he or she knows, further indeterminacy is created that will require still more telling and listening. The point is not to fix text and meaning, but to provoke more storytelling and meaning-making, to create a network of relationships through story. Leslie Marmon Silko extends this even to the level of words: "many individual words have their own stories. So when one is telling a story and one is using words to tell the story, each word that one is speaking has a story of its own too," so that the Laguna perspective on narrative is one "of story within story, the idea that one story is only the beginning of many stories and the sense that stories never truly end" (50). This dependence on personal, social, and narrative context implies that the meaning of a story never can be fixed; rather, it shifts depending on changes in the context that surround it, and so as the listener brings his experience to bear on the teller's, narrative serves rhetorically to effect, in Biesecker's terms, an articulation of listener and speaker within the wider social context in which they both exist: "the rhetorical event can not signify the consolidation of already constituted identities whose operations and relations are determined *a priori* by a logic that operates quite apart from real historical circumstances. Rather it marks the articulation of provisional identities and the construction of contingent relations that obtain between them" (243).

The main point of postmodern theory, and of deconstruction in particular, is the ultimate indeterminacy of any text. From the perspectives of both rhetoric and reader-response theory, however, texts do evince varying degrees of openness and closure, with some texts presenting more interpretive options than others. According to reader-response critics such as Stanley Fish, this openness and closedness rests not in the texts themselves, but in how the reader's

interpretive community mediates his relationship to the text: "If it is an article of faith in a particular community that there are a variety of texts [that is, a variety of potential ways in which readers can generate texts from a given work], its members will boast a repertoire of strategies for making them. And if a community believes in the existence of only one text; then the single strategy of its members will be forever writing them" (115). The interpretive community can be viewed rhetorically in terms of Kenneth Burke's categories of identification and division. If, as Fish suggests, "what utterers do is give hearers and readers the opportunity to make meanings (and texts) by inviting them to put into execution a set of strategies" (116), it is also true that texts can serve as pretexts for the formation of particular interpretive communities, and that in fact, what a rhetor is trying to do when using narrative is to form such a community. That is, in *narratio* the community is exclusive and the criteria for expulsion are narrow, in line with the eristic qualities of western narrative and the desire to produce a particular reading. Conversely, the use of narrative in Native rhetoric tends to be marked by an inclusiveness that reinforces the listener's membership in a broadly based interpretive community.

Roppolo explores the difference between western and Native rhetorics by comparing two iconic representations of the rhetorical situation:

> The spiderweb illustrates a Native ontology and epistemology, and not just because of its role in the stories of Southwest tribes. The spiderweb, the work of the Creator-Grandmother, is what is real, both seen and unseen. All of this creation is one story, the story which we as human beings inhabit. We can affect this story through our words, thoughts, and actions. And, like a web, if one strand is broken, the whole is affected. If someone wants to communicate something about this reality to someone else, there are an infinite number of connections between the speaker and the listener—and the story is all of the rest of the web. The speaker, knowing this, must pick a strand to follow. The listener must meet him or her at the point of connection. This is quite different from the rhetorical triangle of composition and communication theory, in which the noetic field is

> depicted with the speaker (subject) at one corner of the triangle, the audience (object) at another, the particular aspect of reality being discussed at the third, and the text in the middle. (268-69)

Again, using Biesecker's terms, the web represents a logic of articulation, the triangle a logic of influence.[3] In the former, rhetoric consists of a mutual process in which teller and listener use story to construct a context in which they position themselves. Through that positioning they engage in a process of mutual definition. In the latter, speaker, reality, and audience remain discrete entities, and the rhetorical text serves as a medium that allows the rhetor to change the audience's perception of the world in accordance with her aims. The two models manifest contrasting ideas about the relationship of the participants with each other and with their shared context, and these in turn reflect differing views of both the ends and means of rhetoric. Roppolo, examining the relationship of modern critical theory to literature, reflects these differences when she suggests that

> In most, if not all, Native cultures . . . argument doesn't proceed the way it does in academic discourse, at least traditionally. Argument is done by analogy, by association, by means of indirect discourse because while we [i.e., aboriginal peoples] value community, the rights of the individual to make his or her own decisions are also valued. The idea is that the only way to really learn something is to learn it for yourself. . . . "oratory" [by which Roppolo means storytelling] serves, in rhetorical terms, as argument in Native Cultures. (270)

Thus, in oral cultures, public oratory, the central form of rhetorical action, is not so much the transmission of a message from rhetor to audience, but a means by which orator and audience realize particular social and political relationships via shared speech, and especially story. Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton describe the workings of Navajo meetings in which the process of speaking and reinforcing community solidarity seems to be more prominent than the meeting's stated purpose or product:

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[3] See Randy Harris's "Bakhtin, Phaedrus, and the Geometry of Rhetoric" for a Bakhtinian framing of the rhetorical triangle that recasts the figure in a form more convergent with Native American ideas of rhetoric.

Meetings are almost invariably long [and] drawn out. Talking goes on interminably with great respect for conventions of oratory which prescribe various courteous references to preceding speakers, endless repetition of matters previously covered, extended circumstantial accounts of events which are—from a white point of view—irrelevant. When Navaho families go to a meeting, they go for all day. . . . The present practice of actually voting for candidates or on policy decisions is a white innovation and still makes most older and middle-aged Navahos uncomfortable, since the Navaho pattern was for discussion to be continued until unanimity was reached, or at least until those in opposition felt it was useless or impolitic to express further disagreement. (70-71)

Janet Lindsay, in an unpublished Master's thesis on Navajo public speaking, draws similar conclusions after examining the role of speech in Navajo legends, analyzing historical speeches, and observing oratory at tribal council meetings: "The Navajo purpose of speech making was seldom to convince directly or to move to action, but rather to express thought and feeling about those things which affected the speaker or his relatives. The orator hopes to find words to express his own ideas exactly. Such speaking may be highly persuasive, but it is incidentally and not designedly so" (114). Is such speech rhetorical? Perhaps not in the classical sense of the word "rhetoric," which emphasizes overt persuasion, but these speech acts function as part of a reciprocal process of identity construction and thereby do reflect Burke's broader sense of rhetoric as identification and Biesecker's characterization of rhetoric as articulation. As Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday suggests, storytelling is "a realization of oneself in language for the audience and the speaker. . . . The storyteller and his audience, that's a sacred relationship. . . . When the storyteller tells his listeners a story, he creates his listener, he creates a story. He creates himself in the process" (89-90). Although the Native process of storytelling may not bear many of the outward marks of rhetoric as it is usually understood in the western tradition, what is this granting of new substance, as Kenneth Burke would put it, if not rhetorical?

An examination of linguistic practices in Native cultures challenges many of the presumptions that underlie western rhetorical theory, such as the centrality of eristic persuasion, the distinct roles of rhetor and audience, and the clear separation of rhetoric from other functions or aspects of language. In *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Vine Deloria states that, because there is no word for religion in many aboriginal languages, some of the Europeans who first encountered aboriginal cultures assumed they were areligious. However, Deloria then points out that "Religion was an undefined sphere of influence in tribal society," not because Native people had no spirituality, but because religiosity was so integrated into everyday life that "tribal customs and religious ordinances are synonymous" (103). As comparative rhetoricians are discovering, in most non-western cultures, rhetoric functions similarly. Commenting on the role of rhetoric in ancient India and China, Robert Oliver states that "in the West rhetoric has been considered to be so important that it had to be explored and delineated separately, as a special field of knowledge about human relations. In the East, rhetoric has been considered so important that it could not be separated from the remainder of human knowledge" (10). As we begin to extend the study of rhetoric beyond western cultures, perhaps the most productive consequence will not be an increased awareness of alternative systems of rhetoric, but a self-estrangement that will lead us to examine our own rhetorical traditions from a new and more relativistic perspective.

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