

IKTOMI INCORPORATED: CINEMA AS TRICKSTER

By

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To my nieces, Michaela and Tara

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The abundance of trickster manifestations in contemporary cultural productions, representations running the gambit from films, television shows, pop songs, and political pundits to U.S. Presidential candidates, uncovers an aporia between our understanding of the wily figure and the ways in which it morphs within the context of new media.

Technological advances in media production transform the trickster into rather unrecognizable shapes in spaces that range from animated cells and celluloid frames to websites and digital data in which “transcoding,” to use Lev Manovich’s term, replicates the shattering of spatial and temporal boundaries. This dissertation brings a trickster lens to film/new media studies to examine the intersections and interstices of the capricious folk hero and media history and theory. Just as one must maintain the importance of cultural specificity in tracking the trickster in order not to desecrate the local tribes who use said trickster and, consequently, transform it into a nominalist trickster, one must regard media specificity as well.

A second aim of this dissertation is to redress the totalizing and essentialist claims that critical theory, more specifically nascent psychoanalytic explorations, brought to bear on the trickster. Holding a mirror up to the tools initially used to interrogate the

trickster, I reveal an obverse layer of trickster hermeneutics underpinning critical theory itself. A psychoanalytic approach to trickster necessitates a rigorous philosophical exploration that assumes a poststructural and Marxist stance in order to maintain historical specificity. Drawing on the likes of theorists who conjoin psychoanalysis, poststructuralism and Marxism, such as Theodor Adorno, Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek, I show how the trickster imagination reveals the aporias of the social symbolic in what might seem like counter-intuitive ways that historically get appropriated into Western culture, overturning any subversive edge they might exhibit as to maintain the status quo. My research crosses paths with “primitive” cinema, avant-garde practices, European westerns, post-war films and digital processes to cross-culturally examine their intersections with “creaturely tricksterism,” a dimension of tricksterism engendered at eruptions and “caesuras” in the space of meaning.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

When you use a trick in logic, whom can you be tricking other than yourself?

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

Like subatomic particles, tricksters never allow a final definition of time, place and character. They never settle or shape themselves so as to allow closure, either fictional or moral. We may believe that we have somehow secured a trickster in place at one moment, but if we look from another angle, he is gone.

—Franchot Ballinger, *Living Sideways*

Using chiasmic reversals, linguistic traps and playful humor, trickster incarnations abound in recent cultural productions, such as films, literature, television shows, pop songs, the news media and political campaigns. Subverting the hegemonic structures of society, or attempting to do so, the trickster gets evoked by contemporary artists to break the boundaries of permissible thought in order to resituate its borders. From Showtime's Dexter Morgan "righting" social injustices caused by holes in the legal system to United States Presidential candidates touting themselves as "mavericks" and "renegades," the trickster continues carving out an enclave in our cultural memory; yet many observers lack the theoretical understanding necessary to comprehend these exploits. Because the trickster wends its way into a plethora of aesthetic productions, an ethico-political directive to rethink the polyvalent nature and theoretical wiles of the shapeshifting trickster in the cultural imaginary is important, especially considering the paucity of material that situates the trickster among screen and new media studies.

Despite how influential it remains in the cultural imaginary, the trickster appears to lose its edge precisely because readers and viewers find the original folktales too unfamiliar. Many of the original Native American tales remain unknown to the general American public. In June 2010, Matt Dembicki published the first graphic collection of

trickster myths that brought together Native storytellers with renowned comic book artists. It stands to reason that the general population must acquaint itself with the ways in which the Native American trickster figure traverses the cultural landscape and influences, consciously or not, a good deal of the popular culture Americans consume. Trickster iconography surrounds us, yet many lack the hermeneutic methods to track it.

Bumbling its way down the trail, the Native American trickster figure desecrates the values and traditions many hold sacred, something much of the trickster scholarship points out. Academic attempts to situate the trickster in monologue within the social science models usually confine the trickster within the boundaries of each distinct discourse rather than meeting it on its own terms. The essentialist claims scholars use to limit the trickster's shape-shifting efforts always make the definitions seem a bit arbitrary, despite rigorous scholarly efforts to pin down the duplicitous trickster. The first foreseeable problem in beginning to write about the trickster is how one defines the term. To commence discussing the trickster, one must establish a working definition of it despite the way it perpetually evades the constraints of such definitions. The trickster is a shape-shifting comic liberator, a born deceiver with a split mind, who transgresses cultural boundaries in order to resituate permissible borders. The capricious trickster, simultaneously acting at times as both a comic fool and culture hero, wields creative powers that heal cultural wounds while reconstituting the social symbolic order. This rudimentary definition of the trickster provides an inchoate understanding of it, and it also recapitulates many of the essentialist claims that poststructural trickster theorists criticize.

I must stress the importance of the sacrosanct nature of the trickster in these explanations because some theorists underscore it in their working definitions. Although it clearly should bear some weight in discussions of the trickster, naming it the definitive trickster characteristic might be counterproductive because viewers ultimately determine what they want to delineate as sacred. On a different note, many Native Indian scholars castigate the scholarly definitions of the trickster and deny the term “trickster” altogether, preferring the tribe-specific trickster names, such as Nanabozho, Wakdjunkaga or Wenebojo.

These textbook definitions of the trickster commonly ignore the historicity of their own production. The term used by nineteenth-century ethnologists studying North American Indian mythology, “trickster” describes a mythic trope from Native cultures. More specifically, scholars usually trace the term back to the anthropologist Daniel Brinton who first used it to describe a figure in Native American mythology. However, as William J. Hynes and William J. Doty point out, it was originally used in the eighteenth century “to designate morally one who deceives or cheats. In the nineteenth century Benjamin Disraeli employed the term to describe lying political opponents within the Whig party” (14). Hence, the trickster’s purview exponentially expands under the political ramifications of the term, while the indigenous folk hero, wreaking havoc at the crossroads, wanders “betwixt and between” multiple discourses.

Theoretically, the trickster highlights that which falls outside the limits of society and acceptable thought, the misrepresented, if you will; but it seems that politicians today utilize trickster tropes laced with Native American iconography in direct opposition to this notion of liminality. While not all images of indigenous Americans assume a

trickster position, some function in ways that employ trickster hermeneutics, nonetheless. Because humor is such a major part of indigenous lifeways (and Vine Deloria, Jr. disparages it for being nonexistent in many scholarly discussions), I contend that images of Native Americans can initially indicate that the trickster lurks somewhere nearby. In 2008, for instance, Italy's Northern League party produced an anti-immigration propaganda poster, showcasing a Native American in full headdress, with the caption, "They couldn't regulate immigration. Now they live in reservations. Think about it." The Native American iconography, rendered upside-down, gets resituated in service of an agenda that many Indians might find appalling. This trickster slogan deserves attention precisely because it actively asks Italians to identify with the Indian (o)ther, the victims of genocide perpetuated by Euro-Americans. The "subversion of the subject," an ideological reversal, routinely resurfaces in contemporary trickster manifestations. The figure crosses the threshold of permissible thought, instilling the Indian-as-"noble-savage" with a subjectivity that does not equate with the historical perception of Native Americans. This aesthetic rendition of the Native American in service of the status quo brings to light the historical caesura of genocide that requires a spectator capable of unearthing both the stifling ideological doubling of the Indian image and the trickster hermeneutics working together.

Viewing trickster in its various cultural manifestations, many scholars publish articles tying together trickster discourse's heavy hitters without thinking through some of the essentialist claims that get recapitulated in their creative applications. A recent example, Natalie Kononenko and Svitlana Kukharenko's "Borat the Trickster: Folklore and the Media, Folklore in the Media" (2008), traces the connections between comedian

Sacha Baren Cohen's Borat Sagdiyev and the cross-cultural trickster. While they do make rather astute observations about the film, they fetter the trickster by offering totalizing statements, such as "The trickster does not play the role of the devil in the myths" (11). They advance this claim because of their reliance on Lewis Hyde's *Trickster Makes the World* as the definitive analysis of the trickster figure. Hyde states that the devil cannot be the trickster; yet, contrary to this position, much academic scholarship interrogates the connections between the devil and the trickster. It should come as no surprise that, if you lay down a prohibition for the trickster, the wily folk hero scoffs, disobeys, and shifts the boundaries to prove you wrong. Some Klamaths, post-contact, actually view the trickster as the devil, which further makes one question the veracity of such a claim (Ballinger 28). To eradicate the evil side that trickster reveals negates the idea that the trickster can bring balance to a society, a balance that emerges from thinking through disparate possibilities. The vicissitudes of trickster clearly need more academic resituating under a poststructuralist lens in order to disabuse the trickster of such essentialist claims.

Hyde's reluctance to equate the trickster and the devil does, however, raise philosophical questions pertaining to the importance of the negative in trickster theory. He grounds his historical argument in the fact that anthropologists, misunderstanding Native language, cast the trickster as the devil, and he states that the "trickster is amoral, not *immoral*" (10). The trickster, however, can hardly create moral ambiguity without commingling in a space that comes dangerously close to what many would consider "immoral." Hyde's distinction appears to fall apart when he continues,

One doesn't usually hear said of the Christian Devil what Paul Radin said of the Native American trickster: "Trickster is at one and the same time creator and

destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes and is duped himself. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both.” (10)

How would the trickster destroy and negate without traversing the liminal spaces that verge on evil? Hyde’s line of reasoning implies a desire to erase the devilish side of the paradox in a way that recapitulates our culture’s tendency, enmeshed with the rhetoric of happiness, to throw aside negativity.<sup>1</sup> As I will underscore throughout my study, the trickster sign engenders, in part, a negative dialectic, despite the proclivity in our theoretical culture to signal a positive contradiction.

The subversive nature of the trickster figure who transgresses boundaries receives much attention from scholars; consequently, many critical theorists rail against it when they argue that the social system already carves out a space for transgressions as the occult underbelly of society. These theorists debunk the trickster’s transgressions in turning to M. M. Bakhtin’s study of the carnivalesque, *Rabelais and His World*, which famously argues that society lifts cultural constraints and prohibitions during festival time. Fully cognizant that such a line of reasoning can disrupt a close examination of trickster tropes in the cultural imaginary, I contend that the cultural transgressions already built into the system can only make one aware of the very prohibitions that keep the system in motion. Yet, if the trickster teaches us anything, it is precisely that exposing the gaps in the social symbolic order disturbs the patterns, engendering paradigm shifts; hence, what constitutes such transgressions will consistently change. To put it differently, what was initially subversive gets subsumed in mainstream society to the extent that the original subversive act loses its edge. This means that new

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<sup>1</sup> Alenka Zupančič’s analysis of this debate in her Introduction to *The Odd One In: On Comedy* superbly situates this argument in regards to the debilitating effects of the rhetoric of happiness found in contemporary society.

(un)lawful fences get erected for trickster to jump. The trickster does not need festival time to work its skullduggery, nor does it need the system to completely dictate how it can overturn the social structures trying to pin it down.

The trickster figure belongs to a well-established tradition of cultural production that existed long before anthropologists used the term to designate a mythic folk hero within Native American cultures. Trickster incarnations that garner much attention cross-culturally are Coyote, Iktomi, Raven, Crow, Hare, Br'er Rabbit, Legba, Prometheus, Loki, Odysseus, Hermes, Till Eulenspiegel, Tripitaka, Eshu, Anansi, Bugs Bunny, and Wile E. Coyote, to name only a few. The Amerindian tricksters existed primarily in the oral traditions. Sealing the trickster's fate, anthropologists and artists preserved these traditions by transcribing the tales or utilizing trickster traits in their own art. Some of these depictions only unconsciously impart trickster characteristics. A good number of the studies of the trickster delve into the performative gestures of the oral traditions, but there is a dearth of scholarship interrogating the interstices of cinema and the trickster. This lack exists in spite of the fact that some of the trickster incarnations appear only on-screen. The fact that one can trace many cinematic trickster manifestations back to the influence of trickster literature adds to this particular dilemma.

It does not help that contemporary artists, parceling out the trickster's polyvalent nature, keep intact what they find particularly helpful about the figure and eschew what goes against their viewpoint. They employ what seems like an unrecognizable trickster; traditional trickster traits fragment and bifurcate to such an extent that they present a *pastiche* or *bricolage* of trickster in their work. Trickster theorists, such as Jarold Ramsey and Mac Linscott Ricketts, view the trickster as a *bricoleur* and "trickster fixer"

who cobbles together reality from the things at hand. Artists themselves sculpt into their works a multifarious trickster figure that fashions reality to its liking while simultaneously exposing the underside of social reality.

To fully comprehend how contemporary cross-cultural artistic configurations manipulate the trickster, one needs to understand the initial manifestations. Because anthropologists inaugurated trickster studies focusing on Native Americans, my study should begin within trickster discourse surrounding indigenous American cultures. Trickster incarnations cross-tribally appear as an assortment of animal heroes, and scholars commonly situate Coyote, Iktomi the spider, Raven and Hare as quintessential trickster figures despite the fact that many more actually exist. The indigenous trickster tales, passed down through the oral tradition, remained unrecorded until the Euro-American anthropologists began transcribing them for the purpose of preservation. Paul Radin's translation of the Winnebago Coyote trickster cycle in *The Trickster* gets cited as a seminal text, and the trickster's rather unclassifiable characteristics compel thinkers to gravitate towards it as an object of study. The trickster, for instance, materializes in both cosmogonical narratives, such as "Old Man Coyote Makes the World," and traditional comic myths in which it casts aside social mores in order to teach acceptable behavior. Resituating the borders of permissible thought, the trickster creates and breaks laws like a vigilante outlaw hero taming the American western frontier.

A special feature of the trickster in aboriginal cultures that gets exulted in the scholarship is, as stated earlier, its sacrosanct nature. Hyde underscores this, but he also warns his readers not to make this distinction the defining characteristic of the

trickster. Some Native American tribes view the trickster as their culture bearer, which also creates a problem when sifting through trickster hermeneutics. Even among contemporary Native American literature, the trickster's sacred nature loses some of its power in the "postmodern" age as evidenced by Louise Erdrich's conflation of the trickster with the water monster in *Tales of Burning Love* (1997). Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues* (1995), the apotheosis of a trickster text, deploys the trickster in terms of an amalgamation of jazz music, Robert Johnson's guitar and the Faustian mythology concerning Johnson's devilish pact at the crossroads. One can view Alexie's postmodern depiction of the trickster as either secular or sacrosanct; it hinges on one's subjective position in relationship to Native American religions.<sup>2</sup> By not approaching the trickster's sanctity with an open mind, one can dismiss the trickster's scatological humor and sexual exploits as mere debauchery disconnected from the sacred realm.

Reflecting upon various trickster manifestations, one feels ensnared by the ambiguous position in which it leaves the audience. Eurocentric models of the world usually eschew ambiguity from the equation. The ambivalent or ambiguous positions the trickster evokes during its cultural appearances, even though sometimes in the guise of mediation, means scholars miss the unconscious trickster hermeneutics at play in cultural productions. Unfortunately, when scholars do locate trickster traits in unlikely places, they tend to rely on the same tropes that limit the trickster possibilities, for example confining the trickster solely to the narrative and relying primarily on one theoretical trickster text that might not necessarily reflect the trickster's vicissitudes.

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<sup>2</sup> I realize the problem of even discussing religion in relation to Native Americans. The term "religion" does not exist in Native languages—in order to broach the topic, one must learn about tribal lifeways. The category "religion" also suggests that Native Americans all share a global set of lifeways, but this clearly does not reflect lived experience. Each tribe has its own set of local customs that, in some cases, drastically differ from others.

The plethora of trickster scholarship tends to examine it under the social science models, taming it as it gets subsumed in the various discourses, as poststructural critics point out. For example, the Chippewa theorist Gerald Vizenor weds the trickster to poststructural discourse in his seminal essay, "Trickster Discourse: Language Games and Comic Holotropes." Vizenor turns to French poststructural theorists because he views their work as a useful form of resistance. Vizenor's engagement with critical theory appears to waiver between acceptance and criticism, and many postcolonial critics argue that his use of Western theoretical discourse further oppresses indigenous cultures not privy to elitist jargon. Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* bridges this divide by emphasizing that one cannot assume Native American discourse and Western critical theory are mutually exclusive (1-18). Vizenor's various Native American strategies of trickster resistance and narrative liberation give rise to Pulitano positioning Vizenor as a quintessential Native critical theorist in her chapter discussing his work (145-86).

Due to the fact that I posit male theorists as tricksters, I need to address the issue of the trickster's gender. The common scholarly argument maintains that trickster usually assumes a masculine position, but female tricksters appear in the tales more often than some would like to believe.<sup>3</sup> Female tricksters, Franchot Ballinger observes, teach us how to maintain both gendered social roles and familial relations (101). Ballinger, however, does not broach the duplicity of trickster's wife; Iktomi's spouse assumes the wily traits characteristic of her husband's antics in the White River Sioux tale, "What's for Dinner? My Balls?" Here, Iktomi invites Coyote to dinner with his wife,

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<sup>3</sup> See Ballinger (88-110). His chapter on sexual difference, "Coyote, He/She Was Going There: Sex and Gender in Trickster Stories" interrogates published tales involving female tricksters.

but his wife only has two livers to cook. After his wife inquires about what she will eat for her dinner, Iktomi informs her that she can have the leftovers. He continues to tell her that he will go out hunting and prohibits her from engaging in sexual relations with the amorous Coyote while he is gone. She devises a dubious plan after she cooks and eats both livers before their guest arrives: defying her husband's wishes, she and Coyote copulate upon his entrance, after which he asks her, "What's for dinner?" She cunningly responds that they will cook up his testicles for dinner, and he flees as Iktomi returns from his hunting expedition. After Iktomi asks his wife why Coyote is racing off in such a hurry, she tells him that he absconded with both the livers. Obviously hungry from his hunt, Iktomi, rushing after Coyote, asks the thief to save one for him; Coyote replies, "Cousin, if you can catch me, you can have both of them!" (Erdoes and Ortiz 341). The threat of castration presides in this tale as Iktomi's wife dupes both tricksters in one fell swoop.

I posit that the trickster pulls the phallus out of its rucksack of tricks to signify sexual difference, an act that playfully transforms trickster performances. Gender-bending acrobatics and third-gender subjectivity remain a touchstone of pre-contact Native American lifeways through the cross-tribal manifestations of what has been pejoratively called the "berdache" or two-spirited person. This figure takes many names cross-tribally, for example the "winkte." This third gender person assumes in certain tribes a sacrosanct nature akin to the trickster itself. In particular tales, such as "The Winkte Way," the trickster actually embraces this third gender position.

The dearth of material interrogating the interstices between the trickster and screen or new media studies underscores a two-fold problem, the first of which pertains

to the critical reception of both. Various academic fields approach the trickster with disparate methodologies, but, as Vizenor rightly argues, the predominant social science models confine the trickster within their Western paradigms.<sup>4</sup> For example, Carl Jung's assessment of the trickster as a cross-cultural archetype disseminates the derogatory notion that Native American cultures cannot self-actualize. According to Jung, the trickster's stunted growth, as evidenced by its childlike preoccupations with sexual antics and scatological humor, hinders a richly-textured understanding of reality; however, Jung's seeming inability to comprehend the polyvalent nature of the trickster tales highlights the ethnocentrism that gets employed in many critical inquiries into the figure. In terms of screen studies, early cinema's reception recapitulates this historical trajectory of viewing the trickster as "primitive" and childlike. Recently, scholars of early film, such as André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning, disabuse this notion through close explorations of how early films actually work.<sup>5</sup>

Another problem that arises when one starts to critically think through the connections between screen or new media studies and the trickster is the polyvalent natures of both fields. Trickster scholarship encompasses a swath of literature from oral tribal stories and performances to Greco-Roman mythology and European picaresque traditions. With such a wide range of material and connections one can draw into cultural awareness, it appears as though one must transform into Prometheus in order to steal the fire of erudite research just to begin thinking through trickster's multifarious

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<sup>4</sup> In Vizenor's seminal trickster text, he lumps all trickster scholarship together under the "social sciences" even though some cultural studies approaches to the trickster do not stem from that model. Vizenor does so because studies of the trickster engage in a monologue with the social science models. Thus, when I refer to the social science models, I mean it the way that Vizenor does.

<sup>5</sup> I will further develop the connections between early cinema and trickster in Chapter 3.

manifestations. Similarly, new media scholarship focuses on the changing technological landscape of images and cybernetic networks. New media scholars get tangled in definitions that resituate and “remediate” older theoretical models in terms new advances. Sometimes, as Wendy Hui Kyong Chun suggests in “Did Somebody Say New Media?”, one cannot even decipher whether new media refers to media emerging in digitized space or merely replaces the older term “multi-media.” Both participatory culture and digitized culture recreate imaginative possibilities for trickster to manipulate ideological terrain. Trying to pin down the ambiguous language of these discourses demands that theorists must approach the trickster from a playful position in order to re-imagine what Jacques Rancière refers to as the “distribution of the sensible” and retain its political, transformative power.

The lack of a nuanced approach to trickster in the realm of film and new media studies remains the initial point of departure for my study. I find the dearth of material that critically situates the trickster among screen studies conspicuously staring back at me like the stain that Lacan points out in Holbein’s painting, *The Ambassadors*. The language trickster theorists employ continually gets used by film and new media theorists; however, the trickster itself rarely makes its way into their discussions. These theorists might fear trickster hermeneutics because it could deprecate their contributions to media studies by transforming them into pranksters studying “primitive” child’s play. Scholars must privilege seriousness over humor because they need to carve out their own academic field of study; nevertheless, the trickster, although festooned for youngsters more often than not, meets adult audiences in the most improbably places, especially in cinema and new media.

It strikes me as peculiar that recently published film criticism, such as Wanda Strauven's contribution in her edited collection *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (2007), utilizes many of trickster theory's buzzwords. Her contention that we should rethink the name "primitive cinema" to discuss technological advancements that one could historically call "new," harkens back to Jung's use of the term "primitive" in his seminal analysis of the trickster. Strauven argues that the boundary-breaking innovations, such as "bullet time" used in *The Matrix* (1999), can be viewed as "primitive cinema." This belief, however interesting, underscores the trickiness of the language itself, obscuring the fact that one can view the primitive tricks as the trickster's creative exploits. In this project, I want to examine the spaces where what Strauven calls "primitive cinema" crosses over into the trickster's realm.

This dissertation aims to sift through the connections between critical theory, screen/new media studies and trickster hermeneutics. My argument stems from the fact that a serious engagement with psychoanalysis contains the tools for political transformations, as the work of Alain Badiou, Žižek, and others attests. I aim to unearth the interstices of tricksterism and psychoanalysis to show that they work together in ways that obfuscate some of the theoretical acrobatics associated with them.

In Chapter 2, "The Trickster Supposed to Know: Creaturely Tricksterism and Critical Theory," I work my way through seminal texts and more recent scholarship concerning the trickster figure. This chapter explores Vizenor's attempt to turn the trickster into a semiotic sign in a game of narrative chance; however, as some critics point out, poststructural impulses can easily slide into nominalism. Vizenor falls prey to this; consequently, this fact further emphasizes the necessity of a more nuanced

approach to subjectivity in trickster discourse. To rectify this, I posit a creaturely trickster apparatus as an interpretive strategy to examine various subject positions involved in trickster transactions. This approach, conjoining Lacanian psychoanalysis and Adornian critical theory with trickster theory, injects cultural-historical specificity into ethico-political discussions of the trickster.

Chapter 3, “Creaturely Cine-Tricksterism: Cinema as Trickster *Par Excellence*,” explores the connections between the trickster and cinema in more detail. This study begins with the magic of “early cinema” and then moves on to discuss the ways in which the cinema itself manifests trickster traits through the magic of cinematic effects and the language of cinema. This chapter examines the interstices of childhood with the nascent cinematic apparatus, which sheds light on the ways the trickster gets employed in film. I posit the possibility of tracking a creaturely cine-trickster aura, waning as one would suspect after Walter Benjamin’s seminal assessment of the aura’s decay, through a close analysis of film’s formal properties. I conclude the chapter with a case study of Joseph Cornell’s found-footage film, *The Children’s Jury* (1938), which includes images of Native Americans, clowns and children.

Chapter 4, “Dreams that Dadaists Can Buy: Hans Richter’s Tricksterism and the Avant-Garde,” explores the ways in which the historical avant-garde cinema capitalizes on trickster-like qualities—including the ambiguity of abstraction—to embolden the political aspect that I want to associate with creaturely tricksterism. More specifically, I argue that Hans Richter embodies the trickster and his cultural output unearths trickster transactions that undermine the hegemonic cultural logic surrounding him. Richter stands as a marginalized figure in academic accounts of the historical avant-garde

movements despite the fact that he holds a position “betwixt and between” such movements as Dadaism and surrealism. Richter brings his cine-trickster aesthetic along with him when he moves to America to escape the Holocaust, and, rather distraught by the absence of an avant-garde scene in America, he bridges the gap between the historical avant-garde to the neo-avant-garde and influences American underground artists in sometimes (un)conscious ways. I examine his *Rhythmus* films (1921-1925), *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1928), as well as his lesser known but award-winning *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947).

Chapter 5, “Stinking Coyote Incorporated, or Karl May’s Noble Sa(l)vage Heap: Tricksters in Sauerkraut Westerns and the *Indianerfilme*,” underscores the trickster traits at work in the cultural manifestations of renown German author Karl May and his *Winnetou* tales. The most common reading of May’s Native American fantasia condemns May as Adolf Hitler’s literary mentor; nevertheless, the tales themselves contain the quintessential trickster traits that do not allow for such a reductive reading. I posit that May’s rendition of the American western frontier, engendering over a century of cultural output from open stage performances to Hollywood blockbuster films, provides a playful alternative to the high literature forced upon German children. This jocular space provides room for the trickster to wend its way into the German cultural imaginary. Turning to the sauerkraut westerns and *Indianerfilme*, I examine how the trickster works in these films.

In Chapter 6, I focus on trickster children in post-war cinema to underscore the connections between tricksterism, children and post-war societies. Starting from the unruly, huckster children wandering through war-torn streets in the German rubble films,

I cross national borders and temporal boundaries to view the interstitial position of liminal trickster children in such films as *Somewhere in Berlin* (1946), *Forbidden Games* (1952) and *Turtles Can Fly* (2005). Using the creaturely trickster apparatus to view these cinematic children, I remain highly conscious of the historical-political terrain that produced the films.

My short coda, “The Creaturely Trickster Transcoded: The Digitized Imagination and *Avatar*,” examines the ever-shifting terrain of digital media that offers the trickster innovative technology to play with in its webs. The move from analog to video highlights the problems of trickster in the digital age as it moves through Ethernet cables and gets written into digital data. The trickster also rears its head when we look into motion/performance capture and who should actually take credit for these performances. My concluding case study examines James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009) and the ways in which Cameron’s burgeoning technology ultimately showcases the creaturely trickster bursting through prohibitions by the tech-savvy production team as well as in the hegemonic discourse that the narrative wishes to dispel.

CHAPTER 2  
“THE TRICKSTER SUPPOSED TO KNOW”:  
CREATURELY TRICKSTERISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

If you know anything about Coyote, this alone should scare the hell out of you.

—Thomas King, *Landfill Meditations*

The man who managed to recall what used to strike him in the words “dung hill” and “pig sty” might be closer to absolute knowledge than Hegel’s chapter in which readers are promised such knowledge only to have it withheld with a superior *mein*.

—Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

Eric Santner’s *On Creaturely Life* traces the theoretical lineage of “creaturely life” from Martin Heidegger and Rainier Maria Rilke to Walter Benjamin and W.G. Sebald. Santner defines “creaturely life” as “a dimension of human existence called into being at...natural historical fissures or caesuras in the space of meaning” (xv). To put it in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms, “creaturely life” emerges with subjective encounters with the Real, the gap in the symbolic order that resists symbolization and where meaning breaks down. Santner glosses over comedy’s importance in three pages concerning Sebald’s *Rings of Saturn*, but I posit that humor, or tricksterism, assumes a major role in “creaturely life,” revolving around *objet petit a* and the Real.

Alenka Zupančič, in her superlative study of humor, *The Odd One In: On Comedy*, mentions Santner’s text in a brief footnote: “A different and very important dimension of creatureliness, which is also not without a possible relationship to comedy, has recently been described by Eric Santner” (220). Thinking through these connections, I cannot forget that one usually associates animals, such as the Coyote, Spider and Salmon, with the Native American shape-shifting trickster. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor W. Adorno writes, “In its clownishness, art consolingly recollects prehistory in the primordial

world of animals. . . . [T]he constellation animal/fool/clown is a fundamental layer of art”(119). As Adorno acknowledges the humor of animals, an unconscious creaturely trickster discourse exists alongside “creaturely life” and sees its apotheosis in the abundance of cross-cultural artistic representations of the trickster.

Consequently, to conjoin “creaturely life,” the trickster and the terrain of high theory, one should turn to Native American trickster discourse and its most theoretical supporter: Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor’s seminal trickster text situates the trickster as a semiotic sign in a *comic holotrope* that eschews subjectivity. However, when discussing poststructuralism, Vizenor cites Jacques Lacan, a seemingly unlikely choice given that Vizenor rightly castigates crude psychoanalytic approaches to trickster. Utilizing Lacan’s poststructural proclivities, Vizenor does not engage with the psychoanalytic side; but, as I will address below, Vizenor’s poststructural trickster position reconstitutes a problem regarding cultural specificity that a nuanced Lacanian lens would disabuse. I contend that what I call “creaturely tricksterism” makes an intervention into trickster discourse that allows a thorough psychoanalytic analysis that maintains the trickster’s polyvalent nature and cultural specificity.

The creaturely trickster lens provides a theoretical model from which to approach critical theory proper. Before conceptualizing this apparatus as a means to examine visual art, I will turn this lens back onto high theory to reveal the existent trickster traits in the works of two theorists that get overlooked when thinking through humor studies: Lacan and Adorno. I position both of these theorists as tricksters in part both because of their relationship to cinema and their participation in oral performances. Lacan taught his psychoanalytic seminars as performances that mimetically recreated the

psychoanalytic scene, and Adorno's return to Germany after his American exile years saw his transformation into a radio personality. Vizenor lauds Adorno as a kindred spirit, which prompts me to look further into the theoretical ramifications of Adorno's trickster traits.<sup>1</sup> The similar biographies of Lacan and Adorno draw parallels with trickster as both were extricated from their secure hearths, the psychoanalytic school and Germany, respectively. Partly due to their cultural dislocation, they both concern themselves with the gaps or caesuras in the space of meaning within cultural artifacts.

One final vista to these theoretical trickster twists involves turning the trickster lens upon the realm of images. A nuanced trickster approach to cinema studies opens up new avenues in which to comprehend the trickster figure's presence lurking within the cinematic apparatus. Lacan and Adorno, whose philosophical writings focus on the inner workings of the realm of images, provide invaluable insight into understanding the creaturely trickster at work within film as well as a way to begin thinking through trickster's on-screen presence. After situating some quintessential trickster theory, I will conjoin creaturely life, psychoanalysis, and tricksterism as a hermeneutic lens to examine cultural productions.

### **Poststructural Trickster sans Subjectivity; or, Vizenor's Nominalist Trickster**

To begin locating trickster within the realm of high theory, one must turn to both studies of humor and the trickster figure. As I have previously pointed out, some humor/trickster scholars confine the trickster within essentialist taxonomies. However, Zupančič's aforementioned text deserves accolades for integrating poststructural and

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<sup>1</sup> Pulitano's chapter on Gerald Vizenor outlines the majority of the connections between French poststructural critics and Vizenor, but she also includes Adorno in this mix on pages 166-70.

psychoanalytic discourses to avoid essentialist taxonomies. Zupančič seriously scrutinizes comedy, drawing on philosophical and psychoanalytic discourses to locate the structural impulses that drive comedy's infinite movement while remaining cognizant of the various gaps within those structures. Her trenchant analysis provides a way to espouse philosophical thought with comedy. Although she never explicitly discusses the trickster at large, she examines various manifestations of comic characters: cases of split subjectivity, the double and mistaken identity. These categories become useful when turning to the trickster's subjectivity because the trickster encompasses all of these structural manifestations within different trickster tales.

Situating critical responses to humor more so than Zupančič does, James F. English's *Comic Transactions: Literature, Humor, and the Politics of Twentieth Century Britain* investigates the intersections of comedy within the British cultural imaginary. His exemplary analysis of the political social functioning of "comic transactions" evades the quasi-formalist, social science frameworks that depreciate the social functioning of comedy. English elaborates a list of "position points" that set up the way humor interacts within the socio-political scene and overlaps with the cultural imaginary. These points consist of the following: (1) "*Humor is an event, not an utterance.*" (2) "*Comic incongruity is social contradiction.*" (3) "*Humor is never 'innocent.'*" (4) "*We do not know what we are laughing at.*" (5) "*Our laughter is the laughter of others.*" (6) "*Joke-work is the 'most social' form of dream-work.*" (7) "*Politics is a joke . . . but does the joke have a politics?*" (5-18). These positions theoretically create a starting point for English to discuss comic transactions; but one could also conjoin trickster hermeneutics with these positions. Limiting trickster scholarship to the confines of anthropological studies,

English only mentions the trickster in one brief sentence that glosses over it:

“Anthropologists have tended to accentuate the transhistorical, transcultural features of such comic phenomena as the trickster figure and the joking relationship” (3). I contend that analyzing ethico-political “trickster transactions,” from his theoretical vantage point puts stress on the social symbolic positioning of trickster’s cunning manifestations.

To combat the limiting models of trickster discourse, poststructural critics such as Vizenor and Franchot Ballinger, theoretically resist the totalizing taxonomies and supply a more nuanced approach to the trickster’s polyvalent qualities.<sup>2</sup> In *Living Sideways: Tricksters in American Indian Oral Traditions*, Ballinger concomitantly situates a substantial amount of trickster theory to read the trickster across Native American tribes and underscore the assorted contradictions implicit in trickster scholarship. Vizenor, on the other hand, unshackles the trickster from social science models by shifting it into a postmodern discourse, presenting the absent subject of the trickster as a semiotic sign in a *comic holotrope*. Both of these literary critics explain how trickster scholarship, emerging in leaps and bounds, misses the mark: trickster evades one’s grasp, appearing in one fissure one second yet shape-shifting to fit into a different aperture the next. Their trickster hermeneutics liberate the trickster from the confines of the social science discourses while maintaining the trickster’s integrity.

Despite the poststructural approaches that connect Ballinger and Vizenor’s ideas, a chasm separates the two. Ballinger’s text delves into much contemporary trickster theory, glossing over Vizenor’s vision with three brief citations. Ballinger deconstructs

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<sup>2</sup> I rely on these theorists’s texts specifically because of the way in which they use theory, although other influential texts exist that will find their way into my discussion when appropriate, such as Lewis Hyde’s *Trickster Makes the World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* and Jeanne Campbell Reesman’s *Trickster Lives: Culture and Myth in American Fiction*.

the theoretical trickster writings by minimally evoking high theory to point out the contradictions inherent in the scholarship. He interrogates the academic approaches to trickster that utilize high theory in his first chapter, aptly titled “Of Scholars and Wandering.”

Ballinger disabuses the totalizing claims that scholars use to pin down the trickster’s wily tales. He explicates the various problems inherent in trying to set up taxonomies of trickster traits when he observes,

Like subatomic particles, tricksters never allow a final definition of time, place and character. They never settle or shape themselves so as to allow closure, either fictional or moral. We may believe that we have somehow secured a trickster in place at one moment, but if we look from another angle, he is gone. (30)

In his Introduction, he deconstructs a tale of Nix’ant from the Gros Ventre oral tradition to show that trickster tales “perform” various functions simultaneously. He recounts the brief tale in which Nix’ant gets stuck in an elk skull and masquerades as the local water monster in order to scare everyone he meets. Nix’ant proceeds to rape a virgin, infuriating the women who then hit him with a club. The women crack his skull in two after he teases them by telling them that their blows make him “thrust harder” and that the only way to kill him is to crack him in the middle of his head. Nix’ant runs off, the women chasing after him. Approaching the myth, Ballinger delineates ten different ways in which to read Nix’ant’s exploits. For example, the tale teaches valuable life lessons like acceptable behavior, warns against the misuse of power, and amuses us (17).

Ballinger finds a paradoxical hole in trickster scholarship pertaining to the trickster’s marginality/liminality. He points toward Barbara Babcock-Abrahams’s essay, “A Tolerated Margin of Mess’: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered,” wherein she locates the trickster on the margins of society, “outside or between the boundaries of

dominant groups,” mediating between those boundaries (150). Although Ballinger finds this notion of liminality helpful, he contends that Babcock-Abraham’s hermeneutic applications deny cultural specificity because she tables trickster tales that do not contradict her neat categorizations. One can view the trickster as both the culture hero and buffoon, but, in order to receive the subversive, sacrosanct power to deride pride and maintain balance within the community, the trickster necessitates an exalted position at the center of culture. Ballinger concludes, “The language of marginality obscures a Trickster’s real status in society, which is generally something like a fish bone stuck in the throat” (26). For example, maintaining a major position within the family, as in “The Bungling Host” stories, the trickster brings culture and food to his family/communal tribe—a trickster lurking only at the margins would have trouble transforming the social order. One major exception to the trickster’s centrality, Ballinger points out, is the Lakota spider Iktomi, “the only trickster who is truly and consistently outside of human society” (83). One must bear in mind that, even though Iktomi dwells at the margins, Iktomi and Coyote appear in some of the myths together, which suggests that they can enact transformations as trickster twins.

While Ballinger does not conjoin high theory and trickster studies in his text, Vizenor does. As I previously stated, Vizenor’s dialogues with critical theorists remain important in locating Vizenor’s own form of theoretical tricksterism. Vizenor compares his work to that of Roland Barthes when he states, “The death of the author is the birth of the reader, and the death of social sciences in the birth of the modern trickster in modern literature” (*TD* 202). Obviously, Vizenor did not abolish the social sciences or the trickster scholarship that maintains a tragic monologue with the social sciences;

nevertheless, he did force academics to re-assess some preconceptions by bringing together historical cultural anthropologies and the burgeoning field of high theoretical criticism.

One of Vizenor's biggest problems with the social sciences is their desire to exclude the underprivileged side of dichotomies from their discourse. In terms of trickster, this results in the denigration of both the "chaotic" and the "humorous" in the chaos/order and humorous/serious binaries. Vizenor invokes Paul Watzlawick, who, he claims,

argues that what is considered to be the real world [for the social sciences], what is discovered "is an invention whose inventor is unaware of his act of invention. . . . [T]he invention then becomes the basis of his world view and actions." The most "accepted constructions of reality," [Watzlawick] writes, rests on the supposition that the world cannot be chaotic—not because we have any proof for this view, but because chaos would simply be intolerable. (188)

Vizenor's trickster sign brings the other side of the "tragic monologue" into the discourse, while the social science models arrest efforts to bring this dialectical opposition into play. The trickster favors chaos over order in certain instances, while the social sciences privilege order, which reconstitutes Western bourgeois hegemonic values in ethnographies and discussions concerning the trickster.

Vizenor wants to disabuse scholars from the belief that trickster must exist as a subject, animal, human, or otherwise. Instead, he views the trickster as a comic *holotrope*, a figuration joining the trickster as a semiotic sign, the tribal oral performer, and the participant audience. He denies presence in an act of shadow survivance, a form of resistant liberation that stands in contradistinction to the dominant tragic monologues depicting Native Americans as the "noble savage." Vizenor laments the absence of tribal humor within texts of "manifest manners." Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild

West Show, an example of a dominant tragic monologue, kept the denigrating stereotype of the savage Indian alive through both theatrical performances and short films captured by Edison's kinoscope.<sup>3</sup> Vizeor believes that these stereotypical, grunting "Indian" figures do not refer to any solidified presence of the "indian" today. He calls authors or artists who reveal their shadow presence "postindian warriors." Vizeor's terminology, imperative in inaugurating the "indian" in hyperreality, uses its own trickster logic to upturn the dominant tragic monologues and the cinema/literature of manifest manners.

Vizeor's poststructuralist approach to the trickster poses a problem in terms of particular tribal tricksters within Vizeor's own fiction. In his review of *Narrative Chance*, Andrew Wiget underscores Vizeor's denial of subject-hood in trickster discourse. Wiget writes,

As an assertion, this generalization [that the trickster is a comic narrative that denies presence] argues that the trickster, more than simply the negation of signification, is instead the palpable void beyond signification.<sup>4</sup> Historically, however, Native Americans have pointed to the trickster to explain certain aspects of perceived reality or to justify a proposed course of action—behaviors which an "absence" could hardly foster. In the end, the poststructuralist's perpetual deferral of signification amounts to the perpetual deferral of significance. What is missing in [Vizeor's trickster's discourse], of course—and the lack is one inherited by Vizeor's poststructuralist sources—is one of the social matrices of personal identity, for both performer and audience, and of the cultural and historical constraints of signification. (478-9)

The absent Native American trickster subject not only renounces the historical roots necessary for an all-encompassing trickster theory, it denies the subjectivity of those artists and performers who physically embody the trickster within Native American

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<sup>3</sup> I will elaborate on these Indian films captured in Edison's studio, *The Black Maria*, in Chapter 3, which focuses on the interstices of the trickster and cinema.

<sup>4</sup> Here, Wiget implicitly suggests that Vizeor unconsciously aligns the trickster with the Lacanian Real or Eric Santner's discussion of "creaturely life."

tribes.<sup>5</sup> Vizenor's reduction of each "trickster sign" to an abstract entity void of representation in the world approaches a minor form of nominalism, which Fredric Jameson argues is a byproduct of poststructuralism. In this instance, Vizenor's discourse reconstitutes universal and totalizing statements concerning the trickster figure. As Stuart Christy points out, Vizenor denies the local trickster in his novel *Heirs of Columbus*, further problematizing the notion of a "communal sign" in his postmodern trickster discourse. Christy argues that Vizenor conflates his own Chippewa bear trickster, Naanabozho, with the endemic Coastal Salish trickster Salmon. Christy writes, "The shoals of a Chippewa discursive predominance spell trouble for trickster discourse long before the genetic healing of *The Heirs of Columbus* can begin" (370). Just as shamans from one tribal location cannot heal another Indian from a different geographic region because of local spirits, tricksters cannot liberate different tribe members with varying local beliefs.<sup>6</sup> Vizenor's own tribal trickster will not bring liberation to all; the particular and communal trickster signification falls into the abyss, misplacing any historical context within which to situate the particular, tribe-specific trickster. Lacking historical context, against which Jameson warns and Vizenor tries to avoid, the trickster sign diminishes the trickster to a commodity within "*indian* hyperreality," to use Vizenor's terms.

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<sup>5</sup> An example of the trickster's human counterpart in Native American tribes is the sacred clown; examples of such figures include but are not limited to the *heyoka* of the Lakota Sioux tribe, the *koshare* of the Hopi tribe and the *newekwe* of the Zuni tribe. Ballinger discusses the sacred clowns in Chapter 5 of *Living Sideways*, "Blood Kin: Trickster, Hero, Clown."

<sup>6</sup> I understand that Christy does not agree with mistaking Vizenor's work "as merely a rootless field of significations in the anthropological ballroom of dancing signs" (363). See Stuart Christy's "Trickster Gone Golfing: Vizenor's *Heirs of Columbus* and the Chelh-ten-em Development Controversy." (370)

Thus, Vizenor presents a trickster discourse existing in an abstract realm that renounces all material subjects among its participating “characters.” This results in a nominal trickster, a trickster materializing in name only, unconnected to any corresponding reality. Nominalists believed that ideas represented by words have no real existence beyond one’s imagination. If the trickster sign does pertain to a specific trickster, it cannot coexist with the multiplicity of tricksters throughout Native American tribes, as Vizenor infers in his theoretical text. If the trickster performers can reinvent the trickster however s/he desires, the ephemeral communality of the trickster sign dissipates, favoring the commodity value of certain trickster signs.

Vizenor and other poststructuralists/postmodernists may argue that trickster discourse does, indeed, emancipate the trickster via the valorization of postmodern *pastiche* or *collage*: for instance, Vizenor merges the Chippewa Naanabozho with the Coastal Salish trickster Salmon in his novel. However, this amalgamation of the two tricksters repeats what Vizenor rails against in the social science “tragic monologues”: social scientists made totalizing, universal statements about Native American tricksters. Here, the trickster becomes universal, instead of tribe-specific. Does Vizenor crave a return to high modernism, then, through the *unification* of the intrinsic trickster signs? Jameson suggests that postmodernist texts entertain a “paradoxical slogan, namely that ‘difference relates,’” antithetical to Vizenor’s notion of trickster discourse. (P 31)

Ironically, the absent trickster in *The Heirs of Columbus* evokes this postmodern treatise, “difference relates,” creating a “unified” trickster that disallows the specificity necessary for the *all-inclusive* trickster discourse Vizenor creates.

To reiterate, Vizenor's postmodern trickster discourse subverts both subjectivity and historical specificity, resulting in a nominal trickster and an unethical discussion of Native Americans within academia. Vizenor's vital contributions liberated the trickster and, for that matter, Native American discourse from the confining "tragic monologues" of the social sciences and structural anthropology, but this trickster discourse could burst further open under a Lacanian lens laced with creaturely life, allowing both subjectivity<sup>7</sup> and the incorporation of history into the mix.

Before conjoining creaturely life and the trickster, I need to address the critique that poststructuralists inadvertently believe that "all enemies are on the left, and that the principle target always turns out to be this or that form of *historical* thinking" (Jameson *P* 217). Therein lies the crux of my argument against Vizenor's trickster discourse, with its denial of both the subject and history. Synthesizing these structural anthropologies/social sciences with trickster discourse might suit Vizenor better, considering that his novels ultimately traverse the prohibited terrain of his initial condemnations. The Hegelian dialectic, as well as Lacan's dialectic of desire, comes into play here. Vizenor's trickster essay *relies* on these social science models to build its argument; he dialectically inhabits the social science/structural anthropological positions before "progressing" to the next position, poststructuralist/postmodernist thought. I do not mean to suggest here that the trickster should be confined to the Western tradition through dialectical discourse, but a postmodern/poststructural application to the trickster, I argue, ideologically confines the trickster in a similar fashion.

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<sup>7</sup> Lacan's use of "barred subjectivity" seems extremely appropriate in contrast with Vizenor's renunciation of subject-hood in trickster discourse.

The hegemonic social sciences discourses that Vizenor castigates adhere to Hegel's "cunning of reason," setting the passions to work. Hegel writes,

For it is not the universal Idea which enters into opposition, conflict, and danger; it keeps itself in the background, untouched and unharmed, and sends forth the particular interests of passion to fight and wear themselves out in its stead. It is what we may call the **cunning of reason** that it sets the passions to work in its service, so that the agents by which it gives itself existence must pay the penalty and suffer the loss. (Lectures 89)

Unclear of the ominous outcome, these passions ultimately rewrite history; and, thus, in a trickster-like fashion, one must overturn these hegemonic, "tragic monologues."

Vizenor wants the trickster to resist these narratives as well, instead of dialectically using them to its advantage, catapulting the ensnared trickster into a new position. As Jameson writes, "A true 'aesthetics' of resistance...will not seek to 'correct' bourgeois aesthetics or to resolve its antinomies and dilemmas: it will rather search out that other social position from which those dilemmas do not emerge in the first place" (*AR* xlv).

Attempting to tackle this problem, the trickster moves through the social science discourses in order to dismantle the constraints that fix ideological positions.

Not only should one view trickster discourse as a dialectic of institutional practices, the trickster sign itself works via the dialectic. Viewing the trickster within dichotomous relationships, such as law/transgression, order/disorder, and so forth, seems important to the comedic nature of the figure. By unveiling the un-thought, the impossible—by "tarrying with the negative," to use Hegel's terminology—the trickster steps, haphazardly at times, toward the Hegelian "absolute." The antinomies the trickster unleashes do not merely overturn the under-privileged side of the binaries—as many poststructural theorists decry against Hegel—but they initiate a synthesis that births a subjectivity

coinciding with the Hegelian subject. As Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek point out in *Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism*,

The 'absolute' of the German Idealists is not some pre-existing totality or some absolute subject creating the course of worldly events out of its unhampered spontaneity. Such an interpretation of German Idealism would miss the crucial shift from substance to subject. The subject Hegel has in mind is an absolute negativity which can only constitute itself after the fact. Without its manifestation, i.e. without the finite, it would be nothing. The 'absolute' is, hence, nothing but the proper name of the belatedness constitutive of any logical space as such: our conceptual abilities to refer to something determinate in the world can only take place after the fact. The fact is constituted by this 'after,' by the belatedness of the subject. (8)

This metaphoric owl of Minerva, this belatedness, swoops down upon the participant audience like the trickster bringing forth the return of the repressed.

### **Trickster of the Real: The Trickster Supposed to Know**

One must begin amalgamating trickster discourse and creaturely life by situating trickster beside psychoanalysis, specifically next to Lacanian psychoanalysis. As previously stated, Vizenor invokes Lacan in his writings, but he provides only the most rudimentary application of Lacan's ideas. Vizenor cites Lacan twice in "Trickster Discourse." He writes,

Jacques Lacan, however, liberates the signifier; the comic holotrope in trickster narratives. Lacan warns not to 'cling to the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever. (189)

After this, Vizenor refers to Lacan in the endnote to the above quote:

Lacan in "Sign, Symbol, Imagery," defines the sign as an obstacle "to the grasp of the signifier. . . . The sign presupposes the someone to whom one makes a sign or something. The shadow of this someone obscured the entry into linguistics. . . . The sign makes language the basis of abstracts and means of discussion" (209n7).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Although Lacan broaches the *presupposed someone* who interprets the sign, he denies any fixed subjectivity due to both the floating signifier and the desire of the subject, part and parcel to the desire of

Vizenor's application of Lacan stresses exclusively Lacanian poststructuralist tendencies. Vizenor conveniently avoids psychoanalysis altogether as he castigates "crude psychologizings" of the trickster precisely because so much of these explorations fetter the trickster; but a Lacanian psychoanalytic interpretation would hardly appear crude, as evidenced by Vizenor's inclusion of Gretchen Ronnow's Lacanian essay in *Narrative Chance*. Secondly, reducing Lacan merely to a poststructuralist, Vizenor evades the psychoanalytic paradigms that might elucidate his trickster discourse. Moreover, he ignores the possibility that one might consider Lacan a quintessential theoretical trickster. Vizenor refuses the logical overlap of trickster discourse with psychoanalysis.

As Vizenor suggests, a psychoanalytic trickster discourse could engender crude psychologizings of the trickster. However, I contend that a thorough Lacanian analysis conjoining Lacan's tripartite structure of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real as well as *object a* with trickster discourse can redress this danger. Tribal storytelling and trickster performances converge in a trickster discourse of the Real, where Vizenor's poststructural *comic holotrope* transforms the trickster sign into the illusive object *a*, the trickster's truth extricated from caesuras in the social symbolic order. The trickster seems to knock loose the hidden kernel of the Real, revealing the trickiness of social reality itself.

Before underscoring some of the fundamental Lacanian structures, I want to examine what it means to view Lacan as the apotheosis of a trickster in his own right.

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the (O)ther. One cannot fix subjectivity because a subject's very existence relies on whether the (O)ther acknowledges it. This does not mean that Lacan refuses all subjectivity, though, because his entire project necessitates some subject of analysis.

Thrown out of the *Société Française de Psychanalyse* after devoting an entire seminar to the analysis of jokes, Lacan craftily speaks from the psychoanalytic margins, his seminars supplanting trickster-like oral performances. Despite the fact that humor initially coerced him into a liminal space, Lacan illuminates its role in Seminar XVII, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis [La Psychanalyse à l'envers 1969-70]*. Unabashedly, Lacanian puns run throughout his oeuvre, but *Seminar XVII* might stand as his most trickster-like text. In addition to all of the animal imagery one finds in this text, its conclusion brings forth the Real itself for his students. The underside of psychoanalysis upturned, Lacan's wily teachings, evolving in the aftermath of May '68, elevate shame to its rightful place in psychoanalysis. Part eight of this seminar, "The power of the impossibles," turns the impossible into shame, which creates a "(h)ontology" when Lacan states, "'It's a shame [*une honte*],' as they say, which should produce a (h)ontology [*hontologie*] spelled properly at last" (180). Lacan posits that shame might be "the hole from which the master signifier arises," and one must come as close to it as possible in order to subvert the master's discourse or the social symbolic order (189). Lacan castigates his students for not reading primary philosophical texts as they appear, for not reading Wittgenstein because they only like picking apples that have already fallen from the tree. His concluding act of shaming calls for a return to Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel's joke book that reveals the chiasmic inversion of the master/slave dialectic and the dictum to "tarry with the negative."

Lacan's trickster-like transgressions overturn notions of truth and expose the fissures in social relations in order to resituate the boundaries of his four discourses. Lacan, in Seminar VII, discusses the *jouissance* of transgression leading to the death

drive. One might benefit from reading his statement in Seminar XVII, “What analysis shows, if it shows anything at all . . . is very precisely the fact that we don’t ever transgress,” through the lens of Freudian negation, which would reinvigorate Lacan’s transgressive performance (SXVII 19). Staging the transgression within the seminar, Lacan attempts to compel his students to become better readers of performances. This is a result of oral nature of the psychoanalytic session.<sup>9</sup>

Lacan specifically refers to the trickster in “The Freudian Thing” when he discusses truth. Lacan rails against American ego-psychologists for their inability to see/hear the truth in the analysand’s anamnesis, and he conjures the trickster when he pretends to animate a lectern. Lacan writes, “For if the cunning of reason, however disdainful it may have been of you, remained open to your faith, I, truth, will against you be the great Trickster” (E 342). Lacan’s dubious relationship to the trickster makes itself known through his writings and teachings.

Lacan’s triadic structure of human experience consists of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. In “Slavoj Žižek: A Primer,” Glyn Daly states,

[B]oth the Symbolic and the Imaginary may be said to belong to the order of signification. While the Symbolic refers to the (potentially) infinite uses of signification through language and symbols, the Imaginary refers to the particular ways in which signification becomes arrested around certain fundamental images of ourselves that offer a sense of coherence and place in the world. It is through the Imaginary that we achieve particular forms of identification and which enable us to resolve the basic questions(s) of who we are for the other; we “narrate” ourselves around certain basic images with which we identify and/or wish to project. The Real, on the other hand, not only does not belong (directly) to the order of signification but crucially represents its negation.

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<sup>9</sup> See also Phillip E. Wegner’s “Lacan avec Greimas: Formalization, Theory and the ‘Other Side’ of the Study of Culture” for a discussion about Lacan’s mathematical quips and inversions in Seminar XVII.

Constructing a sense of unity within him-/herself, a subject experiences the Imaginary through images (*imagos*), usually resulting in narcissism as Freud discussed;<sup>10</sup> after an introduction to language, the subject enters the Symbolic order, where every word signifies some *thing* else. The Real is the impossible limit of signification, where signification itself breaks down—no language exists to describe the Real—or the Void that the subject knows exists but still attempts (and always fails) to fill through object-use.

Through traumatic fissures, cracks within their Symbolic order, subjects encounter the Real, revealing the external Void that they believe will complete them; therefore, a “passion for the Real” manifests itself in the subject through the desire for what Lacan termed *objet petit a*, the Thing inside a subject more than the subject. Eliminating *objet petit a*, though, would destroy the subject, and produce anxiety (“*Chè vuoi?*”—“You’re telling me that [you desire *objet petit a* from me], but what do you want with it? What are you aiming at?”). Explicating this notion in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, Žižek writes,

Take Lacan’s famous “I love you, but there is something in you more than yourself that I love, *objet petit a*, so I destroy you”—the elementary formula of the destructive passion for the Real as the endeavor to extract from you the real kernel of your being. This is what gives rise to anxiety in the encounter with the Other’s desire: what the Other is aiming at is not simply myself but the real kernel, that which is in me more than myself, and he is ready to destroy me in order to extract that kernel. . . . Is not the ultimate cinematic expression of the ex-timate character of the *objet petit a* in me that of the “alien” in the film of the same name, which is quite literally what is “in me more than myself,” a foreign body at the very heart of myself, and can therefore be extracted from me only at the price of my destruction. (59)

The subject desires *objet petit a* because it elusively fills the Void created by the impossibility of the Real. Lacanian psychoanalysis aims at permitting the subject to

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<sup>10</sup> Lacan states, “The imaginary function is the one Freud formulated as governing object cathexis as narcissistic” (*E* 696).

continue pressing on while simultaneously acknowledging the impossibility of its own desire.<sup>11</sup>

The inclusion of a Lacanian lens to Vizenor's poststructural trickster apparatus exalts the trickster's antics into a powerful position of knowledge akin to an analyst—the trickster becomes the subject supposed to know. In Lacan's oeuvre, the subject supposed to know coincides with transference; the analysand attributes the analyst's power to an inaccessible knowledge, one that reveals the root cause of his/her symptoms, the analysand's secret. The trick inevitably lies in the fact that a psychoanalyst can offer reassurance that the psychoanalytic act will somehow provide the analysand access to this truth. Lacan states in "Mistaking The Subject Supposed to Know",

Now it is indeed in the practice [of psychoanalysis] to begin with that the psychoanalyst has to be equal to the structure that determines him not in its mental form, alas! that is indeed where the impasse is – but in his subject position as inscribed in the real: such an inscription is what properly defines the act. In the structure of the mistaking of the subject supposed to know, . . . the psychoanalyst . . . must find the certitude of his act and the gap that makes its law. (337)

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<sup>11</sup> After Judith Butler argued against Žižek's use of the Real and Claudia Breger criticized him, he further clarified the Real. Adhering to Lacan's original triadic model of all-being, he doubly overlays the tripartite model atop the Lacanian Real while contending that he previously erected this model in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. In "The Rhetorics of Power," Žižek writes,

There are three modalities of the Real: the "real Real" (the horrifying Thing, the primordial object, from Irma's throat to the Alien), the "imaginary Real" (the mysterious *je ne sais quoi*, the unfathomable "something" on account of which the sublime dimension shines through an ordinary object), and the "symbolic Real" (the real as consistency: the signifier reduced to a senseless formula, like the quantum physics formulas which can no longer be translated back into—or related to—the everyday experience of our life-world). The Real is thus effectively all three dimensions at the same time: the abyssal vortex which ruins every consistent structure; the mathematized consistent structure of reality; the fragile pure appearance. (97-8)

These three separate registers of the Real—the imaginary Real, the symbolic Real and the real Real—permit one to discuss the Real via language or mathematical formulas (the symbolic Real). This model further expands Vizenor's trickster discourse, opening up multiple layers to describe the intersubjective (R)eality of both the trickster and its participant audience.

The psychoanalytic act carves out its own fiction based around the belief that the analyst can access a sacred knowledge that emerges in the space of the Real. The analyst as subject supposed to know, as Žižek maintains, “embodies the absolute certainty (which Lacan compares to the certainty of Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum*) of the patient’s unconscious desires” (*HRL* 28). The transference allows the analysand to glimpse the psychoanalytic truth, however briefly.

The trickster’s wily maneuverings act in a similar fashion to the psychoanalytic model. The trickster’s healing capabilities remaining a focal point, many scholars make connections between tricksters and shamans, and Ballinger traces the contradictory nature of this coupling.<sup>12</sup> In “Shamans as Psychoanalysts,” Claude Lévi-Strauss makes this distinction when he concludes, “the psychoanalyst listens, whereas the shaman speaks.”<sup>13</sup> The psychoanalyst, however, does speak, defrocking the return of the repressed masquerading in new clothes. One can also turn this argument on its head regarding the trickster—the trickster speaks, its insight emerging from a sacred knowledge base, although it engenders a “trickster supposed to know” position in relation to the truth. The trickster sometimes seems to stumble upon this truth, his meanderings uncovering the space of truth that ideologically upturns the hegemonic social order. The trickster unearths an impossible horizon, the likes of which recapitulate a position of the subject supposed to know.

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<sup>12</sup> Mac Linscott Ricketts in “The Shaman and the Trickster” tries to delineate the differences between the trickster and the shaman, but Ballinger takes him to task because the tenuous distinctions between the trickster and the shaman inextricably conjoin with the use of similar terminology in Ricketts’s later work. See Ballinger (22).

<sup>13</sup> See Claude Lévi-Strauss’s “Shamans as Psychoanalysts” in Jermeny Narby and Francis Huxley’s *Shamans Through Time: 500 Years on the Path to Knowledge* (111).

How does trickster discourse overlap with Lacanian psychoanalysis? The trickster exists within the Symbolic realm as a semiotic sign that allows the subject viewing the trickster to acknowledge his/her own lack via an encounter with the Real, resulting from the trickster breaking the prohibitions set up within the Symbolic order. This transgression exposes the lack within the subject, uncovering the Real that lacks an external Limit/Exception. The trickster brings the illusion of closure qua disrupting the audience's symbolic order. One must bear in mind that tricksters sometimes act as both a culture hero and prankster. As Michael P. Carroll states, "this selfish-bufoon was usually a culture hero as well. In other words, the Amerindian trickster is often the agent responsible for creating the conditions that allowed for the development of human civilization" (106).<sup>14</sup> To put this in Lacanian terms, tricksters transgress the Law/fantasy, forcing the audience to reconfigure its particular symbolic order after viewing the impossible possibility associated with *traversing the fantasy*, reconstituting the symbolic order and, in turn, beginning to resituate cultural norms.

The "transgressive act," if you will, seditious enough to overturn the social order is the production of shame—but does shame initiate a dialectical turn regarding tricksterism and laughter? The dialectical interplay of guilt and shame brings spectators into being through the perception of an *objet petit a*, which can both laugh and incite laughter in the spectator. The laughter of the gaze as *object petit a*, the floating sardine can that laughs at Lacan in the Petit-Jean story from Seminar XI, for example, even

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<sup>14</sup> One should acknowledge that Carroll's claim that the trickster "was usually a culture hero" might not hold as much credence in light of more recent scholarship, but that does not mean that one should readily dismiss the idea that the trickster resituates cultural norms.

engenders shame within Lacan.<sup>15</sup> As Joan Copjec states about Lacan's *hontology* in "May '68, The Emotional Month",

Shame is not a failed flight from being, but a *flight into being*, where being—the being of surfaces, of social existence—is viewed as that which protects us from the ravages of anxiety, which risk drowning us in its borderless enigma. Unlike the flight or transformation of guilt, however, shame does not sacrifice *jouissance's* opacity, which is finally what "keeps it real." (111)

Using Lacan's outline of shame as the sister of anxiety, Copjec situates these antinomies as an answer to Levinas's questions in *On Escape* concerning shame as an escape from being. Shame produces an awareness of one's own actions in the same way that psychoanalysis makes one aware of him-/herself as a speaking entity, as an "other."

The trickster pulls shame out of his metaphoric pouch of tricks as a ploy to restore balance to society and rearrange the boundaries of permissible thought. In his text concerning laughter, Henri Bergson claims that one laughs at something in order to deride it. However, the chortles the trickster produces in his audience might not completely adhere to this view because of the honor associated with the trickster's position. Hyde, using Douglas Cairns's *Aidos*, discusses the distinction between "shame cultures" and "guilt cultures." Hyde states, "A shame culture arises in the kind of face-to-face community where you behave because other people's eyes are always on you. . . . In a guilt culture, the moral sanctions are more internalized; you carry the internal eye of your conscience with you wherever you go" (155). These distinctions historically separate Hellenistic and Homeric Greece; but they both seem to work together in terms

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<sup>15</sup> Lacan outlines the tale in *Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (95-6). He uses the tale to approximate how he precisely transformed into the stain, the butt of the joke among a group of fisherman scoffing at his lack of understanding regarding their plight and vocation.

of the trickster. The trickster elicits *aidos*, an experience of shame that simultaneously extracts a level of honor.<sup>16</sup> This notion of honor gets retained in the trickster's relationship to the sacred amid its duplicitous exploits. This sacrosanct nature helps trickster work as an external gauge to keep one in check, while it simultaneously creates the measuring stick for an internal super-ego. Lacan's (h)ontology points toward the duality of shame and honor associated with finding one's unconscious subjectivity through the trickster's truth.

A tangible trickster from Native America manifests itself in the sacred clown, an example of which is the heyoka of the Sioux. Ballinger discusses the heyoka as a version of the trickster's blood kin from within Native American tribes. Ballinger observes, "A Dakota becomes a Heyoka by a vision of Ikomi (or at least by association with him), and among the Lakotas Iktomi is considered a Heyoka because he is always talking to the thunderers. [Laura] Makarius even claims that Heyoka is another name for Iktomi" (126). Members of the Sioux tribe who dreamt of the thunderbirds needed to become sacred clowns or else the thunderbirds would kill them (or so they believed). The heyoka performed sacred ceremonies to bring the thunderbirds' vision to the tribe and, consequently, laughter through their backwardness. To the Sioux, they functioned as a bringer of rain, laughter, healing, and *balance*. For the heyoka, no subject was taboo, but s/he could break every imaginable prohibition because these visions supposedly emerged from a sacred space. Ensuring that no tribe member or official regarded their power too seriously, the clowns would mock everything (including the

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<sup>16</sup> See Douglas Cairns's *Aidos* (10-14). You can also see his discussion of shame-cultures and guilt cultures, which determine possible behavior through the use of an external communal eye and an internal self-conscious eye, respectively (14-47).

religious members of the tribe), evoke scatological humor, cook a sacred dog stew, and also bring a sacrosanct balance to the tribe. The heyoka, thus, made both the profane sacred and the abject profound.

This sacrosanct nature of the heyoka doubly works to evoke fear and laughter. After the ceremonies the heyoka needed to enter the sweat lodge to rid him-/herself of the recently committed transgressions.<sup>17</sup> Lame Deer states that a *heyoka*, after dreaming of the thunderbirds, would exhibit exorbitant terror because “he [was] to act out his dream in public. . . . Indians are modest. In the old days, to expose a leg—say, to the knee—for a girl this was improper. [Indians] are a bashful race” (241). The prohibition of the law/transgression dialectic historically constitutes a tangible position among the Native Americans.

To psychoanalyze the heyoka via Lacan, one must understand this sacred power as Native Americans themselves did. In *Black Elk Speaks*, Black Elk states,

[Heyokas] have sacred power and they share some of this with all the people, but they do it through funny actions. When a vision comes from the thunder beings of the west, it comes with terror like a thunder storm; but when the storm of vision has passed, the world is greener and happier; for wherever the truth of vision comes upon the world, it is like rain. The world, you see, is happier after the terror of the storm. But in the heyoka ceremony, everything is backwards, and it is planned that the people should be made to feel jolly and happy first, so that it may be easier for the power to come to them. You have noticed that the truth comes into this world with two faces. One is sad with suffering, and the other laughs; but it is the same face, laughing or weeping. When people are already in despair, maybe the laughing face is better for them; and when they feel too good and are too sure of being safe, maybe the weeping face is better for them to see. (145)

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<sup>17</sup> As Peggy V. Beck states,

In the end, at the conclusion of the ceremonies, the clowns are brought into the balanced world again in cleansing ceremonies. All the frenzy, obscenity, and terror is calmed and dispersed at this time. The clown’s imbalance, their dancing at the edge of limitations, and their mocking of order, helps contrast imbalance and balance, order and disorder, in such a way that even a child can understand the basic concept of balance. Without the clown’s disorder, order would not, in the end, be so obvious and so justified. (309)

In Hegelian dialectical fashion, heyokas uncover the repressed side of dichotomies akin to the Real. Black Elk even appeals to the notion of the symbolic Real through the double face of the dichotomous structure of truth. The “(Other) face,” necessary for inaugurating the dialectic, creates a semiotic sign engendering the Real—the impossible limit—that the participant audience believes will complete them. Black Elk inadvertently broaches the Real (truth) that Indians try to pin down via both the heyoka and the trickster sign. Exposing this limit, heyokas transgress prohibitions, revealing the impossible balance of dialectical relationships, forcing the audience to “tarry with the negative.” As Hegel writes in the Preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, “Truth, then, contains the negative—that which would have been called false, if it could have been viewed as something from which one must abstract,” carrying one along the dialectical journey (153). Heyokas incite the audience to “tarry with the negative” via the creation of a “passion for the Real.”

The heyoka’s vision initially emerges from the imaginary Real, dreams of the thunder beings, which produced fear in the heyoka.<sup>18</sup> The heyoka transcribes these visions/encounters from the imaginary Real into his/her own symbolic order. They later attempt to fill out the Void/Other during the comic ceremonies by transgressing the (L)aw, which, in turn, exposes the lack in both the subject and themselves. Through the

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<sup>18</sup> One could psychoanalyze the unconscious motives behind these dreams in the first place, aligning “the cunning of reason” with the Bacchanalian whirl. Where does this “passion for the Real” or abject truly come from? Julia Kristeva discusses the relation of *jouissance* to abjection. It seems important to note that abjection in Kristeva’s writings seems analogous to “encounters with the Real.” She writes in *The Powers of Horror*, “For it is out of such straying on excluded ground that [a *deject*] draws his *jouissance*. The abject form which he does not cease separating is for him, in short, a *land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered. Once upon blotted-out time, the abject must have been a magnetized pole of covetousness. But the ashes now serve as a screen and reflect aversion, repugnance” (8). The *heyoka* inscribes the dream of the thunderbirds, which could be viewed as his/her unconscious desire to return to “blotted-out time” when the *heyoka* reveled in backwardness.

disorientation of the subject/viewer by way of the object/trickster sign, the participant audience encounters the Real. Ironically, this trauma/horror of the Real makes the subject laugh with the rest of the audience even though s/he realizes the impossibility of the Void's completion. The trickster exposes the "passion for the Real," and the subject remains disoriented after seeing the "(Other) face" of truth, forcing it to tarry with the negative—with the Real. Hegel writes,

Spirit gains its truth only through finding itself within absolute rupture. Spirit is that power not as a positive which turns away from the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or false, and having thus finished with it we turn to something else; rather, spirit is that power only in so far as it looks the negative in the face and dwells in it. (*Preface* 129)

Here, Hegel prefigures Lacan's notion of encountering the Real. After dwelling in the negative position, exhausting every possibility of said impossibility, the subject repositions itself in the next dialectical position and resituates its symbolic order accordingly.

The trickster utilizes the "cunning of reason" to remove that which occludes the viewer from the Truth of the Real. I do not mean to suggest that the trickster reveals the "true state of things." The trickster merely invokes "the cunning of reason," which Žižek describes in a parenthetical phrase: "we act, intervene, yet we can never be sure of the true meaning and ultimate outcome of our acts, since it is the decentered big Other, the substantial symbolic order, which decides" (Puppet 136). The wily trickster may or may not know what it does, but it ultimately projects its participant viewers into the Bacchanalian whirl catapulting them into their dialectical journey towards Absolute Spirit.

### **A Spider's Stress: Creaturely Tricksterism**

Conjoining “creaturely life” to the constellation of trickster discourse, psychoanalysis and critical theory adds another thread to Iktomi’s web. Ballinger comes close to positing a creaturely trickster of the Real discourse. He writes,

With a trickster the abstract imaginable becomes concrete possibility. . . . The All is not . . . some immutable Platonic Ideal, and American Indian tricksters manifest this truth with a vengeance. When a trickster violates a boundary or an ordered place or moment, he is often practicing the essential trick of exposing the substance underlying appearances; that is, he reveals for us the trickiness of reality. (135-140)

One could replace Ballinger’s description of the trickster “exposing the substance underlying appearances” with a trickster exposing “creaturely life.”

When one combines the trickster of the Real with a discussion of “creaturely life,” the high theory that Vizenor evokes gains new significance. Santner historically traces the “creaturely” in German thought. Beginning with Rilke’s separation of human life from *de Kreatur*, creaturely life, in the eighth *Duino Elegy*, Santner moves through Heidegger and Giorgio Agamben’s reading of Rilke in order to emphasize a traumatic dimension that renders man “creaturely.” Santner observes, “What I am calling creaturely life is the life that is, so to speak, called into being, ex-cited, by exposure to the peculiar ‘creativity’ associated with [the] threshold of law and nonlaw” (15). Benjamin’s notion of “natural history” [*Naturgeschichte*], “the fact that the artifacts of human history tend to acquire an aspect of mute, natural being at the point where they begin to lose their place in a viable form of life” becomes the focal point of departure for creatureliness (16). Situating natural history and creaturliness in W. G. Sebald’s writing, he focuses on transgressive moments where the “creaturely” and human coincide. Santner states,

[T]he “creaturely” pertains . . . to a biopolitical *animation* that distinguishes the human from the animal. To put it again in psychoanalytic terms, what we share with animals is the life lived among the spectrum of pleasure and pain. Where we

diverge from the animal is in our peculiar capacity for that pleasure in pain that Lacan refers to as “jouissance.” (39)

Denying the complete convergence of the creaturely and the human, Santner does not concern himself with the collision of the two, the liminal space where trickster animals lurk and transform the human realm.

Santner does intertwine psychoanalysis with creaturely life. The creaturely coalesces with Lacan and Freud, particularly Freud’s notion of the continuation of sovereign jouissance after the “death” of the primal father, as well as Lacan’s recapitulation of this as the jouissance of the (O)ther. After creating certain anxiety about the parental (O)ther, a child begins asking, “What do you want from me?” [*“Chè vuoi?”*] This question’s evasive answer commences the dialectic of desire, and the child gets entangled in a search for *objet petit a* to stave off the (O)ther’s demand. The (O)ther’s demand creates anxiety about the *signifying* demand, and the child, often missing the mark, translates this demand however s/he sees fit. To put it in Santner’s terms, “It is this never-ceasing work of symbolization, translation, and failure at translation, that constitutes the *signifying stress* at the core of creaturely life” (33). This *signifying stress* engenders the “core” of both creaturely life and the Lacanian Real, and it exposes the Real as a space for and an injunction to ethico-political action.

As previously stated, Santner swiftly dismisses humor’s role in creaturely life, devoting two paragraphs to the place of comedy in Sebald’s oeuvre. Santner contends,

My sense is that it is at just those points of creatureliness I have been trying to isolate that Sebaldian humor arises; these are the points where the *nonsensical* aspect of what I have referred to as “signifying stress” becomes manifest to us, the point where we catch a glimpse of the mechanical stupidity of our jouissance, the very “Thing” that matters most to us. (146-7)

This model of creaturely humor can be correlated with the trickster of the Real; but the creaturely trickster's tom-foolery forms from shocking representations of an impossible possibility—*objet petit a*—that produces laughter. To put it differently, a humor that can predominantly remain excluded from our daily lives comprises the pith of creaturely trickster discourse.

The anthropomorphism associated with the trickster connects the trickster and Santner's discussion of creaturely life. The animal tricksters commonly assume human characteristics in the tales themselves: spiders, coyotes, and ravens communicate and think like humans while simultaneously remaining non-human in their animalistic ways. The Coyote from Paul Radin's seminal Winnebago trickster cycle, for instance, holds many human qualities; but he also carries his penis in a box on his back. It is the excess of the non-human, the hyperbolic, that makes the creaturely trickster significant.

Concerning comedy, Zupančič observes in a rather lengthy passage,

If humans were “only human(s)” (and life “only life”), if the human equation indeed added up so neatly and with no remainder, *there would be no comedy*. Is not the very existence of comedy and of the comical telling us most clearly that a man is never just a man, and this his finitude is very much corroded by a passion which is precisely not cut to the measure of man and of his finitude. Most comedies set up a configuration in which one or several characters depart violently from the moderate, balanced rationality and normality of their surrounding, and of other people in it. And, if anything, it is precisely these other, “normal” people who are “only human” or “only men,” whereas this is far from being the case with comic characters. There is something very real in comedy's supposedly unrealistic insistence on the indestructible, on something that persists, keeps reasserting itself and won't go away, like a tic that goes on even though its “owner” is already dead. In this respect, one could say that the flaws, extravagances, excesses, and so-called human-weaknesses of comic characters are precisely what account for their *not* being “only human.” More precisely, they show us that what is “human” exists only in this kind of excess over itself. (49)

The trickster tales abundantly exhibit these excesses of the human; and in this way it maintains the uncanny ability to remain a cross-cultural folk hero.

Because the creaturely trickster materializes from conjoining critical thought, more specifically German critical thought, with Native American theory, one should rethink critical theory's trickster-like function. As Santner contends, "One rightly wonders whether there is room for humor in the bleak world of historical suffering [Sebald's] work seems to live and breathe. It is almost as if one were to ask whether Benjamin's angel of history was capable of a good laugh amid all that wreckage piling up before his eyes" (146). Here, Santner's discussion of critical theory can be viewed under the lens of creaturely tricksterism. Similar to Adorno's notion that a form of tricksterism "is a fundamental layer of art," I argue that creaturely tricksterism might be a fundamental layer of theoretical discourse. Benjamin's angel of history gazing at modernity's rubble of the Real, urban decay and ruins of strife, theoretical edifices provide a traumatically "comic" way to situate the excess jouissance of the sovereign's "cunning of reason" that results in natural history. As Martin Jay writes of the Frankfurt School in *The Dialectical Imagination*, "The role of the intellectual . . . was to continue thinking what was becoming ever more unthinkable in the modern world" (80). Theoretical tricksters shatter the boundaries of acceptable thought, dialectically shifting philosophical borders.

Vine Deloria, Jr. laments the ignoring of the humorous side of Indian life by professed experts; similarly, critical theory's adherents say the same about the current academic trend to happily proclaim the metaphoric death of theory. The trickster's buoyancy keeps humor afloat within American indigenous culture; similarly, theory persists despite its supposed marginalization within academia. Žižek brings this to light in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* when he upbraids theorists who state that we now live in a post-ideological world (3). Ideology persists everywhere, just as theory informs

everything. One can endlessly persist on this core fantasy that ideology and theory entered a caesura or gap within our social symbolic order. Underneath these wily machinations, the trickster can expose hidden ideologies or theoretical caesuras that help bring the audience toward a new understanding of their own position in the world.

Under the creaturely trickster rubric, Adorno becomes a quintessential theoretical trickster in relation to creaturely life; his peculiar relationship to exile and animals begins to close the expanse between this high theorist and his tricksterism. Escaping the catastrophic events transpiring in Germany, Adorno made the trip to America in 1938 and would stay for thirteen years. As Detlev Claussen points out, Adorno had a close circle of friends during his stint in America, and even their nicknames underscored Adorno's marginal status. Adorno and his friends belonged to the "zoo of 'nicknames and noms de guerre'" during his émigré years in America, and each of them received their own animal nickname. Adorno, also known as the "hippopotamus king Archibald," stood at the helm of the kingdom. His wife was "Giraffe" Gretel Adorno; Max Horkheimer's name was "Mammoth." Even Fritz Lang and his wife, "Badger" and "Micky" Lily Latté, respectively, belonged to this unique group.<sup>19</sup> These names, signatures on letters, maintained a level of secrecy they found necessary because of their emigrant status. While Horkheimer and Adorno drove west across America, as David Jenemann points out, hotel employees informed the FBI that possible "enemy aliens" arrived at their hotel; and in El Paso, Texas, an FBI agent would not let them alone until a letter from J. Edgar Hoover arrived stating that America already knew

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<sup>19</sup> See Detlev Claussen's "TWA: The Friend from America" (129). Claussen further elaborates on this in *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius* (164-5). Also see David Jenemann's *Adorno in America* (136).

about the two Frankfurt School scholars (xii-xiii). The historical situation at large imbued the animal nicknames with further significance.

The language of liminality would seem quite appropriate in describing Adorno's oeuvre. Adorno's critics readily dismiss his opinions about mass culture and the American culture industry as, to use Jay's words, the "uncomprehending condescension of a mandarin elitist." Matt F. Connell writes, "The playful side of Adorno relies on a . . . dark use of exaggeration, overstatement, irony . . . and chiasmus, which sober critics often want to dismiss as dialectical excess. . . . Adorno plays the theoretical buffoon to make us think seriously" (84). Adorno's high jinks correlate with the trickster's use of chiasmic reversals, which prominently appear in *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, his book of aphorisms written during his exile years in America. In his online journal article, "Maxima Immoralia: Speed and Slowness in Adorno's *Minima Moralia*," Jeffery T. Nealon gives credence to this argument when he writes,

The fact that inversion or chiasmus is the dominant trope of Adorno's thinking is so obvious that it scarcely seems worth mentioning. Especially in *Minima Moralia*, chiasmus is prominently on display from the very beginning: the title itself is an inversion of Aristotle's *Magna Moralia* ("Great Ethics"). . . . [T]he inversions continue in the text's first sentence, where Adorno famously characterizes his work as a "melancholy science," in chiasmic contradistinction to Nietzsche's "joyful science." . . . From the book's epigraph (Kürnberger's "Life is not alive") to *Minima Moralia*'s most famous sentence "The whole is false" (an inversion of Hegel's dialectical dictum that only the whole is true), chiasmic reversal is all over *Minima Moralia*.

Adorno attacks many longstanding traditions with this text, and morphs writers into creatures, such as when he writes, "Properly written texts are like spiders' webs. . . . They draw into themselves all the creatures of the air" (MM 87). Becoming Iktomi, Adorno asserts a dialectical version of creaturely tricksterism and transgresses theoretical boundaries in order to resituate them. In this case the important *signifying*

*stress* rests on the spider's web, each aphorism/thread subverting German philosophical traditions. Adorno's aphoristic style intentionally violates Hegel's maxim that "the whole is the true." By using aphorisms, he upbraids the Hegelian belief that the Concept can never be true.<sup>20</sup>

Adorno chastises every theoretical tool that remains vital to his own cultural analyses. He rails against psychoanalysis by saying, "In psychoanalysis nothing is true except the exaggerations" (*MM* 49). Rebuking Marxism, he writes, "Even solidarity . . . is sick" (*MM* 51). The (un)truth be told: Adorno relies heavily on both psychoanalysis and Marxism throughout his writings. These negated, unconscionable statements act like the ephemeral *object a*, and Adorno's creaturely sentences leisurely slouch from the Real. Adorno's aphoristic spider web tempts the reader as it showcases his inverted, theoretical "dwarf fruit," which forces his readers to think for themselves, question his hyperbolic statements and face the Void of the impossible Thing. The participant audience needs to resituate his/her own theoretical stance within the social symbolic after encountering Adorno's creaturely trickster discourse. Adorno inadvertently champions this approach in his critique of the culture industry, believing that art should aim at breaking intellectual boundaries and expand the minds of mass-culture connoisseurs.

In the seminal "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Adorno and Horkheimer argue against Hollywood's tendency to make formulaic films in which the audience already knows the ending before the film even begins. For Adorno,

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<sup>20</sup> One could also consider Frederick Nietzsche's aphoristic style, which works in similar ways. *Daybreak* in particular appears as Nietzsche's trickster text very much akin to *Minima Moralia*. His writing regarding Dionysus also situates him within the realm of the trickster. Zupančič goes so far as to posit Nietzsche as a comedian in *The Shortest Shadow*.

cinematic images hold the capacity to jumpstart the masses into a subjective position with enough historical consciousness to dialectically see through the image and view the intolerable image; or, more directly put, to transform moviegoers into the position that Rancière calls “the emancipated spectator.” Adorno believes that “[t]he regression of the masses today is their inability to hear the unheard-of with their own ears, to touch the unapprehended with their own hands,” to see the un-seeable (*DE* 36). Here, Lacan’s *objet petit a* and the Real return to the fore in our discussion. Exposing the trickster’s truth in the Real, in the caesuras of the cinematic image that push the audience away while simultaneously compelling viewers to continue looking, the cine-trickster opens up the creaturely fissures that Adorno champions. Jenemann states of Adorno’s discussion of William Dieterle’s *Syncopation*,

What is perhaps not so generally accepted, but what Adorno’s all-too-brief remarks on *Syncopation* reveal, is Adorno’s abiding interest in exploiting those elements of motion pictures that encourage the subject to see what isn’t there and miss what is. In this light, Adorno’s exile writings on film merit reassessment. Instead of the monolithic film text, against which no subject could hope to do anything other than grow “stupider and worse,” Adorno offers a vision of the motion picture in which subjectivity survives at the margins, just offscreen and out of view. (127)

The spectator Adorno aggrandizes must work to construct meaning out of a film, thus inaugurating its own subjectivity after encountering a marginalized space within the filmic image.

In an updated form of this argument, in *The Emancipated Spectator* Rancière disseminates a similar idea; Rancière reconfigures spectatorship as an active event that shifts the emphasis toward audience members viewing polyvalent artworks with hermeneutic strategies to create innovative interpretive possibilities. Rancière’s notion presupposes that viewers as active spectators can liberate themselves enough to move

beyond an artworks's ideological positionings. This is reminiscent of Adorno's ideas regarding cinema.

Adorno's writings on cinema only interrogate classical Hollywood films despite the fact that many other films, such as avant-garde cinema, did attempt to turn the spectator into an active participant constructing meanings that break free from bourgeois ideology. As Jenemann points out in his research, Adorno sat in the audience at every film premiere during his stay in Hollywood, and the fact that he made friends with many filmmakers, including fellow émigrés, helps further explain his perspective. International filmmakers, such as Fritz Lang and Billy Wilder, with their ties to the studio system became disenchanted with the Hollywood system, and Adorno's access to their experiences informed his exile writings.

Adorno's involvement within the Hollywood system actually transforms him into a theoretical trickster regarding the cinematic image. Beginning in 1945, Horkheimer and Adorno began work on a sociological film, the title of which changed from *The Accident* to *Below the Surface*. This film, a treatment of racial discrimination that "was seen as an integral part of the Studies in Prejudice project," forced the spectator to move beyond the screen, to see whether or not audience members would cobble together an anti-Semitic or otherwise racist explanation for vicious actions without explicit racism appearing on-screen (Jenemann 131). Anthropologist Margaret Mead and German experimental filmmaker Hans Richter were among the script consultants for this project. Richter's innovative inclusions, as Jenemann suggests, would have turned the film into an experiment in both form and function. However, Adorno and Horkheimer would ultimately scrap any efforts to produce *Below the Surface* because Dore Schary, a

writer called in on July of 1945, absconded with knowledge of the script to produce his own film, Edward Dmytryk's *Crossfire* (1947), nominated for five Oscars including Best Picture.<sup>21</sup> As Adorno's efforts to make this film attests, his relationship to cinema and the American culture industry certainly sets him up to act like the trickster, a wrench within the culture industry's machinery. As a marginalized figure among film scholars today, Adorno reached into mass culture to such an extent that Richter even said that his failed film project was "Hollywoodish" (142).<sup>22</sup>

Adorno's stint in Hollywood highlights the significance the film industry held in terms of his work, and one rightly wonders how much the culture industry's humor played a role in his understanding of laughter. His fame led him to a dinner party in Malibu where he sat next to Charlie Chaplin, a trickster in his own right, and met actor Harold Russell, who wore prosthesis after losing both arms in World War II. When Adorno went to shake Russell's "hand," he found himself startled and grimaced at the touch of the prosthesis. This appears as a moment of creaturely life in Adorno's oeuvre specifically because it reveals a fissure in his own symbolic order. But the trickster also rears its head in the guise of Chaplin's mechanical response to this scene. Chaplin mimicked Adorno's expression at that moment and replayed the scene back to him.

Claussen imparts this anecdote about Adorno, but Anca Parvulescu unveils the

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<sup>21</sup> Jenemann discusses the failed film project at considerable length, connecting Dore Schary as the link between Adorno and Horkheimer's research and *Crossfire* (131-147).

<sup>22</sup> This is also true of Adorno's relationship with American radio before he wandered across the country to Hollywood. His involvement with the Princeton Radio Research Project, cut short by his skepticism of empiricism and his fears regarding the diminishing of democracy and the dissemination of propaganda based on his first-hand experience with it in Germany, reveals his close proximity to low culture. For a detailed analysis of this, turn to Chapter 2 of Jenemann's study, "Adorno in Sponsor-land: Authority on the Radio" (47-104).

theoretical underpinnings of the anecdote in her incisive study *Laughter: Notes on a Passion*. Parvulescu writes,

Chaplin is doing what he does best. He is mimicking Adorno. And Chaplin's mimicry, André Bazin argues, is an allegory of cinema's own mimeticism. . . . Chaplin might have shown Adorno what cinema can be. Did Adorno laugh? If he did, it is a lost laugh for our archive or laughter. But the anecdote . . . is an impetus to reconsider Adorno's take on laughter. Notes on another form of laughter, qualitatively different than that of the culture industry, are scattered throughout his work. This is a laughter that can turn the laughter of the culture industry back on itself, and lead to what Adorno calls "a suspension of the law." Laughter has the potential to suspend the culture industry's promise of reconciliation that it initially announces, leading to the possibility of a different kind of reconciliation. (150-1)

What Parvulescu comments upon here is a laughter that calls attention back onto itself, a laughter that brings one into self-consciousness through the very act of shaming. The Chaplin anecdote underscores shaming as a creaturely trickster act that produces laughter and engenders the flight into self-consciousness.

Using both Lacan and Adorno in conjunction with the creaturely trickster calls into question the use of the Hegelian dialectic; or, more specifically, the use of the negative dialectic. Negative dialectics, inscribed with hegemonic resistance, engenders an antinomian trickster position. Adorno believes that art should aim towards determinant negation, the practice of elucidating the specific antinomies in aesthetic and social phenomena. Freud's seminal essay, "Negation," revolves around the double meaning of the German word *aufhebung*: not just a cancellation but a lifting, which aligns the negative dialectic with the trickster figure in terms of chiasmic reversals that resituate permissible borders. Adorno and Lacan both rely on this double movement in terms of looking for the creaturely fissures in reality and in artistic productions.

Another final connection in this constellation of trickster, Adorno and Lacan emerges with the production of shame and laughter. As previously stated, Lacan's

(h)ontology gives shame its importance while using puns to elicit a response from his seminar participants: Adorno likewise uses shame and laughter as a way into subjectivity. Traversing parricidal territory but not the Oedipal conflict proper, Adorno addresses notions of guilt at the beginning of *Minima Moralia*. Adorno continues to return to notions of shame throughout the text, and comedy remains entangled in this aphoristic constellation through discussions of distorting “comic riddles,” shapeshifting “picture puzzles,” and “children and animals.” Interestingly enough, he ends the text discussing possibilities that emerge when one thinks through what commonly does not get thought, when one refashions the impossible. This coincides with Lacan’s discussion of shame in Seminar XVII, especially his concluding chapter titled, “The power of the impossibles.” Creaturely trickster resistance inextricably weds the two texts and thinkers together while highlighting the importance of estranging the self from the world through reversals that expose the caesuras in our reality.

CHAPTER 3  
CREATURELY CINE-TRICKSTERISM:  
CINEMA AS TRICKSTER *PAR EXCELLENCE*

The cinema implies a total inversion of values, a complete upheaval of optics, of perspective and logic.

—Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and It's Double*

Manifestly, movies have never been the representations of tribal cultures; at best, movies are the deliverance of an unsure civilization.

—Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*

The Western-European tradition appropriates Native American culture and iconography both to ideologically subvert the hegemonic social order and maintain the status quo. The peculiar ambiguity of these representations pilfered from indigenous American Indians by various artists and political groups seems to recapitulate the wily maneuverings of the trickster, perpetually mocking any attempts to defend a particular ideological position. To explore the nexuses between the trickster and cinema, one should start with the initial celluloid representations of Indians. While not all Indian representations act as trickster performances or evoke the wily folkhero, the first filmed images of Native Americans instantiate the persistent problems that arise when approaching indigenous representations disseminated for a Western audience, the dialectical image evoking a multitude of conflicting interpretations.

An exploration into early cinema uncovers a dearth of Native American cinematic representations. The early films of Indians, brief snippets of ritual performances recently recovered in Paris's *Centre national du Cinéma*, depict the Indian (o)ther precisely as a Western audience wants to see Indians: humorously animalistic, primitive and yet, ironically, sacrosanct. During the autumn of 1894 William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody and his group of Sioux Indians performing for his Wild West Show in Brooklyn made the

trek to West Orange, New Jersey, Frank Maguire and Joseph Baucus requesting their presence at Thomas Edison's Black Maria motion picture studio. Documenting faux ethnographic moments of ritual performance, Cody and his entourage performed *Sioux Ghost Dance* and *Buffalo Dance* for Edison's kinetoscope. Returning to the Black Maria at least four times during that fall, Cody and the Sioux entertainers would make more than a dozen films at Edison's studio (Musser 27). These brief encounters between Native Americans and the camera depict the Sioux in various forms of ritual performance, however staged they initially appear to the trained eye. The fact that Maguire and Baucus, from the Continental Commerce Company, asked for these films warrants comment because they held the rights to Edison's Kinetoscope in Europe. They used these films as advertisements to promote the European tour of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. European Indianthusiasm, usually absent in scholarly discussions of these films, created a need to capture the Indian on film.<sup>1</sup> In spite of Cody's dissemination of Native American stereotypes, one should not ignore his role in bringing Native Americans into the cinema.<sup>2</sup>

These early film images of Indians depict them in the manner of what Gerald Vizenor would call the "absence of the Indian."<sup>3</sup> However, viewed under a trickster lens, these Sioux performances open up the possibility of resistance to the hegemonic structures confining them. *Buffalo Dance*, filmed by W.K.L. Dickson and William Heise,

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<sup>1</sup> Indianthusiasm and its European heritage will be explored in Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> Cody publicly apologized for perpetuating this stereotype later in his life.

<sup>3</sup> Vizenor's discussion of the absence of the Indian pertains to the etymological roots of the word *Indian*, which has no referent in any Native American language. Vizenor proposes that one refer to the stereotypical representations as *indians* with a lowercase to emphasize the absence of any contemporary Native American.

depicts three Sioux Indians moving in a circle, squawking about like feathered animals in front of two Indians playing drums. Their awareness of the camera shatters any realist illusions that the film attempts to project: the dancing Indians keep twisting their heads in order to gaze back at the camera. A common belief among Native American tribes was that a camera had the power to steal one's soul; gazing back at the camera could be read as a way to prevent this from happening. A dialectical reading of the film could view the disruptive gaze of the Indian as a form of resistance, an attempt to shake the verisimilitude out of the picture by both acknowledging the artifice of this ritual dance and instantiating some form of indigenous agency.<sup>4</sup> In lieu of beseeching the gods to bring back the buffalo, the Indians's performance loses its sacrosanct power through its gaze that seems to ask the camera for an audience.

*Sioux Ghost Dance*, another Edison short, begins with the Sioux standing in a line behind two Native American children. As the camera starts rolling, the adults remain motionless while the child on the left dances. The adult Indians then commence their dance, enveloping the two children within a circle of moving bodies. The artifice of this particular film dissipates after the Indians begin the almost mechanical *mise-en-scène* of shifting bodies and seem to disregard the camera's presence. One Indian dances towards the center of the frame and nearly freezes to return the camera's gaze; but his

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<sup>4</sup> In *Reservation Reelism*, Michelle H. Raheija both rejects and supports giving agency to Indigenous actors filmed by a white director. Her discussion of *Nanook of the North*, for example, begins to read Nanook's laughter after seeing the gramophone as a form of resistance. She wants to read trickster resistance in this scene, but she believes that only an Indigenous viewer of the film would acknowledge such resistance (190-3). However, when she attempts to develop an Indigenous film theory earlier in her text, she permits Indigenous actors to create forms of resistance while "redfacing" in films directed by whites (20-34). Raheija is reluctant to read trickster resistance in Nanook during the gramophone scene because western audiences would not understand it. I contend that these early kinetoscope films can be read under trickster hermeneutics as a form of Indigenous resistance.

reluctance to halt and stare directly at the camera sustains the verisimilitude of the ritual performance.

From merely watching these films, one would not immediately call them humorous; however, the Native American iconography does evoke a creaturely trickster in its own right. The use of child and animal imagery initially prompts a second reading of the films under a trickster lens. The creaturely images reveal the trace of an (o)therness melancholically transcribing its own history before the camera, while at the same time falling under the stereotypical constraints that a Western society asks of Native Americans. As Eric Santner writes,

[C]reaturely life—the peculiar proximity of the human to the animal at the very point of their radical difference—is a product not simply of man’s thrownness into the (enigmatic) “openness of Being” but of his exposure to a traumatic dimension of political power and social bonds whose structures have undergone radical transformations in modernity. (12)

The animal-like gestures of the dancing Indians bring the creaturely trickster into the frame, but it then appears as though the trickster gets entombed in the *mise-en-scène* itself. The seemingly invisible resistance of the Sioux Indians, breaking the film’s verisimilitude, separates the stereotypical presentation from a real Sioux presence. These representations, if read under the aegis of the creaturely trickster, expose the ideological schism between the ontological Indian/Sioux’s on-screen presence and the simulated *indian* Vizenor deconstructs in the literature of manifest manners.

Filming Native Americans remains an important historical marker as it ideologically situates the Indigenous within Jacques Rancière’s notion of “the distribution of the sensible” [*le partage du sensible*] of the aesthetic regime that inextricably binds politics and art. Rancière writes,

Political statements and literary locutions produce effects in reality. They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies. They thereby take hold of unspecified groups of people, they widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognize their images. They reconfigure the map of the sensible by interfering with the functionality of gestures and rhythms adapted to the natural cycles of production, reproduction and submission. Man is a political animal because he is a literary animal who lets himself be diverted from his 'natural' purpose by the power of words. (PA 39)

The short films depicting the Sioux allow the visibility of the Indians to proliferate in celluloid representations, both revealing and concealing the true Indian. It takes trickster consciousness to see through the paradox of the stereotypical representations, to force the placated viewer to interrogate the subjugation of real Indians shown in these films.

Other than those showcasing the Indians of the Wild West Show, shorts created during the dawn of cinema highlight the trickster's position. One example, the 1903 Kinetoscope production *Egyptian Fakir with Dancing Monkey*, reveals the "magic acts" of fakirs, a Western creation. This short film depicts a fakir banging a drum for a clothed monkey to perform with a wooden stick and eventually duel with him. To the left of the fakir, a goat balances on a small platform, adding to the fakir's mystical nature. The monkey ends up showing off its own balancing skills as it propels itself up by its tail and stands on its head.

The constructed nature of *Egyptian Fakir with Dancing Monkey* adds another layer to the trickery involved in this film. The postcolonial reading of fakirs as a western creation sheds light on the political aspects of the film. The fakir works in tandem with the monkey and the balancing goat to become a curiosity for a western audience. He also brings the sacrosanct nature of the trickster into the frame as a holy man

transformed into something akin to a magician. The fakir's drum-striking acts as the trick that controls the on-screen animals, maintaining a balance between the mobile monkey and the motionless goat. Viewing the scene under a trickster hermeneutic lens, one senses that what was once outside the purview of a western audience gets rendered visible, the fakir breaking into the social symbolic of the western cultural imaginary. Viewing the figure in terms of a "magician" transforms it into a trickster performance. The potential of cinema to expose hidden realities, constructed or not, reveals the trickster's abilities to wander across barriers.

Viewing these early films in light of trickster hermeneutics broaches the notion that one could actually posit cinema as the trickster medium *par excellence*. These films depicting Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show Indians merely create a point of departure from which to sift through the connections between the trickster and film. A larger assessment of cinema's history and film's formal properties reveals the ways in which the cinema can evoke a creaturely cine-trickster aesthetic that then gets incorporated into mainstream Western culture in social practice as a political tool, the polyvalent trickster's truth aptly revealing other ideological possibilities.

### **Tricky Convergences: Tricksterism, Cinema History, and Children**

Cinema crosses the borders of language as people from various cultures read the on-screen images to construct meaning out of them. Likewise, the movement of cinema across boundaries reconfigures a border-crossing trickster figure. Both narrative and non-narrative film cross national borders, the images speaking for themselves across language barriers. European immigrants in America found early cinema fascinating precisely because they could understand the stories even if they could not read the intertitles. Synchronous and direct sound would prove a stumbling block to film crossing

national borders as certain films would require multiple language tracks before the adoption of standardized subtitles. Similarly, when the Western European anthropologists initially started studying the Native American trickster tales, the tales themselves existed only in the oral tradition, and the process of preservation through writing necessarily involved translation.

The cinema's connection with bewildering illusions and magic tricks resembles the trickster and its jocose tales. Inscribed with an uncanny magic, the likes of which appeared unfathomable at first, the trickster tales would evoke a particularly condescending laughter when the anthropologists took the written translations back to Europe. Fortunately, the Native American trickster tales met a captive audience despite the *shockingly* sexualized and comical portrayals of such things as Coyote carrying his penis in a box on his back, as in the Winnebago trickster cycle, or flinging his penis across a lake.<sup>5</sup> The sacrosanct, yet devilish, supernatural aspects of the trickster approximate the cinema's relationship to its occult tricks.

Early cinema, inextricably linked to illusion and magic, originally aroused suspicion among the civilized western world in a way that mirrors the Eurocentric anthropologists's perception of the trickster. Dubious illusions and magic tricks influenced early cinema as it evolved out of magic lantern shows. Ian Christie points out that the magic lantern,

already had a somewhat macabre reputation. From its beginnings a century earlier, some of the most common lantern images were skeletons, ghosts and devils. The very term 'magic' already linked the lantern with the black arts, and the fact that it required darkness encouraged such gruesome imagery. (11)

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<sup>5</sup> See Paul Radin's *The Trickster* for the complete Winnebago cycle of trickster tales.

Another association with magic continuing this preternatural view of cinema is found in the 1896 introduction of “Phantom Rides” (18). The cinematic variant of a carnival ride, a “Phantom Ride” consisted of the view from a camera mounted to the front of a moving object, most notably a train.

The trickster figure’s relationship to spirits also reminds one of early cinema’s affiliations with the supernatural. Filmmakers attempted to quash the demonic specters that haunted the cinema by introducing sacred imagery. Respectable citizens disdainfully met representations of that which should remain unrepresented in the cinematic images of Christ. Protestants roused much concern over the sacrilegious depictions of Christ until film directors started framing these representations under the guise of filmed passion plays (119-20). This inclusion of sacred images alongside the abstruse character of early cinema ironically appears similar to the split between the trickster’s sacrosanct and profane natures.

One can view the sacred and sacrilegious antinomies of early cinema in the interstice between realism and illusion in cinematic representations. The trickster’s dialectical truth lies in the interplay between uncanny magic and the antinomies of filmic truth and illusion, what Siegfried Kracauer in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* referred to as the realist and formative tendencies. Kracauer situates the realist tendency in the short views of the Lumière brothers, while the formative tendency employs cinematic magic tricks like those found in Georges Méliès films. Kracauer writes, “[T]hrough [Méliès’s] ingenuity in using these techniques he added a touch of cinema to the playful narratives and magic tricks...Illusion produced in this climate depended on another kind of craftsmanship than the magician’s. It was

cinematic illusion” (148). The playful trickiness of Méliès’s images predominantly emerges through the *mise-en-scène*, editing, and superimposing images.

In *Death 24x a Second*, Laura Mulvey demythologizes the distinctive boundaries Kracauer delineates. One can find, according to Mulvey, an uncanny magic in the realist images of the Lumière brothers. To make this leap, Mulvey examines an eerily sacred nature of the cinema in an amalgamation of the magic of optical illusions and the devil’s tricks. Mulvey writes,

As the economic and social conditions for a popular culture emerged during the nineteenth century, magicians and illusionists developed ‘the arts of deception’, appealing to human fascination with the unnatural, the impossible and, ultimately, the supernatural. The ideological mode of address adopted by these entrepreneurs would change over time. The dangerous, forbidden activities involved with summoning up the devil and his tricks gave way to other kinds of beliefs that, over and over again, tapped into the wide and changing variety of superstitions and beliefs associated with life after death. The cinema concentrated into itself a range of these pre-existing forms of illusion and entertainment. (33)

Engraving the devil’s signature on this new technology would haunt cinema; at the same time, this very act engenders an eerily sacrosanct nature to cinema that reminds one of tricksterism. Similarly, literary scholarship on the archetypal trickster figure equates the trickster with Lucifer, reading the Faust myth as a trickster tale in its own right.

Another connection between the reception of cinema and the trickster is the shared use of the symbol of the child. The figure of the child, cinematically frozen as the promise of future change and liberated from adult constraints, acts as a metaphor for the birth of cinema. Crossing permissible borders, children inhabit an interstitial position between their uncultured, primordial youth and the civilized nature brought on by adulthood. The particularities of this cinematic metaphor recapitulate the ways anthropologists and psychoanalysts initially viewed the Native American trickster figure

as “the reflection of an earlier, rudimentary stage of consciousness” (Jung 141). Some critical analyses of the trickster figure viewed it as a primitive character of indigenous antiquity. The demythologized belief that early cinema was primitive and the view that the trickster was a savage mythic figure connects the historical trajectories of both.

To discern the trickster/cinema/child constellation, one must look at the connection between the Indian and the child. Phillip J. Deloria notes,

The connections between Indians and children already had a long history, the two being paired rhetorically as natural, simple, naïve, preliterate, and devoid of self-consciousness. It was no accident that romantic literature often referred to Indians as children of nature and that they were denoted as childlike wards in their political relations with the U.S. government. Children, in turn, could be conceptualized as noble savages with equal ease. In 1904, the psychologist G. Stanley Hall endowed this conflation with scientific rigor, viewing the Indian-child connection through the lens of evolutionary biology. In his influential book *Adolescence*, Hall linked the stages of childhood development with the progressive evolution of human society from savagery to civilization. (106)

Hall refers to this development as recapitulation theory. The connections between the child and the Indian get recreated in the cinema, and the constellation evokes a trickster-like position. The cinema itself needed to grow from primitive cinema to narrative cinema, from the shocking aesthetics of the early cinema of attractions to narrative cinema, as Tom Gunning puts it. Noel Burch similarly calls this the turn from early film’s “Primitive Mode of Representation” to the sophistication of the “Institutional Mode of Representation” (Popple and Kember 33-5).

Later critiques would eventually overturn these “primitive” myths concerning both cinema and the Native American trickster figure. The trickster’s versatility and “maturation,” seemingly against conventional Western wisdom, teach life lessons to adults as well as children and retain the seeds for growth. Likewise, many studies into what film theorists originally called “primitive cinema” point out that the advanced

aesthetics that would transform into narrative cinema actually already exist in the cinema of attractions. Gunning's scholarship pertaining to the dialectic between narrative and spectacle in early film concludes that a synthesis between the two existed in films made well before narrative became the predominant mode. The advanced filmic tricks of the "cinema of attractions" during film's nascent years merely get subsumed into the narrative cinema we recognize today.

To further elaborate the constellation of the child/cinema/trickster, one turns to the connection between the child's curious gaze and the biological nature of the camera's eye. Like Dziga Vertov's kino-eye searching for "[t]he sensory exploration of the world through film," the creaturely trickster, aiming to reveal the gaps in reality, searches uncharted territory with a childlike gaze (14).<sup>6</sup> Vertov argues, "We therefore take as the point of departure the use of the camera as a kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space" (14-5). Walter Benjamin's seminal "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" lays the groundwork by which to view the camera's subjective nature via an identification with the camera's eye. Laura Mulvey's equally important "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema" emphasizes the gendered subjectivity of this identification. Jean-Louis Baudry in "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema" turns both to Plato's scene of the cave and Betram Lewin's hypothesis about the dream screen in order to infer that movie-goers resemble the chained prisoners, while the film screen is understood as the mother's breast. Baudry inverts truth's position in Plato's myth of the cave and repositions it in the shadows on the cave wall.

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<sup>6</sup> Vertov distinguishes between the mechanical eye versus the human eye, arguing that the mechanical eye shames the human eye by the way in which it captures reality.

This trickster-like move involves the subjective identification with the cinematic image and its ideological underpinnings. Other film scholars from Daniel Dayan to Kaja Silverman delve into the ideological and psychoanalytic effects of suture, the various means by which film beckons the viewer to identify with the camera and/or onscreen images. Nevertheless, none of these studies examine the relationship between the camera's eye and the figure of the child.<sup>7</sup>

Vicky Lebeau's *Childhood and Cinema* does offer an extended analysis of the child and its connection to the camera. Lebeau writes,

[T]he (sometimes elusive) sense that the domain of the visual has a privileged relation to the mind of the child is fundamental to the study of the ties between cinema and childhood. 'That is the cinema', as Edgar Morin insisted in 1956. 'What it is concerned with and what interests it is the mind in its infancy.' (13-4)

Conceiving cinema as a child's mind suggests a connection to psychoanalysis, which Lebeau almost begins to develop. Lebeau continues,

Closer to the state of infancy, or *infans* (literally, without language), the small child tends to be discovered at the limit of what words can be called upon to tell, or to mean—a limit that then generates the questions of how to convey the child's experience in language, of what in that experience, of what *in the image*, falls outside of, and so resists, the world of words. By contrast, when it comes to the representation of the child, cinema, with its privileged access to the perceptual, its visual and aural richness, would seem to have the advantage: closer to perception, it can come closer to the child. (16)

Lebeau maintains that the camera's perceptive stance resembles that of the child.

Locating the camera in the realm of childhood, an ambiguous world of innocence, guilt, and beauty; Lebeau inadvertently gives credence to the notion that cinema itself recreates the world through a child's eye. This reminds one of Hegel's inverted world

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<sup>7</sup> See Daniel Dayan's "The Tudor Code" and Kaja Silverman's "On Suture" from *The Semiotics of the Text*.

where everything gets turned upside-down. Hegel deems this world—a trickster's world if one ever existed—a necessary step on the dialectical journey.

Despite the lack of any nods to Lacanian psychoanalysis, Lebeau almost seems to connect Lacan's tripartite structure of all being and the child's relationship to it by extrapolating her understanding of the camera's subjectivity. If the camera's eye brings us closer to the child's eye and the audience gets sutured into the film by identifying with the sensory perceptions of an infant, as Lebeau indicates, then the spectator identifies with the childlike fascination captured in the Imaginary in order to misrecognize itself in the on-screen image. Yet, representing the camera's view as a wandering infant's perception of the world, one wonders how the spectator gets sutured into the film: with what would s/he identify? The infant, pre-mirror stage, struggles in its attempt to straddle two of Lacan's three registers: the Imaginary and the Real. Lebeau suggests that the child's actual experience with language exposes the gap in the child's communicative abilities. The child's inability to construct linguistically meaningful sentences/images elevates the importance of the Imaginary, but her insistence on "what *in the image*, falls outside of, and so resists, the world of words," or, to put it differently, that which resists signification in the social symbolic, venerates the Imaginary Real in the child's experience. The interstice between the Imaginary and the Real of childhood experience allows complex readings of cinematic representations of children and provokes peculiar instances of humor even among the most traumatic depictions.

Lebeau maintains that the camera's sensory perception brings the viewer closer to the perception of the *infans*, and this raises questions about the relationship between the child and the Imaginary. Lacan's seminal "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the /

Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” interrogates the way in which a child gets propelled into its historical subject position through an imaginary identification with its own image. Lacan writes, in a particularly telling passage concerning the function of the mirror stage,

This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual’s formation into history: the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an orthopedic form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. (*E* 78)

The child finds its own subjectivity in the “fragmented image of the body” by *misrecognizing* the reflected image as a totality. This “lure of spatial identification” ultimately brings the child into language, the symbolic order, and, in turn, history itself.

The intersection of the Real and the imago that the child misrecognizes, the ideal ego that the (O)ther projects for it onto the fragmented mirror image, highlights an unobtainable goal that initiates the child on its quest to become the totality that the (O)ther believes it should become. This ideal ego, instantiated by the parents, continues to haunt the child as it tries to become that which the (O)ther desires. Hence, Lacan’s maxim that “one’s desire is the desire of the Other” gains its effectivity. The metaphoric child situated as the camera, lacking the words necessary to make connections, underscores the imaginary realm, and it is “not for nothing” that many of the images that get captured by filmmakers and photographers reveal that which slips between the gaps of the hegemonic social order. Numerous films involving children unearth the traumatic dimensions that usually fall outside the limits of the sayable and transform into what Rancière calls “the intolerable image.” I would add that it usually takes trickster

consciousness to interpret “the intolerable image” as a meaningful political message that shatters and resituates the social symbolic order for many viewers.

One might ask how images of children can cause such a fissure in the social reality of viewers. Rancière in *Film Fables* bifurcates the cinematic child into a dual position. He writes, “The child in cinema oscillates between two roles, traditionally playing either the victim of a violent world or the mischievous observer that takes itself too seriously” (16). Further on, the terms “child” and “animal” appear interchangeable, as when Rancière contends, “There is no denying that infancy is disarming. In either one of his twin figures, as pitiable or mischievous, the little animal was tailor made to reveal the world’s brutality and falsehood with the guile of innocence” (63). The connection between children and animals unearths the trickster dynamic at work in this wily constellation. The camera captures images of children in this dual role as “pitiable or mischievous” in order to expose the caesuras of the social symbolic, to reveal creaturely life.

Twisting another thread onto this trickster tapestry, Adorno suggests that the connection between the child and the animal exposes a fundamental layer of art. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno writes,

In its clownishness, art consolingly recollects prehistory in the primordial world of animals. Apes in the zoo together perform what resemble clown routines. The collusion of children with clowns is a collusion with art, which adults drive out of them just as they drive out their collusion with animals. Human beings have not succeeded in so thoroughly repressing their likeness to animals that they are unable in an instant to recapture it and be flooded with joy; the language of little children and animals seems to be the same. In the similarity of clowns to animals the likeness of humans to apes flashes up; the constellation animal/fool/clown is a fundamental layer of art. (119)

If, indeed, adults try to drive out the childish joys and the childish trickster creates a fundamental layer of art, the figure of the child retains a connection to the trickster.

Native Americans told trickster tales to children, and this also occurs in cinema, as production companies and artists saw children as their target market for animated trickster incarnations from Windsor McCay's shorts to Walt Disney and Warner Brother's cartoons. Technological advances in cinema saw more trickster tales adapted into films, ranging from the early animation of J. Stuart Blackton's *Humorous Phases of Faces* (1906) and McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) to Disney's first live-action animation film, *Song of the South* (1946). This trend of cinema catering to children through comedy and trickster manifestations still continues today with three-dimensional (3-D) images becoming more affordable and the creation of Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI). The first fully computer-generated film, Disney-Pixar's *Toy Story* (1995), exhibits its own trickster characteristics, and many recent films utilizing this technology bring the trickster to the screen.

Walt Disney's role in this trickster constellation is quite important. Esther Leslie point out that section ten of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," wherein unconscious optics becomes a way to save the decay of the artistic aura, Benjamin originally entitled "Mickey Mouse." Benjamin locates the optical unconscious of cinema in Mickey Mouse, Disney's animated trickster mascot. If one can locate the optical unconscious in one of popular culture's most pervasive trickster incarnations, can one also locate a trickster aura, waning as one would expect, in the cinema?

### **A Cine-Trickster Aura: Film's Formal Properties in Fragments**

Cinema's formal properties, its foundational building blocks, create a trickster figure in its own right; however, one needs trickster discursive strategies to understand

it. Using Vizenor's trickster hermeneutics, we can locate the trickster within the oral performer, the trickster sign(s), and the participant audience. In filmic terms, the oral performance becomes the dialogue/sound/acting; the trickster signs become the mise-en-scène/editing/cinematography; and the participant audience becomes film spectators. The creaturely trickster sign, mechanically woven into the film through various means, exposes the gaps within both the viewer's symbolic order and the ideological structures that intersect with the hegemonic worldview. Similar to the way Vizenor in his own writing translates the trickster's oral performance to the written word, the trickster sign burns onto celluloid and eternally freezes the trickster in the moving image.

We need to return to Benjamin's seminal "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" to delineate the trickster's complex relationship to unconscious optics. Benjamin argues that the rise of capitalism and the advent of mechanical reproducibility inaugurate the decay of an artwork's "aura," the unique distance between observer and artwork. Benjamin ultimately redeems the waning of the aura by locating the optical unconscious within the camera's subjective gaze. If, as previous psychoanalytic scholarship pertaining to the trickster suggests, the trickster actually does exist crossculturally in the unconscious, can a trickster's aura be located within unconscious optics? Moreover, while the manifest content of the image steers viewers to seek out trickster traits, can such a trickster aura pertain to the latent content of the image?

The fragmented nature of the cine-trickster in the age of mechanical reproduction recalls the decay of the aura that Benjamin stresses. Armed with Vizenor's trickster

discourse, I contend that Benjamin's major points seem appropriate to tracking the waning of the trickster's sacrosanct importance within cinema. Cinema, with its bag of visual tricks, fragments reality even before we arrive at the mechanical reproduction that Benjamin claims can liberate the masses. Similarly, a trickster's aura gets fragmented when other cultures appropriate the figure.

The creaturely cine-trickster creates an enigma via its fragmented nature from which art works its way through dialectical contradictions. Adorno expounds upon this in *Aesthetic Theory*, when he observes,

The enigmaticalness of artworks remains bound up with history. It was through history that they became an enigma. . . . All artworks—and art altogether—are enigmas; since antiquity this has been an irritation to the theory of art. That artworks say something and in the same breath conceal it expresses this enigmaticalness from the perspective of language. This characteristic cavorts clownishly. (AT 120)

The enigma moves through cinema, which shapeshifts playfully like the trickster; moreover, the trickster also emerges in cinema precisely because of the ambiguous nature of images and the various interpretive strategies employed to read them.

The numerous hermeneutic strategies used to read a cinematic image opens the door to recognizing the trickster's wily presence lurking amid film's formal properties. Adorno continues, "The enigma of artworks is their fracturedness. If transcendence were present in them, they would be mysteries, not enigmas; they are enigmas because, through their fracturedness, they deny what they would actually like to be" (AT 126). Alluding to this enigma, Adorno later states, "The afterlife of artworks, their reception as an aspect of their own history, transpires between a do-not-let-yourself-be-understood and a wanting-to-be-understood; this tension is the atmosphere inhabited by art" (AT 302). The cinematic image stands as the apotheosis of this enigmatic tension,

recalling the trickster's dualism and inevitable shifts that thwart efforts to pin it down. The camera, fracturing and fragmenting reality, captures the trickster. The camera's cinematographic effects divvy out the fragmented nature of reality much like a child experiences geographical and temporal space: the close-ups, zooms, edits, and other cinematic tricks twist time "out of joint." A chiasmic trickster nature burns onto the celluloid, and the dialectical tensions inherent in an image engender a cine-trickster aura.

The infinite playfulness that the trickster brings with him as he cobbles the fragments of reality together creates the possibility of trickster resistance within the artwork itself. Questions regarding the tricky nature of cinema recapitulate problems that troubled and haunted the historical avant-garde. Peter Bürger writes, "The resistance that Adorno believes he discovers in art and that is compelled to take on ever new forms can hardly be found there. It remains the positioning of a critical subject which, because it thinks dialectically, can perceive the positive in the negative" (61). Bürger's compelling thesis that the historical avant-garde movements sought to destroy art as an institution remains quite important, but his criticisms of Adorno eschew the possibility that avant-garde art contains any liberating potential. Rancière, on the other hand, contends that the political traces already exist in the aesthetics of an artwork. It does require a community of spectators capable of utilizing hermeneutic strategies to comprehend their politics, but that does not mean that political resistance does not already exist within the aesthetics of artworks. These works both say the unsayable and obfuscate their meanings from viewers.

Surrealist film, highlighting dream rather than narrative logic, adds another layer of nuance to this debate. These films force the audience to construct meaning out of the juxtaposition of seemingly unconnected images, thereby simulating a notion of chance: trickster chance. The schism between the dream and narrative logic harkens back to the distinctions between the latent and manifest content; both logics get revealed on the screen with cuts that one can view as unconscious chance encounters. As many theorists have pointed out, surrealist films exhibit a trace of narrative logic, one constructed by an audience's active interaction with the shots. However much these elements masquerade as trickster chance, their careful construction actually denotes the opposite, "their painstaking calculation," as Bürger puts it (67). The distinctions between trickster kismet and the construction of texts blur in surrealist cinema, as well as in recent works that interrogate the interstices between chaos theory and textual production. Bringing order to the trickster's chaos, artists write or edit texts in such a way as to begin to explain the chiasmic turns under the aegis of nonlinear dynamic systems theory. If the spectator understood them as unconscious connections on the part of the creator, she needs to use hermeneutic strategies that place them in the position of the critical subject that Bürger argues Adorno requires for resistance to occur.

If, indeed, a ubiquitous creaturely trickster aura proliferates in cinema, how would one begin to parcel it out? Turning to an American avant-garde film helps us delineate cine-trickster hermeneutic strategies. American surrealist artist and filmmaker Joseph Cornell, recognized more for his boxes than his forays into film, invigorates some of his surrealist found-footage films by exhibiting what one can understand as a creaturely

trickster aesthetic. The animal montage film “Carousel-Animal Opera,” for instance, underscores his cine-trickster acrobatics as zoo animals heterogeneously move as if caught up in the music’s rhythm. Bruce Posner observes that this film “transforms a run-of-the-mill zoo film into a moving visual symphony regarding the nature of interrelatedness and survival in the world.” The film begins with the image of an elephant donning a giant masquerade mask and using its trunk to spin the handle of a rather large jack-in-the-box to set the stage for the cornucopia of animal images that follow. Two giraffes approach the camera as though they know something will soon happen, and then the shot of the elephant opening the jack-in-the-box plays again. The film then cuts to monkeys entering a cage to perform circus tricks, replete with unicycles, pogo sticks, seesaws and trapezes. Following an image of one monkey clapping his hands ecstatically while another smiles as if to laugh at their creaturely playfulness, the viewer gets bombarded with shot after shot of zoo animals.

Characteristic of trickster tales, the ambiguous nature of the animal images leaves the viewer bewildered. Underneath the façade of animal fur and leathery skin, these caged animals unearth the desire for trickster chance, whether one reads it as a chance encounter with the camera, a chance to break free from captivity, or a chance to exhibit their creaturely side (even corporeal and beastly at times as revealed by a shot of fighting zebras). The film ends with a shot of pelicans on a sidewalk, the trees above separating them from industrial buildings. The mostly light-hearted jocularity of the animal images gives the film what I call a creaturely cine-trickster aura precisely because the film also presents the viewer with a view of animal life that runs counter to our expectations concerning the zoo experience. The film unearths an aesthetics of

ambiguity that forces the viewer to look beyond the playfulness of the animals and piece together a larger argument concerning the caged reality of animals and our own human relationship to them.

In some of his other films Cornell splices together snippets of newsreels and found footage to create collage films that act as on-screen trickster performances. These are replete with sacrosanct inversions, images of children, and playful editing. While not all of these films exhibit Native American iconography, *The Children's Jury* (1938) does include footage of Indians dancing in ritual dress. This particular film utilizes montage in a way that can easily confuse viewers, and this adds to Cornell's strange aesthetics of ambiguity, a trickster-like aesthetic par excellence.

The mise-en-scène in this film connotes a trickster position. Cornell juxtaposes images of Native Americans, clowns, and children with shots of industry that cinematically captures Adorno's dialectic of Enlightenment, pitting as it does primitive barbarism against the civilizing effects of modernization. Introducing *The Children's Jury* on the DVD collection *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film (1894-1941)*, Posner comments,

Images of children, clowns, animals and Native Americans collide with snippets from travel, adventure, novelty, and industrial films. Many of the collage-editing effects were produced during the 1920s and 1930s. Here the resultant conjunctions effect [sic] a surreal nostalgia that remains inexplicable.<sup>8</sup>

The Native American iconography tips off the viewer that the trickster might come wandering across the screen. Moreover, other discursive carnivalesque elements included here underscore the trickster's importance.

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<sup>8</sup> See *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film (1894-1941)* Disc Two: *The Devil's Plaything: American Surrealism*.

As with the *mise-en-scène*, the editing of the found footage instantiates a creaturely trickster position. This occurs through Cornell's use of montage. The editing of these images, drastic juxtapositions that act like shock cuts, recapitulates the dialectic of progress and myth. Cornell evokes the reality of deforestation with two safari hunters clinging to a tree branch before cutting to an image of forest workers chopping down a tree. After including a few shots of urban life and an image of a pianist, Cornell dialectically juxtaposes tractors and elephants as each pull logs out of the jungle. These images signify the barbarism of industrialization, and this appears just before circus elephants and clowns putting on make-up appear on-screen. These snippets from carnival life serve as a counterpoint to the industrial urban scenes that follow; but the film even more overtly resists the myth of progress once Cornell splices in the images of Native Americans dancing at a stadium. The Native American segment concludes with a low angle following shot of a zeppelin flying above a skyscraper and a teepee. The camera pans from left to right to reveal the top of the skyscraper in the background and the teepee in the foreground appearing at the same height. This constructs an argument that the realm of Native American myth appears equivalent to the icon of industrialization, the skyscraper. These shots convey a collision between "primitivism" and industrialization that forces the viewer to see the interstices and caesuras between the two dialectical concepts.

How can editing, and montage in particular, elicit a creaturely trickster position that resists hegemony? Bürger says of montage, "Within the frame of a theory of the avant-garde, the use to which film puts the concept cannot become relevant because it is part and parcel to the medium" (76-7). While I agree with Bürger's point, I contend that one

can view cinematic editing and montage as a gesture towards a trickster performance. Sergei Eisenstein characteristically juxtaposed images to create “art as conflict,” presenting the Hegelian dialectic at play through the “thesis-antithesis-synthesis” model. The cuts give rise to images crossing temporal and geographical boundaries in ways that can either create the conflict purported in the dialectical montage or construct a rhythm or flow, as Vertov introduces in his theory of the interval.

The manipulation of sounds in relation to the construction of the image-track adds to the trickster’s positioning in Cornell’s film. One should add the contrapuntal sound to the list of trickster characteristics. The sound montage of this film jars the viewer into becoming painfully aware of this disconnect between the on-screen images and the manipulations of sound. The film begins with a title frame and circus music playing. It then cuts to the image of two safari hunters clutching onto a tree branch while a “narrator” explains a situation about a wealthy man going to the mountains. The “narrator” gets cut short by a snippet of an orchestra as the film cuts to two men sawing down a tree. This shot lasts for mere seconds before the song changes again and a male voice sings, “For that’s the ten cent movie show, where all the lights were turned down low. John and Flo are right at home, just as though they were alone, and every little movie had a meaning.” When this song begins playing, there is a cut to an image of three trucks pulling out of a station. The inclusion of this sound bite invites one to believe that movies should contain a meaning, but the ambiguity in the asynchronous sound montage already alerts the viewer that *The Children’s Jury* will thwart this convention.

Cornell cuts from the three trucks to the image of a pianist sitting next to a piano. The voice on the soundtrack, apparently belonging to the man on screen, states, “I was born with the gift of singing as a bird, and the scientists have discovered that the reason for this is in—”. He is cut short by a voice singing, “Lola in jungle-land,” and the image cuts to an elephant’s backside. The notion of a human voice singing like a bird recurs later in an image of the pianist with a female singer standing behind the piano, while the viewer hears the sound of the chirping bird. This use of disjunctive sound evokes laughter.

The images of industry during the first half of the film are accompanied with the contrapuntal sounds of voices mimicking barnyard animals and other “primitive” jungle sounds. However, the first time that the railway train, the apotheosis of industrialization, graces the screen, the folk ballad of Casey Jones plays. While not synchronized sound, this song about the infamous railroad engineer appears to be the only time throughout the film in which the image track and the soundtrack work in tandem to produce a coherent message, one concerning the dialectic of Enlightenment. This excerpt from the ballad of Casey Jones, taken from the original 1909 lyrics, recounts Casey Jones departing for his final train ride as if he knew that he would not survive the trip. This song, while whimsical, ironically casts an incriminating gaze upon the locomotive in a way that further situates this found footage film in the tradition of the dialectic of Enlightenment.

The contrapuntal sound continues throughout the rest of the film. The sounds switch between those supposedly belonging to animals and snippets of songs that work to create a tension between myth and Enlightenment thought. Cornell’s ability to

playfully utilize the sound in this political way enables the creaturely trickster's presence to make itself known. The jarring sound draws so much attention to itself that the viewer must pay attention to the way in which the sound actually functions in the film. It flies in the face of the rhythm of the image-montage and resists the images in order to jolt the viewer awake, to force the spectator to become a participant in the production of meaning.

This analysis of Cornell's *The Children's Jury* underscores its trickster aura; nevertheless, I must simultaneously maintain that the film's trickster machinations will remain undetected by someone with an untrained eye. The film's formal properties work together to engender this creaturely cine-trickster aura, a shadow-presence of resistance lurking on the margins of the film. Cornell's film allows for the dialectic of Enlightenment to continue its Bacchanalian whirl within the audience because it lacks a coherent message. The wily positioning of the images and sounds opens up an enclave of enigmatic tension, which allows for multiple readings of the film. The images of Native Americans, children, clowns, and industry—laced with contrapuntal sound—bombard the spectator with its ambiguous message.

The power of film's formal properties to uncannily instigate creaturely trickster transactions opens up a possible space in which the trickster can simultaneously exist at the margins and the center of the cinematic experience. The enigmatic characteristics of film and cinema's own historical trajectory position the medium as a creaturely trickster *par excellence*. Film is replete with disordered order, sacrosanct reversals, comedic tomfoolery, and political boundary crossing. The lines of permissible thought

emerge from the distribution of the sensible, and the realm of images adheres to these regulations. The cine-trickster conversely attempts to barrel through them.

CHAPTER 4  
DREAMS THAT DADAISTS CAN BUY:  
HANS RICHTER'S TRICKSTERISM AND THE AVANT-GARDE

We [Dadaists] were forced to look for something which would re-establish our humanity. What we needed to find was a “balance between heaven and hell,” a new unity combining chance and design.

—Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art*

Personally, I could easily decide to do without rules and logic in the world of images; the wonderful barbarism of such a possibility delights me—finally primal world, nature, untouched land. Sentences cannot be made illogical without killing them, but why should images, which have no absolute value as such, burden themselves with logic?

—René Clair, G: Journal for Elemental Form Creation

After tracking the trickster in early cinema, I turn my attention to the ways in which the trickster continues to wind its way against the dominant modes of production, through the cinematic avant-garde. While not what one conventionally considers humorous, avant-garde films exalt chicanery via the use of cinematographic tricks, playful mise-en-scène, and boundary-breaking politics. Avant-garde filmmakers engender a mischievous alternative to the hegemonic view of cinema while they also attempt to produce cinema that becomes more conscious of itself and its transformative powers. The laughter that gets provoked by some avant-garde films seems to correspond with the Bergsonian laughter that escapes one's lips when an uncanny fear passes, and the foreignness of the images and their juxtapositions force audiences to acknowledge the medium's formal properties.

Viewed under a creaturely trickster lens, the films of the historical avant-garde clearly attempt to stray from the predominant narrative cinema. Subverting the hegemonic rules of narrative cinema, avant-garde artists carve out a space for a

counter-aesthetic in order to supplant bourgeois notions regarding autonomous art. It stands to reason that the historical avant-garde acts as does the trickster, bumbling its way with a passion to change artistic practice and discourse.

Because of its nascent state when these counter-movements emerged in turn of the century Europe, cinema remains one medium that gets the least attention in discussions concerning the avant-garde. This is partly due to the fact that fine artists, namely painters and sculptors, created the films that belong to the canon of avant-garde cinema; therefore, scholars sifted through the studies of fine art in lieu of contending with the cinematic aspects on their own terms. Relegated to the margins of the discourse, avant-garde cinema received scant attention at first; nevertheless, this would all change when modern artists and theorists began to view cinema as the medium that might best shock the world with its capacity to reach the masses.<sup>1</sup>

The institutional accounts of the historical avant-garde movements, cinematic, painterly, or otherwise, consistently present artists filled with a desire to transform and subvert modern bourgeois existence. As Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) attests, avant-garde artists typically refused constraints of any sort, crossing boundaries that would render them renegades. Rebellious, unruly, anarchic, destructive, and deviant, avant-garde artists, upending traditions, sought radical social and artistic change. These aesthetic movements—cubism, Dadaism, futurism, and surrealism among the most well-known—share a bond with trickster's chaotic nature. Reading avant-garde cinema under a creaturely trickster hermeneutic lens, I posit that avant-

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<sup>1</sup> Malcom Turvey argues against the shocking affect of early cinema and, more importantly, uses the historical European avant-garde as one of the few examples that actually proves this thesis. Turvey argues that his few examples from the avant-garde do not substantiate the overabundance of scholarly material that takes the "modernity thesis," as he refers to it, seriously.

garde movements such as Dadaism and surrealism act in ways similar to the wayfaring trickster. This is especially the case in light of new research that situates avant-garde artists in ways different than scholarship traditionally has done.

### **Avant-Garde Chicanery: An Unconscious Trickster Phalanx**

Matei Calinescu traces the lineage of the term “avant-garde” in artistic circles back to a discussion of French poetry in the sixteenth century. He also underscores the fact that the term became popularized during the Middle Ages (97-8). At that time, the “avant-garde” was understood as “a military term denoting an advanced group forging an assault on the enemy ahead of the main army” (O’Pray 3). While the standard line of reasoning about the histories of the avant-garde follows that the movements vehemently attacked the Enlightenment faith in rationality that culminated in World War I, the “main army” approaching behind these artists was comprised of critical theorists. While it would be some time before “the owl of Minerva would set sail” and Adorno and Horkheimer would outline these vicissitudes in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, these avant-garde artists and filmmakers attacked the belief in progress that resulted in the war rubble that surrounded them. As Hal Foster contends in *The Return of the Real*, those movements enacted a mimetic dimension that gets lost in many analyses, including in Bürger’s seminal text. These artists’s works doubly predict the impending problems engendered by the Enlightenment belief in progress, technological and otherwise. Kracauer states in his retrospective critique of Weine’s expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) that it predicts the rise of Nazism, and, similarly, avant-garde artists, politically engaged, imbued their artistic efforts with a subversive edge that would attempt to reconstitute a new social order.

The trickster's wily behavior and the aims popularized by the institutional histories of the avant-garde concatenate. Amos Vogel's seminal *Film as a Subversive Art* (1974) lays out the political and aesthetic arguments about the historical avant-gardes in order to underscore the significance of the neo-avant-garde that emerges in the mid-century. In this text, a compendium of films inaccessible to many moviegoers, Vogel's discussion of movements does not venture far into theoretical territory, and one should note that it glosses over the films in ways that many scholars have done for years. Vogel examines the anti-art aesthetic of dada, emphasizing its proclivity to illuminate objects outside of their commonplace reality, and he interrogates the shocking mise-en-scène of surrealist cinema that sought to destroy every rational aspect of bourgeois society. Vogel glosses over these aesthetic groups in order to formulate his larger argument regarding the subversive nature of cinema; however, he primarily concerns himself with cinematic images and narratives that break religious and social taboos of the time.

The historical avant-garde movements embraced internationalism to disseminate their aesthetic ideals. Dadaism, for example, arose in Zurich, but artists from various countries comprised the group (Turvey FML 77). The fact that international artists collaborated to establish these groups also helps explain why so many inherent contradictions would exist as to the particular aims of each movement. Embracing internationalism, these avant-garde artists also meander between the various counter-culture groups and borrow willy-nilly from each. The institutional histories of these movements make claims about them that the films made during this period actually tend to contradict. This is outlined in Malcolm Turvey's *The Filming of Modern Life: European Avant-Garde Film of the 1920s* (2011). Turvey's close reading of a handful of avant-

garde films challenges institutional film history. The ways in which the cinematic avant-garde contradicts what scholars inform us about the avant-garde act as a platform to cross the thorny chasm connecting avant-garde cinema to trickster acrobatics.

Similar to the trickster, each movement gets relegated to the margins of its time, despite the decisive influence they had on later artists. Most of the cinematic avant-garde tricks originated in “primitive” films, and the avant-garde artists surgically examined them at great lengths, remediating them, if you will, for a new audience. Unremittingly, these avant-garde techniques assume newer “cutting-edge” functions as artists continually remediate them for audiences who may not know the initial sources of these techniques. For this reason, the historical avant-garde has garnered much attention from film and new media scholars as of late, which makes my exploration of the creaturely trickster working within the cinematic avant-garde all the more timely.

It should not go unnoticed that the use of the term “primitive” recalls the derogatory nature of the word that continually haunted the trickster figure and his unruly antics. In Wanda Strauven’s “From ‘Primitive Cinema’ to ‘Marvelous’” she introduces her “New Plea for the Term ‘Primitive’” by discussing avant-garde cinema as well as primitive cinema and its relationship to Futurism, the movement she speculates might have been unconsciously inspired by early trick films. Strauven writes,

Whether or not the Futurist manifesto played an effective role in the (re)discovery of “primitive” tricks, is difficult to say; but the effects of “trickality” re-emerged, quite systematically, in film experiments of the 1920s is a fact. . . . Avant-garde films from the 1920s . . . still today seem to express the desire to transgress the dominant film grammar, in short, to go against the norm. The effects of “trickality” should therefore not simply be seen as a return to the origins, to the “early” (years of) cinema, but rather as a return to the “otherness” of that cinema, of the “primitive mode of representation” (PMR), as a reaction against the dominant mode of representation of their time. It is rather a return to “primitive” cinema than to “early” cinema, in that it is not a temporal, but a stylistic (or grammatical) matter.

In other words, a “primitive” trick is not necessarily a trick of early cinema, but a trick that marks the otherness or alterity, the deviation from the norm, exactly as it was promoted in the 1910s by the Futurists. (108)

Strauven creates a constellation of avant-garde cinema, primitive cinema, and “trickality,” but she does not include the boundary-breaking trickster figure transgressing societal norms in this figuration. Shifting aesthetic norms to create alternative forms to acceptable art, the avant-garde movements at the turn of the century acted similar to the trickster figure proper, even more so in terms of cinema, pushing otherness and alterity to new levels.

The central filmmakers of the avant-garde come from various backgrounds. The usual suspects that get lumped together in this group include Hans Richter, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Viking Eggeling, Fernand Léger, Dudley Murphy, Francis Picabia, René Clair, Walter Ruttmann, Oskar Fischinger, Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Salvador Dalí, and Luis Buñuel. However, this group consists of artists that have aesthetic and political concerns that run counter to any over-arching claims that one can make about the group. For this reason, I need to limit myself to an exploration of one of these artists. A study of the filmmaker known for making the first experimental film will underscore the trickster’s position in relationship to the avant-garde. Richter’s contributions within and between modernist counter-culture groups, I contend, reveal how the creaturely trickster maneuvers within the ebbs and flows of avant-garde cultural production.

A focus on Richter will also raise significant questions regarding the relationship between the historical avant-garde and its return in the neo-avant-garde. Foster contends that the American neo-avant-garde enacted the historical avant-garde for the first time by way of Freudian deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*). Foster claims that the

avant-garde always already returns from the future because disruptive avant-garde art cannot influence society as it showcases gaps in the symbolic order (29). The repetition compulsion perpetuating an avant-garde aesthetic, he argues, fragments the causal logic of these artworks so that they return to the fabric of the social symbolic from a future moment already anticipating them. Foster's theoretically rich assessment, however, does not include certain European artists whose relocation to America evoked an encounter with alterity that renders the neo-avant-garde artworks repetitions of a peculiar order. For example, Richter, crossing the Atlantic, bridges the gap between the historical avant-garde and its repetition in the neo-avant-garde in terms of surrealism and in his influence on a generation of American experimental and underground filmmakers. Richter escaped World War II by making his way to the U.S. only to find America lacking a thriving underground art scene. Inevitably, he would rectify this situation as he went on to produce the neo-surrealist feature-length film, *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947), collaborating with some of the forefathers of avant-garde cinema: Man Ray, Duchamp, Léger, and Max Ernst. Foster maintains that the avant-garde returns from the future in order to challenge the belief that the neo-avant-garde movements are always shoddy imitations of their politically-minded originals; nevertheless, Richter, artistic hands dabbling in many political counter-culture movements, presides as a central figure initiating this eternal return of dadaist/surrealist aesthetics in post-war American neo-avant-garde art scenes.

Before beginning an analysis of Richter, I need to touch on the dada movement, one of the biggest influences on surrealism. Traditional views of dada situate its beginnings in 1916 Zurich with a group of nihilistic artists and poets who wished to

destroy bourgeois ideas about art and create anti-art. Dada artists, such as Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, and Francis Picabia, viewed the corruption within bourgeois society as the impetus for the destructive impulses around them; they wished to attack these norms in order to right the world. Some scholars of the avant-garde equate dada with anarchy, destruction, and disorder, buzzwords that pertain to the wily trickster. Dadaist poet, Tzara, with his strategies of subversion, which included nonsense and contradiction, is understood as exemplifying dadaism; however, Tzara's practices conflicted with the aims of other dada artists. As Turvey writes, "Time and again we find former Dadaists insisting that Dada was also *constructive*, that it aimed not merely to destroy but to create something new, lasting, and valuable, despite the public rhetoric of the movement" (FML 18-9). Resituating the boundaries of art by destroying them, dadaists perform trickster transactions, as Richter's overdetermined "dadaist" films and writings effectively illustrate.

Creating another connection to the trickster, the term dada itself acts as a signifier of ambiguity. However, some of the humorous associations with dada slip through the cracks when scholars reduce it to a baleful force. The term

was adopted as the name for the movement because, as one of its founders, the poet Hugo Ball, wrote in his diary on April 18 of that year, 'Dada is "yes, yes" in Rumanian, "rocking horse" and "hobbyhorse" in French. For Germans it is a sign of foolish naïveté, joy in procreation and preoccupation with the baby carriage"' (77-8).

The whimsical ambiguity in its name underscores the playful potential of dadaism.

A fusion of the aims of Dadaism with a new understanding of the unconscious engendered surrealist art. Conjoining psychoanalysis with dadaism, surrealist artists incorporate unconscious optics and dream imagery into their work, which maintain its subversive edge, at least in its inchoate European stages. In America, however,

surrealism would assume a rather different form, which I will explore within the context of Richter's work. The tenuous distinctions between Dadaism and surrealism lie in the inclusion of psychoanalysis in the latter. Richter, however, dabbling in both practices, anachronistically incorporated a surrealist aesthetic into his dadaist cultural production, and he added psychoanalytic concepts to his dada art.

### **Richter's Trickster Elixir: Dadaism/Surrealism Upended**

Richter is one avant-garde figure who stands out as the apotheosis of the trickster. Like the trickster, he traverses geographical borders, at once in touch with the pulse of these movements and marginalized. His wanderings brought him to various cities, including Munich, Zurich, Paris, and Moscow, which gave him a privileged vantage point from which to view the aesthetic fluctuations of a multitude of avant-garde practices (Alter 223). Paradoxically, his dallying with various artistic groups, from Zurich dada to international constructivism, instead of underscoring his importance in modernism, made him practically invisible in older histories of modernism. As Stephen C. Foster argues in "Hans Richter: Prophet of Modernism," "One stands to learn less about Richter from modernism than one does about modernism from Richter; that is, ironically enough, while modernism makes Richter smaller, Richter makes modernism larger" (9). One might attribute Richter's marginalization to the fact that he stood at the center of the G-group, a collective of artists who between 1923 and 1926 contributed to the short-lived avant-garde journal *G*, short for *Gestaltung*. The G-group's pell-mell of avant-garde artists gets subsumed into the histories of other movements because its members never solidified into a recognizable whole. *G* stands out as one of the earliest avant-garde journals to explore all forms of modern visual culture, from architecture to film (Dimendberg 53). Its final installment, originally planned as two issues, focuses

solely on film and showcases writing by international avant-garde filmmakers. In this way, Richter, much like the trickster, gets positioned as a liminal figure in these institutional histories despite his location at the communal core.

Another reason one can view Richter as a trickster figure lies in his peculiar relationship to dadaism. A dada aesthetic, even after the (anti-)movement officially ended in 1922, pervades his films to such an extent that Richter anachronistically calls his subsequent abstract work dada art. Turvey, in both his aforementioned book and “Dada Between Heaven and Hell: Abstraction and Universal Language in the *Rhythm* Films of Hans Richter,” argues that Richter stays faithful to a functionalist definition of dada, one that relies on balancing antinomies. This maneuver is reminiscent of the trickster’s mediating ways. Richter also believed in a high level of chance in his work, which doubly renders Richter’s art a form of tricksterism. A playful dada spirit haunts Richter’s cultural productions, not only right after dada’s demise but also throughout Richter’s life as each of his films exposes this aesthetic.

Richter’s early career as a painter showcases trickster chance and inversion. Rebellious against his father’s desire for him to become an architect, Richter began his artistic career as a painter. While the trajectory of his filmic output moves from abstraction to representation, his paintings move inversely from representation to abstraction, as Nora Alter mentions, and this move towards abstraction in his paintings brings unconscious chance onto the canvas (228). Richter describes his reasons for this move in *Dada Art and Anti-Art* (1965), which outlines an artistic vision verging on tricksterism. In 1917, Richter began painting what he would refer to as “visionary

portraits” in the twilight when he couldn’t completely distinguish between the colors he brushed onto the canvas. He viewed this as a form of liberation from any preconceived notions and social constraints that occluded “absolute freedom.” Viewing these spontaneous flourishes as an elaboration of the essence of dada, Richter states, “The more freedom I allowed myself, the more I allowed the unconscious to be governed by chance, the more my reaction grew. What I tried to find was not the chaos but its opposite, an order in which the human mind had its place and in which it could flow freely” (as qtd. in DAA 20). This movement from a seemingly unconscious chaos to order reveals a shadowy trickster figure attempting to resituate artistic terrain by exposing gaps in the social symbolic.

Richter’s use of abstraction to weave the unconscious in his art initiated a mythic search when he turned his attention to the cinematic medium. Richter and Eggeling collaborated on a theory of abstraction that unveils a universal language of cinema, and Richter’s abstract *Rhythmus* films worked towards this goal. “The unconscious is structured like a language,” and Richter, with his abstract films, tried to structure his films so that they revealed a similar universal cinematic language. From the playful freedom of the unconscious in his “visionary portraits” to the shifting sizes of suprematist squares and rectangles in *Rhythmus 21* (1921), Richter searches for a universal rhythm of the unconscious, a structured *unstructure* or unstructured *structure* that would shatter artistic boundaries.<sup>2</sup>

Both the burgeoning avant-garde movements that Richter helped foster in Europe and psychoanalysis sought legitimation around the turn of the century. Chronologically,

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<sup>2</sup> *Rhythmus 21*, *Rhythmus 23* (1923), *Rhythmus 25* (1925) and *Fuge in Rot und Grün* (*Fugue in Red and Green*) (1923) makes up the corpus of Richter’s abstract filmic output.

it makes sense that psychoanalysis proper would not officially make its way into the avant-garde movements until surrealists gained notoriety. Because surrealist scholars turn to Dada as the precursor to surrealism, one finds connections between the two, but these connections usually get relegated to a shrewd reliance on chance, a trickster-like maneuver, rather than artistic renditions of dreams. As Adorno noted of surrealism and its self-proclaimed associations with Freudian dream logic, nobody dreams like that. Viewing Dadaism and surrealism as a form of creaturely tricksterism, anachronistically imbued with Lacanian psychoanalysis, helps rectify the continual equivalence of psychoanalysis only with surrealist cinema.

Of all of Richter's output, his abstract films might be considered least likely to connect to creaturely tricksterism; nevertheless, Richter's belief in artistic and cultural transformation through unconscious chance and abstraction, the functional aspects of dada that he upholds, correlates with the trickster's innovative permutations of reality. Richter wishes to expose a primordial cinematic language by way of trickster-like moves. Ballinger hints at a connection between abstraction and tricksterism: "Tricksters become a model of human possibility. They derange the stability of order into disorder, and disorder, being illimitable and knowing no restrictions, is replete with potentiality. With a trickster the abstract imaginable becomes concrete possibility" (135). The abstract imagination, which Richter explores in his *Rhythmus* films, stands out as a connecting point between the trickster and Richter's experimental films.

One might argue that the *Rhythmus* films do not elicit any laughter from the audience as they represent only abstract shapes. Foster intimates that the historical avant-garde *failed to signify* precisely because of the traumatic affect of the images that

either try to “bind” or “deepen” the exposed gaps in the social symbolic order (29). These two operations remain inextricably linked, and Foster wonders whether one should view these avant-garde encounters with the Real as an effort to cure or destroy the social symbolic. If avant-garde films mimetically recreate a traumatic encounter, any laughter that they provoke will be Bergson’s derisive laughter. While Richter’s *Rhythmus* films do not necessarily appear traumatic on the surface, they do present an alternative to narrative cinema that challenges an audience’s aesthetic sensibilities—a traumatic encounter in its own right.

*Rhythmus 21* functions as the inaugural effort both to unlock this universal language of cinema and to balance contradiction in such a way that one might argue that it prefigures Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The shifting geometric shapes reveal a structured freedom associated with dada; but they also signify contradictions in such a way that one can easily overlook them. In a statement applicable to his *Rhythm* films, Richter says of his abstract drawings,

Month after month, we studied and compared our analytical drawings made on hundreds of little sheets of paper, until eventually we came to look at them as living beings which grew, declined, changed, disappeared—and then were reborn. We finally could operate them like instruments (and that is exactly what we called them). A vertical line was made meaningful by the horizontal, a strong line grew stronger by a weak one, a single unit became important against many, a defined one was clear against an undefined one, and so forth. All of these discoveries became meaningful in the light of our belief that a precise polar interrelationship of opposites was the key to an order, and once we understood this order we knew we could control this new freedom. (as qtd. in Turvey FML 41)

Richter’s playful stance in terms of these abstract figures is reminiscent of the dialectical trickster figure’s mediation of antinomies that creates ordered chaos or chaotic order. To view the enlarging and shrinking squares and rectangles as people, one could argue that these contradictory figures actually resemble trickster twins, dualistic yet functioning

as a single unit. There are other moments in these abstract films where three or more shapes of varying sizes simultaneously appear on-screen; this suggests a momentary synthesis between antinomies before the bacchanalian whirl can create another configuration.

Even the repetitions in these abstract films reinforce the notion that Richter prefigures the Adorno's dialectic. Turvey maintains in his reading of *Rhythmus 21* that Richter uses repetition to impose some form of organization onto his figures. Turvey writes, "the film creates an impression of order in spite of the moment-by-moment disorder, thereby conforming to Richter's definition of Dada as a balance between reason and unreason" (37). By attempting to tame chaos through repetition, Richter makes a sacrosanct reversal similar to that Adorno effects in his dialectic of reason and unreason, progress and myth; moreover, these repetitions also open up the film to a psychoanalytic exploration of repetition. These repetitions reconfigure a fort-da game of the mastery of unreason or of the split of the subject. To put it differently, the film's repetitions recreate a traumatic moment—a contradiction if we follow Richter's line of reasoning regarding abstraction—that attempts to stage and master chaos or reveal the moment in which the subject comes into language and inaugurates the division of the self. What becomes abundantly clear in Richter's search for a universal language of cinema is that he wishes for something akin to a mirror moment, only one in which the viewer recalls an imagistic primordial language that divides the subject and captivates it in the Imaginary. The *Rhythmus* films initiate a mimetic staging of the dialectic of Enlightenment as well as the fragmented self's journey into language, a fort-da game of representation that enables a search for a mythic language.

To uncover the alterity at the heart of these repetitions requires an allegorical reading of these abstract shapes. At the same time, these shifting squares and rectangles create a dichotomous relationship reminiscent of the division of the self and other Lacan outlines in his theorization of the mirror moment. In making this connection, I realize that these films lack the mediating (O)ther necessary for a subject to emerge into the realm of the symbolic order; however, in a step towards semiotics, Richter seeks a language that emerges in the realm of the Imaginary yet gets entangled with the rhythmic movement enabled by cinema.

It might seem overly simplistic to conclude that the *Rhythmus* films also transgress the boundaries of narrative cinema, but it is precisely this boundary that seems significant. While viewing early experimental and avant-garde films one notices the absence of a narrative, a sacrosanct reversal of the hegemonic view of cinema that one cannot explain away by using the “primitive” cinema hypothesis. Consequently, this inversion would occur for Richter in his search through abstraction for a universal language of film. He liberates cinema from the narrative constraints of literature and theater; however, he simultaneously maintains the belief in abstraction that he used in his paintings. While no one would argue that a coherent narrative runs through the *Rhythmus* films, one needs to keep in mind that Richter views his abstract shapes as characters.

During the years following his *Rhythmus* films and prior to his next film *Vormittagsspuk* (*Ghosts Before Noon/Breakfast*, 1927), *G* took shape with Richter at the helm. While the G-group never created an official manifesto, Richter and Werner Gräff do elaborate on its aims in the inaugural issue. They begin, “The opposition between modern form-

creation (in art) and yesterday's art is one of principle. We do not wish to bridge it but to deepen it" (101). While this suggests that the goal of *G* was to separate modern avant-garde art from the dominant modes of artistic creation, they also mean to create a new direction for art. They conclude,

Our task is of a destructive and a constructive nature. The **classical prejudice**, the basis of the culture now in decline, **must be destroyed**. Only then will new inclinations and needs take shape. **The elemental task of the creative person means** not only: corresponding to the inclinations and needs of our time, but above all: **creating new inclinations and needs**. Hence it is not a new direction that we advocate. We direct our appeal not to lovers of art but more generally to those who love the fundamental—in art as in all life's contexts. We can expect such people to understand our will to solve the problem of art not from an aestheticizing standpoint but from a general cultural one. We have no need for a beauty that, as a mere flourish, is pasted onto our (precisely oriented) existence—we need instead an inner order for our existence. *Anyone who creates contexts who makes the means for form-creation more profound and more organized will create new life and surplus.* (101)

Highlighting the destructive and constructive natures of the task of the modern avant-garde artist, this passage gestures toward a creaturely trickster methodology. Richter and Gräff challenge artists to cross permissible borders and create art that transforms every day life and culture. This will, in turn, transform viewers into dialectical thinkers, self-aware and critical.

The investigations in *G* tend to gravitate towards visual culture, and this trend climaxes in the final April 1926 issue, which solely focused on cinema. Richter prefigures Walter Benjamin's "optical unconscious" in his frontispiece, "Toward the Strengthening of Our Consciousness!" While Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings point this out, they do not suggest that Richter's optical unconscious offers an uncanny nod to the trickster. Richter writes,

The general and characteristic feature of these [avant-garde] works is a new optical attitude. Film has added a new dimension to the optical consciousness of

today's humans, a dimension that reveals the uniform shape of things through the constant change in their form. (206)

An order emerges from cinematic shape-shifting and is revealed through (un)conscious optics.

Richter's surrealist *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (*Vormittagsspuk*) utilizes the ideas about art he elaborates in *G*, and it embodies the spirit of what I call creaturely tricksterism. Replete with tracking shots of floating hats as well as a mise-en-scène of disappearing beards, animal imagery, and laughing faces; Richter's representational film marks a departure from abstraction despite the fact that these figures act in ways similar to his abstract shapes. These representational images expose a trickster aesthetic that enters the creaturely realm: the ambiguity with which Richter edited the images together led the Nazis to destroy the sound version of the film and disparage it as degenerate art. This experimental film's narrative revolves around a few lost hats flying in search of their owners, suit-clad men. It should be noted that in Germany, the image of a hat swept off the head gestures towards an emerging existential crisis. Film scholars have pointed out that the repeated images of both a revolver and a ticking clock approaching noon portends the rise of fascism (Alter 229). This further explains why the Nazis would want it destroyed.

Undoubtedly, one could read *Ghosts Before Breakfast* like the *Rhythmus* films in terms of alterity and otherness. Richter superimposes images so that a man's face actually appears to divide into two entities, and this exposes intersubjective splitting. Further hinting at the fragmentation of the ego, Richter cuts from the image of the divided self to another image of the revolver. While one might read this image as denoting a Jungian shadowy double, I contend that it signals the rebellious trickster side

of human nature. In Richter's *Everything Turns, Everything Revolves* (1929), a film about a circus fairground that caters exclusively to the bourgeoisie, a circus performer will also split in two. Richter does not aim to unearth an unconscious language in *Ghosts Before Breakfast*, but he does wish to engender a self-conscious form of dialectical art with all the accoutrements necessary to awaken society from its slumber.

The ambiguous trickster nature becomes more pronounced with images of floating hats that seem confused by the split subjectivity of their owners. This playful misrecognition of the fragmented self plays out on multiple levels; one can view the hats as representative of the totality of the ghosts from the title or as part objects that make the viewer aware of the divided core of one's being. The viewer, however, determines whether the "ghosts" would represent the ideal-ego or the ego-ideal in this constellation. This adds an interesting twist to the interpretation of the "non-representational" space underneath the hat, the vacillation between being and non-being, self and other, *object* a gazing back at the audience from the space of the Real. The caesura in the space of meaning here is exposed through the work of the creaturely trickster.

The split subjectivity at the heart of *Ghosts Before Breakfast* reveals the existential gap of being and non-being that the viewer must move back and forth between in order to fully grasp the film's political ramifications. The trickster humor emerges in the repetitious movement of hats evading their owners' grasps. A creaturely trickster resistance bubbles to the surface as these objects both defy the laws of gravity and revolt against their owners.

Highlighting the temporal aspect of the film, Richter uses stop-motion techniques and plays the film backwards, which further underscores the trickster characteristics of

the film. Richter manipulates time here in hopes to allow the spectator a moment to contemplate and, perhaps, negate the impending crisis. The businessmen's existential crises as they try to sit down for tea link the political and the personal. If one considers the four levels of time Jean Laplanche delineates in "Time and the Other," this division between the personal and the political extends to temporality. Laplanche maintains,

Thinking about time, whether philosophical or scientific, is to be developed on four levels, at once sharply distinct and clearly connected. What I call Level I is that of cosmological time; let us say: the time of the world. Level II is perceptual time, that of immediate consciousness; this is also . . . the time of the living being. Level III is the time of memory and of the individual project, the temporalisation of the human being. Level IV, finally, is that of history, the time of human societies, or even of humanity conceived as a whole. (EO 238)

Richter's tricks in *Ghosts Before Breakfast* shake the viewer into an awareness of these simultaneous layers of time. While Laplanche places existentialism within Level III, the existential crisis Richter constructs in the film pertains specifically to historical time. Playing with the interstices in and non-linear nature of time, Richter tramples upon hegemonic Western conceptions of time.

Much like his wandering hats, Richter crosses the Atlantic to escape World War II. He hangs his hat on the East coast, and, upon not finding a thriving art scene akin to the one to which he had grown accustomed, he decides to create one. Maneuvering like a trickster *bricoleur*, he cobbles together an art scene of new and former acquaintances. Richter's seeming insignificance during his wartime exile reflects the problem that scholars stumble upon in terms of his relationship to European modernism.

The marginalization of surrealism and dadaism in America is highlighted by scholars. Once it arrived in America, surrealism, for example, was criticized by American artists and critics because of the previous political stances associated with it; nevertheless, some American artists readily embraced its aesthetic. Surrealism quickly

got subsumed by advertising, and Angela Miller observes, “Surrealism’s associations with advertising undermined its revolutionary claims with American artists on the left: its irrationalism was now linked to another kind of desire, liberating the imagination not in the service of revolution, but of consumption” (68). Surrealism in America would affect something akin to a sacrosanct inversion regarding the aims of the avant-garde. Instead of employing unconscious aesthetic effects to unearth the dialectical imagination and overturn hegemony, American advertisers would wed psychoanalysis with a surrealist aesthetic to sell products and maintain the status quo.

I need to stress the significance of this American inversion of surrealism because it inhibits much of the social change that the trickster engenders. Some might argue that the social change derived from trickster manifestations already finds its way into capitalist cultural output by way of the politics inherent in aesthetic production. However, this notion of subverting subversion in the service of capitalism, while seemingly imbued with trickster acrobatics, does not expose aporias in the social symbolic the same way that the creaturely trickster does. In short, the capitalist appropriation of a tricksterly surrealism reinforces the belief that the unconscious can be bought and sold.

*Dreams That Money Can Buy* expands surrealism in America with all the avant-garde cinematic tricks Richter could muster. Indeed, he called on many of his acquaintances associated with the older avant-garde to help create his only feature-length film. The film’s frame story revolves around Joe [Jack Bittner], a huckster who concocts a plan to fund his apartment by selling his ability to look inside people and give them a dream. A series of patients enter his office, and Joe takes on cases sequenced in this order: Mr. A., the girl who wants Joe to “sign up for something,” Mrs. A., a

gangster, a blind man, and Joe's alter-ego, Narcissus. Joe conflates psychoanalysis and dream-giving, as if the two were interchangeable. Acting like a psychoanalyst, Joe allows these dream-seekers to sit on his couch; his trick involves peering inside his patient's eyes to find a dream or the *objet petit a* within his patient.

The loose plot revolves around a trickster transaction that subverts the superiority of language in psychoanalysis. In what one might call a sacrosanct reversal, Richter refuses to implement synchronous sound in the film. The viewer initially finds this jarring; however, this technique serves an interesting purpose in relation to Joe and his patients. Joe does not need to listen to his analysand's words because he views images inside people. The Lacanian Imaginary transforms into the symbolic order under Joe's gaze. I would not suggest that Joe's imagistic chicanery trumps linguistic interpretation in the psychoanalytic treatment, but it does introduce the notion that images hold symbolic power. Interestingly enough, this links to Lacan's discussion of the gaze as a function of desire. In Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan, initially drawing from the figure of Sartre's gaze through the keyhole, argues,

The gaze I encounter . . . is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other. . . . Is it not clear that the gaze intervenes here only in as much as it is not the annihilating subject, correlative of the world of objectivity, who feels himself surprised, but the subject sustaining himself in a function of desire? (84-5)

Joe, peering inside the analysand's unconscious, inaugurates a search for object a in order to give it back to the subject as his/her own desire. This recapitulates Lacan's maxim that "one's desire is the desire of the Other." Joe cannot represent the big Other because the film's narrator, speaking of Joe in the third person, assumes that position; Joe, rather, assumes a position akin to the "therapist-supposed-to-know," but without transference.

The distinction between the phallic object a and matrixial object a as outlined by Bracha L. Ettinger gives us insight about what occurs during Joe's sessions with his various patients. Ettinger offers a feminist reading of psychoanalytic theory that elaborates a matrixial object a as an alternative to the castrating phallic object a that borderlinks the subject with the (O)ther. Joe acts as the (O)ther parceling out the subject's desire. The distinction here lies in Joe's playful trick of pretending to transform into the (O)ther seeking out the object a instead of merely telling the analysand what s/he desires. Joe finds these objects by looking into the patients who ask him to find their dreams, and these dreams seemingly want to borderlink with him.

While I do not mean to fall prey to essentialism by delineating as feminine desires these desired lost objects that Joe foists onto his clients, something further needs to be said for the link between feminist theory and the avant-garde. Julia Kristeva famously stated that the works of avant-garde and modernist artists stand as the apotheosis of writers who utilize feminine *écriture*. Although the avant-garde should not be considered solely a form of feminine writing, avant-garde cinema incorporates Ettinger's notion of a borderlinking matrixial object a into the screen. This is due to the viewer's nascent understanding of the hermeneutics of abstraction: viewers need to learn to make sense of the images bombarding them. The images either wish to communicate, or they want to resist conveying a message. Connecting the matrixial object a to Richter's film begins to explain how Joe can find the impossible object a's lurking inside his analysands without turning to the Symbolic order. The matrixial object a inside his analysand gazes back at Joe with the intensity of the phallic object a; however, instead of dissipating into

the abyss as soon as Joe ascertains its approach, this matrixial object desires to connect with Joe by beckoning him to examine its intricacies.

In order to escape the critique of essentialism that can easily get set against this male/female dichotomy, one needs to consider the trickster's third gender possibilities within Richter's *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. Léger's sequence of the film, "The Girl With the Prefabricated Heart," concerns the "organizational neurosis" of Joe's female patient who wants Joe to sign up for something. She enters his office and states in the non-synchronized dialogue, "How can he know himself if he's not signed up for something?" After Joe signs his name to a paper, a meaningless gesture the narrator explains, Joe gazes into her eyes and extracts a dream that concerns a mannequin's conformity to gender stereotypes, the manufactured norms of society put into place by the (O)ther. Her desire to break free from the hegemonic structures, which both create her being and confine her, opens up the possibility of a third gender position at the margins of her dream.

"The Girl With the Prefabricated Heart" dream sequence begins with a shot of smoke before a cut to an unfocused image that initially looks like an assortment of human organs. As the curved objects come into focus, the viewer sees an unassembled female mannequin strewn across the floor. The following images show the mannequin's dismembered parts pulled securely into place. A female singer informs us that an assembly line constructed our heroine Julie. A photomontage of Julie in various positions unfolds followed by close-ups of Julie's face that reveal her plastic body moving on a turnstile. The photomontage captures fragments of her body, frozen and immobile, like her heart. This mise-en-scène of a mannequin emphasizes the

“prefabricated” nature Julie experiences. The repeated image of Julie staring into the mirror reveals her split subjectivity caught in the Imaginary realm of her factory produced ideal-ego. Juxtaposed images of machinery and wheels turning, reminiscent of *Ballet Mecanique*, further develops the notion that she cannot make more of her life beyond her plastic nature as a commodity.

This sequence continues with the introduction of an equally overdetermined ideal male mannequin, a hero who shall save Julie. The male, donning a black tuxedo, pops his head around the side of an open yellow door. This signifies a stereotypical predatory male nature desiring to break through Julie’s innocence. At first, it appears as though his materialistic offerings appeal to her obdurate sensibilities as he supplicates her with synthetic flowers and handfuls of jewelry and diamonds. The two mannequins get married, and they pretend to assimilate into society. This continues until Julie can no longer handle the sham of the marriage because her prefabricated heart excludes love from her emotions. She calls her “Amazon sisters,” who show up to save her by taking him away, and the viewer sees a wedding-dress-clad Julie riding a bicycle, her torso bending back and forth in a seemingly mechanical movement. The images of Julie escaping into the evening get intercut with close-ups of her teary-eyed husband’s head falling off and close-ups of portions of spinning wheels.

The use of mannequins to subvert the dominance of hegemonic gender roles opens up space for third gender trickster possibility. The inclusion of Julie the mannequin permits a feminist reading that aligns itself with Donna Haraway’s notion of the cyborg. Haraway offers the figure of the genderless cyborg as a means to eradicate essentialist claims, and her cyborg encapsulates both masculine and feminine traits.

This reading of Julie as a cyborg opens up a space of trickster third-gender possibility as she evades the notions of love and romance that usually get associated with women. Julie's transgression of stereotypical gender norms appears like a trickster move into an indeterminate and liberating space capable of initiating social change.

Joe's third case in Richter's film, Man Ray's "Ruth, Roses and Revolvers," begins as Mrs. A. enters Joe's office. She physically embodies the ideas of Julie's mannequin as she complains about the shell of a human her husband has become. Her costume, with an embroidered blouse, makes her look skeletal, as if her ribs are exposed. The pith of Mrs. A's dream consists of bourgeois elites looking at a book titled *Ruth, Roses and Revolvers* before attending a film screening in which the audience members are told by a female lecturer, "We are going to have the privilege tonight of witnessing one of the most unusual films ever produced. Whatever it may lack in the way of sound or color, you may supply out of your own conversation and by looking at me." The lecturer implores the audience to participate in the film by mimicking onscreen gestures, transforming the film into a participatory experience that underlines the notion that "life imitates art." This rather postmodern dream sequence reveals the political underbelly of art, despite the fact that the characters's laughter seems to undermine the political aspect of the artwork. When Ruth and her cohorts exit the theater, they return to look at the title of the book, laugh and say, "All we need is a revolver." The film cuts from an image of the book to Man Ray, and the picture then gets superimposed with an image of a riot. This underscores the eschewed political side of art.

Case number four, Marcel Duchamp's and John Cage's "Discs," presents John Latouche [John La Touche] as a gangster whose dream—reminiscent of Duchamp's

*Anemic Cinema* with color and close-ups that fragment the spinning discs—develops the notion that a gangster can have a poetic and delicate imagination without a conscious or subconscious. This is what the narrator suggests to Joe. When John Latouche enters Joe's office, he wears a black suit with a tiny, polka-dotted bowtie, his hands bound together with handcuffs. The voiceover narration states about Joe, "To anyone who unlocks dreams, handcuffs should be a snap." This humorously re-casts Joe as a Houdini-esque magician. Trickster scholars commonly read gangsters as trickster manifestations, and Duchamp's hallucinogenic imagery of spinning discs juxtaposed with John Latouche's patriarchal gangster profile contrast to such an extent as to elicit humor.

The last three dream sequences, Alexander Calder's "Ballet" and "Circus," and Hans Richter's "Narcissus" utilize many trickster tropes that finally transform *Dreams that Money Can Buy* into a film showcasing the creaturely trickster at work. Calder's sequences begin with a blind grandfather and his granddaughter entering Joe's office. Calder's "Ballet" consists of juxtaposed close-ups of mobiles swinging in a circular motion. The metal objects clinging to the ceiling playfully twirl in front of the camera. The film cuts back to Joe's office where the blind man inquires, "You're a dream dealer? I want to sell you one of mine. I have so many, you see." After this, Calder cuts to his circus montage of metal toy figures, replete with axe throwers, sword swallowers, lion tamers, unicycle-riding kangaroos, stretcher-carrying clowns and trapeze artists. The toys performing circus routines evoke the trickster in this sequence.

"Narcissus," Richter's final dream sequence, features Joe as his alter-ego, a blue-faced version aptly named Narcissus. This sequence captures Richter's move from the

abstract into the realm of myth, the preoccupation of his later works. This sequence begins as Joe peers into a blue poker chip, and an eye gets superimposed over it. The image cuts to a series of shots of variegated poker chips filmed so that they resemble circular versions of the squares featured in the *Rhythmus* films. Once the blithe, abstract images of the poker chips end, the viewer sees Joe with a group of shady, cigar-smoking characters playing poker with oversized cards. After losing a hand of poker, Joe reaches for his glass, which shatters as his hand approaches it. The liquid leaks onto the table and the poker chips. Joe peers into the fluid to see his own reflection as he experiences a mirror moment. When he slowly looks up from his reflection, his hat obfuscates his face for a moment before the audience sees that his skin has turned blue. The voiceover narration states, "One day in May it suddenly happened. I met myself. I was not prepared for it when the unspeakable became true." His blue countenance makes his poker buddies start laughing at him before they depart.

The precarious position Joe/Narccisus finds himself in leads into a mythic labyrinthine dream. He states, "Even familiar objects became strange and unfriendly. I have always suspected they led a private life of their own." As Joe frets about his life in the surreal labyrinth of objects moving around him, a "blue thread of hope" arrives in the room, and he follows it down the steps to freedom. The blue rope leads to a ladder guarded by suit-clad men, who initially block him from moving forward like the gatekeeper in Kafka's "Before the Law." Here, however, our hero manages to eradicate the men. When he does, a second, third and fourth ladder appear around him to cause confusion. He begins to ascend one of the ladders, and as he climbs, the rungs beneath his feet vanish. After he reaches the top, he jumps onto a roof, which transforms into a

room where he meets a woman waiting for him on a hammock. Giving him a bowl of cherries and a sharp blade, she lies back as though she wants him either to feed or kill her. Our saturnine hero assumes the latter, but when he places the blade on her neck, he catches his reflection in the knife and stops. Joe/Narcissus decides that he needs to begin again back in the poker room. However, after he returns to his forgotten memories, his cohorts fall apart as though they were no more than pell-mell pastiches of everyday objects. He climbs down the rope that he supposedly followed up the ladder, only to have the female he found at the top cut it off—as if she was Atropos cutting the thread of life. Joe's descent is intercut with abstract images of ink dropping into liquid before the film concludes with a final superimposed shot of an eye and the blue poker chip.

Mythic references abound in this sequence, adding another enigma to Joe's shamanistic powers. The reference to Narcissus gazing down at his own reflection in the pool of liquid gives the viewer a hint that the associations with myth play a major role in Joe's dream life. Ariadne's thread that he follows out of the room, the bizarre climb up the ladder like Daedulus taking flight, and the Atropos figure snipping the string showcase the mythic import of the sequence. Nevertheless, the juxtapositions of these mythic moments with the *mise-en-scène* of business attire and all the accoutrements of capitalism set into motion once again the dialectical interplay between myth and enlightenment. Joe/Narcissus's experience with alterity loosens capitalism's hold over him, and the trajectory of these dreams, from the case of Mr. A up through his own dream, reveals the individual's dialectical quest to reach Absolute Spirit with the help of trickster turns.

The underlying lesson that Richter finds when he reaches America—that dreams and the unconscious can work in the service of capitalism—gets inverted with the conclusion of *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. The mythic connotations add a sacrosanct nature to this reversal. While some viewers may dismiss the political connotations of the film and highlight instead the playfulness of the imagery, Richter and his avant-garde cohorts *incorporate*, in the Freudian sense, the political into the film. In this way, *Dreams That Money Can Buy* awakens the political underpinnings of the avant-garde that goes on to influence underground American directors.

Richter's *Dreams That Money Can Buy* bridges the gap between the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde in the U.S. The trickster-like qualities of Richter establish him as a key artistic figure whose cultural production elicits a creaturely trickster aesthetic. His cinematic output showcases surrealist ambiguity and aporias within the cultural symbolic in an attempt to shock spectators into self-consciousness. His films underscore the movement from Dadaism through surrealism and beyond, and they unearth a trickster consciousness, the likes of which break the boundaries of classical Hollywood cinema and force the viewer to provide meaning in the ambiguous on-screen spaces.

CHAPTER 5  
“STINKING COYOTE” INCORPORATED; OR, KARL MAY’S NOBLE SA(L)VAGE  
HEAP: TRICKSTERS IN SAUERKRAUT WESTERNS AND THE *INDIANERFILME*

There is only Karl May and Hegel; anything in between is an impure mixture of these two.

—Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*

If the Wild West had never existed, Europeans would have had to invent it.

—Julian Crandall Hollick, *The American West in the European Imagination*

The trickster’s shape-shifting abilities accentuate its constant boundary crossing, but this movement also helps one locate the trickster. Crossing continents from America to Europe, in an act reminiscent of the trickster’s penchant for crossing rivers, trickster initially appears to stray aimlessly from the Native American context; nevertheless, a European manifestation of the trickster figure retains much of its polyvalent nature. The very act of Europeans dressing up like Amerindians creates another bridge to the Native American trickster figure’s wanderings into the late nineteenth and twentieth century European cultural imagination.

Many dismiss the trickster figure in these cultural artifacts because the trickster seems a bit too conspicuously hidden within the unconscious gaps of the texts and artworks. Skeptics wish to find an overt trickster at work. The transformative power of Coyote’s exploits blatantly reveals itself in “I Like America and America Likes Me,” a 1974 action by German performance artist Joseph Beuys. Immediately upon his arrival in the U.S., Beuys, wrapped in felt, took an ambulance to the René Block Gallery on East Broadway where he stayed in a room for three days with one other companion: a coyote, the Native American spirit animal recognized most often as the trickster par excellence. The coyote urinated on copies of *The Wall Street Journal* brought in each

day and received a hug from Beuys after the three days to reveal the bond forged through this simulated vision quest. Beuys believes that performance art carries the potential to promote self-healing and social change, and this belief informs his decision to alter his performance space into a coyote den and shape-shift himself into coyote's trickster twin.

Carving out an enclave within the social symbolic order, Beuys conjoins this performative gesture with the space of creaturely life. Beuys's trickster performance exposes the historical fissures engendered by the collision of European cultures with the Amerindian. On the website "Coyote, I Like America and America Likes Me," Beuys writes,

I would never had done it with a coyote in Europe. But there are other animals in America which could conjure up a completely different aspect of that world. The eagle, for instance, the abstract powers of the head and the intellect, the West, powers that the Indian wore on his headdress. I believe I made contact with the psychological trauma point of the United States' energy constellation: the whole American trauma with the Indian, the Red Man. You could say that a reckoning has to be made with the coyote, and only then can this trauma be lifted. The manner of the meeting was important. I wanted to concentrate only on the coyote. I wanted to isolate myself, insulate myself, see nothing of America other than the coyote. First of all there was the felt which I brought in. Then there was the coyote's straw. These elements were immediately exchanged between us: he lay in my area and I in his. He used the felt and I used the straw. That's what I expected.

Coyote signifies both the trickster/culture bearer and the initial traumatic encounter with the Native Americans. Beuys recreates the point of contact within the "coyote den" similar to the way an analysand "works through" trauma during analysis. Many scholars ask exactly how this works, and whose trauma does it actually liberate. Does Beuys mean to displace German guilt onto Americans, or does an indigenous audience get past its trauma by watching Beuys meet his spirit animal in a staged performance? Can an American audience accept its complicit role in the Native American genocide?

Beuys's tricky maneuverings leave this action politically open to a multitude of interpretations, many of which require trickster hermeneutics to comprehend. Beuys's border-crossing performance and identification with the coyote (o)ther reveal the extent to which the Native American trickster figure situates itself within the European cultural imaginary. The most enigmatic and troubling interpretation of this artistic encounter reveals that the trickster is always already entombed within the space of the Lacanian Real, traumatically trapped within the gaps of the social symbolic order. Eurocentric models and, more specifically, the Judaic-Christian tradition tend to suppress any force that turns pranks and deceit sacrosanct; however, Beuys relies on the coyote's buoyancy to stay afloat within the flood of these Western paradigms. If the trickster gets incorporated into the psyches of European artists, as Beuys seems to suggest, it stands to reason that the European imaginary replete with a fascination for the Indian (o)ther would exhibit traces of the trickster in earlier literary and filmic texts, especially those in which Native Americans play a central role.

Germany's deep infatuation with tribal cultures points toward an unconscious trickster discourse that finds its apotheosis in the work of Karl Friedrich May, the German author who began publishing popular novels in the late nineteenth century. Masquerading as Old Shatterhand, May writes about his supposed adventures with the Apache chief Winnetou. The Winnetou tales have a long history of both open-air stage productions and film adaptations. The cinematic productions reach their zenith in the 60s UFA (*Universum Film AG*) "sauerkraut westerns" that helped usher in both the DEFA (the *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* of the former German Democratic Republic) *Indianerfilme* and the Italian spaghetti Westerns (Schneider 142-5).

Historically significant in the trajectory of the Karl-May-Phenomenon, these films—the most popular German productions of the twentieth century—relegate the cinematic trickster to gaps in the narrative and the screen. Before turning to them, I first need to situate the trickster within May's oeuvre.

### **Manifesting Tricky Manners: May's "Stinking Coyote" and Shattered Hand**

Combining May with the Native American trickster figure disrupts an apparent order of things. Finding humor in May's literature of manifest manners uproots Klaus Mann's assessment of May, often considered the final word on May for an American audience. Mann called May the "literary mentor of the Führer," an appellation based on Adolph Hitler's adoration of May's writings.<sup>1</sup> As many researchers note, Hitler attended May's talk given at Vienna's Sphiensaal auditorium in March 1912, a week before May's death (Cook 67-8). Identifying May's depictions of Native Americans with fascism, many scholars miss both the comic transactions and the trickster's buffoonery within May's texts. However, as Marlies Bugmann writes in *Savage To Saint: The Karl May Story* (2008), "May's entire body of work is spiked with satire and humor, though at times it is not readily apparent" (149). The rhetoric often associated with the literature of manifest manners bookmarks Winnetou's place; the stoic noble savage stands as the pith of the stories. Native American scholars dismiss May's debilitating depictions because they recapitulate the myth of the Indian as noble savage. Vizenor even places May in his list of "authors of dominance" (*MM* 31). Other literary critics point out that May's resistance to Anglo-Saxon hegemonic structures persists in an uncanny German identification with the Native American plight. I do not mean to suggest that May

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<sup>1</sup> See Klaus Mann's "Karl May: Hitler's Literary Mentor," published in 1940.

employs postindian shadow survivance, but examining May's use of trickster hermeneutics might disabuse some presupposition about the peculiar fascination that leads Germans to recapitulate "authentic" Indian representations.<sup>2</sup>

This subversion of the subject qua inversion of the indigenous (o)ther assumes a peculiar shape in the German cultural imaginary. It transforms into German "Indianthusiasm," a term coined by Hartmut Lutz to describe the German adoration of Native Americans. Indianthusiasm both pre-existed and outlasted Karl May's *Winnetou* novels. Fostering a nationalist myth, the German Romantics evoked Tacitus's reference to the Teutons as wild forest dwellers and savages in *Germania*, which refigured primitive Germans as *noble savages*. From this original identification, then, one can see Karl May as another step toward Indianthusiasm; however, this conclusion ignores two things: ethnological studies of the indigenous Indians and the carnival Indians of the Wild West Shows—particularly Buffalo Bill Cody's Show—that helped popularize May's novels. After Buffalo Bill and the Native Americans he brought to Europe—including Lakota Black Elk—in 1888 literally missed their boat back to America, they decided to tour Germany; it was at this point that May would have seen the show (Kreiss 196-7).

An amorphous amalgamation of the *Winnetou* tales, anthropological studies, and stage performances helped shape Nazi identification with the Indians. The Nazis used "Indian books to propagate Nazi ideals like *Führerkult*, *Rassenlehre* (race theory) and *Wehrtüchtigung* (fostering of military fitness)" (Lutz 178). Incorporating the Indian (o)ther into their psyches, Germans disseminated a nationalist myth that entombed the

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<sup>2</sup> Gerd Germünden's "Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA *Indianerfilme*" in *Germans and Indians* cites Phil Lucas, a Native American filmmaker, whose anecdote about filming a German "Indianerklub" ends with the line, "It was impressive—to find real recognition of Native Americans, one has to go to Europe" (254).

noble savage. But this reading, too, needs a nuanced psychoanalytic framework to grasp more fully the fantasia of Indian identification because, as Jacques Lacan points out, subjects identify with a splintered *imago* and misrecognize it as whole. The fragmented and romanticized Indian (o)ther gets inverted in this process of incorporation, ultimately displaced onto the Jew. As Lutz points out, the romanticization of the Indian and anti-Semitism dialectically appear as two sides of the same coin. Yet May's unshakable denigration of the perpetrators of the Native American genocide contrasts starkly with the dismal (dis)identification that led to the Holocaust.

After WWII, Indian enthusiasm assumed new roles in Germany as hobbyism or "ethnic drag." Katrin Sieg conceived the term ethnic drag to describe Germans impersonating Indians as "a way to both mourn the vacancies left by the holocaust and to refuse the role of perpetrator in racial aggression" (Sieg 220). Sieg argues that hobbyism became vital to worn-out soldiers struggling to reclaim their masculinity in postwar society. Donning their handmade Indian garb, hobbyists could magically resume their lost stoicism and supplant the Indian (o)ther within the social fabric. Although hobbyism existed prior to WWII, *Indianerklubs* emerged after it, further facilitating hobbyism. Playing Indians—more specifically, enacting May's adventure tales about the American West in stage performances—further opens up a space in the collective German imaginary for the sauerkraut westerns and *Indianerfilme* to gain their immense popularity.

Sieg mentions that East and West German enthusiasts bifurcate their efforts based around their historical positioning and identification with Indians. This, in turn, contributes to the cinematic differences between the DEFA *Indianerfilme* and the UFA

sauerkrauts. East German hobbyists organize under the *Indianistickbund* (Indianist Union), while West German hobbyists don feathers for the *Westerbund* (Western Association). In “Indian Impersonation as Historical Surrogation” Sieg notes,

The main difference between the Western Association and the Indianist Union is the exclusive focus on Indian cultures in the latter, whereas the former comprises a wide range of identifications with anything Western—including scouts, mountain men, military (both Union and Confederate soldiers), and cowboys. (223)

In other words, the Indianist Union hobbyists concern themselves with maintaining the illusion of “authenticity” of Native Americans through anthropological research, while the Western Association hobbyists identify with the myths disseminated by the dominant tragic monologues.

European Indian hobbyists assume an air of seriousness, excising humor from their pursuits much like the tragic monologues of dominance that eschew humor in the literature of manifest manners. Observing a serious tone in each of the individuals/groups she studied, Sieg states,

All four (groups of) individuals that I interviewed repeatedly used the term *serious* to underscore their ethnological aspirations and expertise. “Seriousness” has a range of connotations concerning the hobbyists’ self characterization: it signals respect for Native Americans, as opposed to the “foolery” of carnival Indians, artistes, or Karl May fans. Moreover, seriousness connotes scholarly accuracy, as opposed to the casual, often faulty reproductions of many hobbyists. (Sieg 224)

Privileging seriousness in this serious/foolish dialectic ethnocentrically confines the Indian within the Western academic tradition against which Vizenor rails. Regardless of their own disavowal of indigenous humor, the hobbyists, masquerading as the “authentic” Indian (o)ther, ultimately perform a shape-shifting, ethnicity-bending trickster role. Sieg recapitulates the stereotypical belief that humor somehow lowers the accuracy of pseudo-representations, diminishing May’s trickster-like position.

Despite the reception May's novels encounter in the course of later history, the wandering tricksters in them sashay down recognizable sideways channels. In "The Appeal of Karl May in the Wilhelmine Empire," Nina Berman refers to Old Shatterhand's trickster qualities,

In some ways, Old Shatterhand bears resemblance to the traditional trickster, such as Till Eulenspiegel, or confidence man, such as Baron von Münchhausen. Like these figures, Old Shatterhand survives by using his brains, manipulating the strong, and displays almost supernatural powers. But May's superhero is physically even more robust, has an additional aspect of grandiosity, and has clear aspirations for real power. He interferes not from the margins, like the jester, but wields power at the center of the action. (298)

Berman's understanding of the trickster figure forecloses any productive connections because she assumes that the trickster must work from the margins. Franchot Ballinger finds this common reading of the trickster figure problematic: "The language of marginality obscures a Trickster's real status in society, which is generally something like a fish bone stuck in the throat" (26). Berman emphasizes the trickster's liminal position; however, disregarding the trickster's polyvalent nature, she overlooks the specific ways the trickster emerges in May's work.

As May's biography attests, he, too, becomes a trickster figure in his own right. Going blind shortly after birth on February 25, 1852 due to malnutrition, May regained his sight a few years later. The mythology surrounding his formative years revolves around his grandmother reading him fairy tales and his father's abusive outbursts. Both strands contribute to May's wily desire for escape and deceit. His seminary teachers at Waldenburg uncovered his kleptomania after ascertaining that he stole candles to bring Christmas cheer to his desperately poor parents (Bugmann 8). This voracious appetite for absconding from school with items would continue even after he became a schoolteacher. For example, he regularly borrowed a pocketwatch from a fellow

teacher, and one day he forgot to return it. He then used the fob watch he accidentally took home to show his social status to his parents. This act sent him to prison for six weeks. He also spent time in a labor camp for “posing as a general practitioner, a teacher, and an engraver,” actions that signify his trickster-like imagination. (10). As Mann points out, one of May’s dubious pseudonyms was “*Dr. Heilig*—which means Dr. Holy,” an alias that further inscribes a sacrosanct nature to May’s cunning chicanery (395).

May’s wiles wend their way further into trickster territory when he commences his publishing career. With the publication of his Winnetou tales, he proclaimed he actually was Old Shatterhand and touted these tales as an autobiographical account of his American adventures. It is commonly known that he did not cross the Atlantic until 1908, only four years before his death. His penchant for assuming multiple identities culminates in the 1890s when he posed for pictures in the 1890s as Old Shatterhand.<sup>3</sup> May further claimed that he spoke twenty-six languages, a feat his alter-ego could easily master for Native American dialects. These fabrications later plague him when his enemies expose these lies; nevertheless, one should not overlook his playfulness.<sup>4</sup> His biography resembles a trickster narrative wherein his boastful pride and creative wandering, interwoven with his kleptomania, ultimately result in his downfall. These actions finally force him to publicly announce his duplicitous nature. During a talk he gave a week before his death, May proclaimed, “There exist two fundamentally different

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<sup>3</sup> Pictures of May posing as Kara ben Nemsî, the protagonist from May’s Arabian adventure tales also exist. See Gerald D. Nash’s “European Image of America: The West in Historical Perspective” (8).

<sup>4</sup> Cook discusses Dr. Fedor Mamroth’s 1899 attacks on May as well as journalist Rudolf Lebius’s accusations railed against May in “Germany’s Wild West Author.” Cook explains how May’s scandalous past gets resurrected and used against him. (73)

Karl May's, [sic] you see, a genuine and a fake one, a real and an invented one, a serious one and a caricature who is being sketched in newspapers as a slipshod and a clown" (459). He reveals a dual nature, exalting the serious side of his character while undercutting his buffoonery.

May's selfhood divided into this serious/clownish dialectic reveals a sacred reversal in terms of the privileged position with which May aligns himself. To capitalize on his writing, he needed to negate any trickster characteristics, but May, however steadfast he would cling to the serious side of this dialectic, understood that Old Shatterhand's border-crossing and trickster-like properties gave him renown everywhere save in America. This renunciation of his topsy-turvy past makes his creaturely tricksterism all the more important, his own escapist ideals engendering the shame that lies at the core of his being.<sup>5</sup> May notes,

Everyone lives in such a way that nothing very extraordinary can or should happen to him. Our *European Bildung* is of such a nature that chance, the happening, adventure, surprise are completely excluded. The life of any person in school and home, in office and profession, in marriage and society is fixed and must not give itself to extravagance. In the case of the slightest deviation from the philistine course, a hundred forces come together to suppress that alien element.<sup>6</sup>

May's quest to liberate himself from German bourgeois ideals and carve out an alternate transitional trickster space, where he can enact his fantasies, led him to identify with the Native American (o)ther and, ultimately, the trickster.

One cannot dismiss in the previous quote the importance of alterity presiding as the pith of May's subjective identification with the "alien." As Slavoj Žižek points out, the

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<sup>5</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas's *On Escape [De l'évasion]*. (65)

<sup>6</sup> John Miller. "Relative Autonomy and the Esthetic Fields" (162)

Hegelian (and Lacanian) subject realizes itself only as something foreign, exterior to itself:

[T]he Hegelian “subject” is ultimately nothing but a name for the externality of the Substance to itself, for the “crack” by way of which the Substance becomes “alien” to itself, (mis)perceiving itself through human eyes as the inaccessible-reified Otherness. That is to say, insofar as the relationship of the subject to the Substance overlaps with the Substance’s self-relating, the fact that Substance appears to [the] subject as an alien-external-inaccessible entity bears witness to a self-splitting of the Substance itself. (*TWN* 30)

The bifurcation May experiences forces him simultaneously to identify with and suppress the Indian (o)ther. This “parallax view” keeps shifting subject and object/(o)ther positions. This, in turn, constitutes a tricky vantage point from which to view May’s work and his attempt to come to terms with his self-consciousness. Žižek defines self-consciousness as “the object qua *objet petit a*, qua the gaze able to perceive the true meaning of the stain from which gives body to the unbearable truth about [one]self” (67). May’s “unbearable truths” that fuse with the trickster (o)ther are precisely his imaginative crimes and mistaken identities, his *fugitive-poses* with alter-egos. May’s self-consciousness emerges at the site of his trickster (o)ther in the guise of *objet petit a* that evades him no matter how often he tries to negate or affirm it.

One can trace the schism between May’s serious and clownish personas by examining the German reception of May’s work. Children, retreating from the highbrow cultural imaginary of such German authors as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich von Schiller and their ilk, embraced May’s tales. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg even referred to May as “Richard Wagner for the masses” (Hollick 18-9). To ensure the German classics their rightful place in the minds of the youth, adults frowned upon children consuming these popular narratives. This would all soon change, however; as Mann writes,

Reading Karl May, imitating and worshipping him, used to be a sort of contagious disease among boys in all parts of Germany and neighboring countries. In the beginning, parents and schoolteachers took objection to this Karl May-mania on the part of the young. Their sound instinct told them that the literary production of this dubious adventurer was sheer trash, and not even harmless at that. They wanted to be sure, however, and therefore started reading Karl May themselves. And they too were completely won over. Old Shatterhand's bubbling imagination, his brassy self-confidence, his overwhelming naïveté proved to be quite irresistible. (392)

The first wave of detractors became enamored with Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, and this halted protests against children reading his works. The deep need to escape bourgeois existence propelled Germans to identify with May's swashbuckling heroes. When the truth about May's criminal past surfaced around the turn of the century, another wave "of moral indignation arose throughout the conservative and liberal press. From platforms and pulpits [May] was ominously labeled the *Corrupter of youth*" (397).<sup>7</sup> The campaign against May's writings eventually overwhelmed him; nevertheless, May, like Coyote, gets the concluding chuckle as his creative output continues to influence artistic endeavors even today.

Where does one locate Coyote's wayfaring exploits in the Winnetou tales? May represents an oral storyteller in the comic holotrope, fashioning himself as the trickster-sign of Old Shatterhand. Throughout *Winnetou I*, the Indians incessantly refer to Old Shatterhand as both a "greenhorn" and a "stinking coyote" after he performs perfectly every task assigned him, and despite his bookish intelligence.<sup>8</sup> As Franchot Ballinger observes, "the Navajos do not distinguish among the various Coyotes (Ma'i): the animal

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<sup>7</sup> See Cook's "Germany's Wild West Author" for a longer description of these libelous articles. (73-4)

<sup>8</sup> See Nina Berman's "The Appeal of Karl May in the Wilhelmine Empire: Emigration, Modernization, and the Need for Heroes" in *A Companion to German Realism 1848-1900*. (296-7) Also note that Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, published in 1902, also begins with the protagonist taunted for being a "greenhorn." Wister's novel became the prototype for many Western novels to come after it, but this direct reference to Karl May's American West should not go unnoticed.

coyote, 'the personification of Coyote power in all coyotes,' the trickster/clown/transformer, and the mythic purveyor of disorder" (29). Sam Hawken, Old Shatterhand's teacher upon his arrival in America, tells him in a particularly striking passage,

That's it, young man! That's the way! But don't get conceited because I am praising you! A teacher occasionally has to praise even the dumbest boy if he doesn't want him to repeat everything. But if you continue like this, it may no longer be necessary to call you a greenhorn six or seven years from now. Till then, you can console yourself with the common experience that sometimes a stupid fellow will get as far or farther than a smart one, if I'm not mistaken. (22)

Sam chastises Old Shatterhand precisely for the pride and skullduggery that gives him the upper hand in his frontier adventures.

As Berman suggests, Old Shatterhand does not solely embody the trickster figure; the trickster sign erupts concomitantly with Old Shatterhand and his blood brother, Winnetou. Old Shatterhand explains the blood ceremony that connects him to Winnetou: "Winnetou and I became like a soul with two bodies. We understood each other without having to communicate our feelings, thoughts and decisions to each other. A glance sufficed, and we knew what we wanted" (May *W* 242). The two characters work in tandem as trickster twins undermining the Anglo-Saxon American imperialists busy industrializing the American frontier. Their mutual resistance liberates May's Indian from the literature of manifest manners.

May's Winnetou tales unearth a wily transitional space within the German cultural imaginary, a space that spans a century of cultural production. The tales themselves exhibit the trickster sign that traverses theatrical terrain in stage adaptations and open-air performances. As Bugmann points out, as early as 1896 May professed a desire to adapt the tales for the stage, but the first play, *Winnetou*, did not hit the Munich stage

until 1919.<sup>9</sup> The play was performed once more at the open-air stage near Rathen in 1938. After World War II, East Germany would ban the characters from the Rathen stage until 1984 (475-6). Winnetou and Old Shatterhand continued to grace German open-air stages ever since, the most famous occurring at Bad Segeberg every year since 1952. Moreover, six film adaptations of May's Oriental tales would appear before the first Rialto sauerkraut western was produced in 1962.<sup>10</sup> Tim Bergfelder suggests that, if produced, silent film adaptations of May's American tales would have performed equally as well as these Oriental films (103-4). To further corroborate Bergfelder's claim, May's influential tales also played a role in catapulting the Westerns to such success in Germany during the early years of cinema. Roger L. Nichols observes, "Before conflict broke out in 1914, Western films had become so popular in Germany that booking agents there reported having trouble getting enough copies of films to satisfy the theater operators" (13). The sauerkraut westerns spawned the *Indianerfilme* as well as made-for television films, such as *Winnetous Rueckkehr* (1998, *Winnetou's Return*). Even comic books capitalized on the 60s May revival. The last comic turns in May's oeuvre arrive in the new millennium with the Winnetou spoof, *Der Schuh des Manitu* (2001, *The Shoe of Manitu*), the most successful German film to date, as well as Quentin Tarantino's re-imagining of them in his critically acclaimed *Inglourious Basterds* (2009).

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<sup>9</sup> Bugmann states, "Hermann Dimmler adapted *Winnetou* for the Deutsche Theater Muenchen and Alfred Lommatzsch produced it. The very first actors who played the famous blood brothers, Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, were Maximilian Herbst and Adolf Hille" (470-1).

<sup>10</sup> Ustafilm produced the first of three now lost silent films based on May's work, *Auf den Truemmern des Paradieses* (1920, *In the Rubble of Paradise*), which starred Dora Gerson, the German cabaret star and wife of filmmaker Veit Harlan. These silent films include *Die Todeskarawane* (1920, *Caravan of Death*) and *Die Teufelsanbeter* (1921, *The Devilworshippers*). The three sound films include *Durch die Wueste* (1935/6, *Across the Desert*), *Die Sklavenkarawane* (1958) and *Die Loewe von Babylon* (1959). Ibid (471-3) Also see Tim Bergfelder's *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s*.

### **Creaturely Cine-Tricksters, Sauerkraut and *Indianers***

Locating the creaturely cine-trickster figure in the sauerkraut westerns seems at first like an impossible task. It certainly does not go unnoticed that few westerns depict Native Americans in any way differently than they are in the dominant tragic monologues. Add to this the paucity of humor in Native American depictions that Vine Deloria, Jr. laments, finding the ever-shifting trickster in these films seems akin to the quest to pin down Lacan's elusive *objet petit a*. Comic chance and trickster resistance simultaneously haunt and evade the cinema of manifest manners. Jacquelyn Kilpatrick outlines the trail of Native American iconography on the silver screen in *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (1999), and she observes that most westerns, with relatively few exceptions before the 60s, depict Indians as the noble savage. Eschewing any identification with Native Americans, these westerns usually revolve around cowboys conquering the untamed Western frontier. In 1964 John Ford, guilt-ridden by the stereotypical representations he helped disseminate, attempted to correct these conceptions with *Cheyenne Autumn* (Kilpatrick 67-8).<sup>11</sup> Kilpatrick, surprisingly, does not extend her study to include the sauerkraut westerns or the DEFA *Indianerfilme*. Ford's film, identifying with the Native American plight seems influenced by the 60s German co-productions because the narrative shifts the audience's identification to the Indian (o)ther.

May's influence on European westerns was initially overlooked by American viewers and reviewers of the sauerkraut westerns. The sauerkrauts exported well in Non-U.S. countries. André Bazin conceives of the western genre as the quintessentially

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<sup>11</sup> One might go so far to say that Jimmy Stewart's comedic turn as Wyatt Earp in *Cheyenne Autumn* deserves some acknowledgement as a cinematic manifestation of an inverted trickster in the film.

American one, inextricably linking it to the nation's history; nevertheless, in his seminal "Authorship and Genre: Notes on the Western," Jim Kitses argues that "this does not mean that [westerns] are historically accurate or that they cannot be made by Italians" (57). Kitses's remark emphasizes the fact that scholars should not readily dismiss the Italian westerns; yet, as Jeffrey Sammons points out, Renata Adler in his *New York Times* review of *Old Shatterhand*, Harald Reinl's fourth sauerkraut western, brushes it aside as a spaghetti western (249). Adler remains ignorant of May's importance to the UFA westerns primarily because the tales themselves alienated an American audience by vilifying Anglo-Saxons as imperialists impeding the Indian's plight. In terms of the physical films themselves, the lack of synchronized sound on the exhibited prints inhibited their American reception as well.

Film scholars compare and contrast the sauerkraut and the spaghetti westerns, often praising the poststructural and postmodern turns in the Italian films. In this regard, one initially turns to Sir Christopher Frayling's seminal *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (1981). Frayling painstakingly delineates the postmodern, parodic references within Leone's films with an extensive analysis of *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), the paragon of the irreverential, deconstructive spaghetti western. Frayling points out that this film restages scenes from classic Hollywood westerns only to subvert them in trickster-like fashion, chiasmatic reversals deconstructing the western genre.<sup>12</sup> Frayling's chapter pertaining to May, however,

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<sup>12</sup> See Christopher Frayling's chapter on *Once Upon a Time in the West* for a highly detailed analysis of the film and its source material in *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*. (192-216) Trickster hermeneutics might be more appropriately suited to read Sergio Corbucci's *Django*, Django (Franco Nero) dragging his "coffin of chaos" through the desert. Django hides his gun inside the coffin like Coyote carrying his penis in a box on his back. After *Django's* release in 1966, every Italian spaghetti western imported into Germany was billed *Django*, followed by the film's real title.

suggests that the UFA sauerkrauts de-emphasize May's mournfully romantic view of the Amerindian in order to reveal the extent to which the films rely on the American western genre. Bergfelder, on the other hand, contends that Frayling probably based this notion on the British release versions of the films in lieu of the original West German release (92). As Tassilo Schneider notes,

While the 'spaghetti Western' might be said to 'deconstruct' the genre, the German films may be said to *reconstruct* it. If the Italian films might be said to be interested in 'demythologisation', the May adaptations seem to pursue the opposite objective: to construct or reconstruct, a viable generic mythology. (146)

Indeed, while the sauerkrauts reconstruct western mythology, these films bring more to the proverbial powwow inspiring filmmakers to make both the DEFA *Indianerfilme* and the Italian spaghetti westerns. This is a result of May's specifically German identification with Native American iconography. Although the sauerkraut westerns do not completely deconstruct classical westerns, they overturn the generic westerns by inviting the viewer to identify with the Native Americans. Vera Dika makes a similar claim about the *Indianerfilme*.<sup>13</sup>

This recurrent gesture of reconstructing American western mythology in the European context brings to mind Marx's famous insight about repetition: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." The doubling of the American West mythology at once nods to the westerns that came before and inverts them by revealing an aspect usually eschewed from older

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<sup>13</sup> See Vera Dika's "An East German *Indianerfilm*: The Bear in Sheep's Clothing." As an aside, Dika overturns the common reading of the Italian spaghetti westerns, labeling them modernist texts. She situates the DEFA *Indianerfilme* as postmodern texts due to their use of blank parody. Perhaps, one could classify the sauerkraut westerns similarly, but the tenuous distinctions between modernism and postmodernism proper and the critiques against postmodernism by the likes of such theorists as Andreas Huyssen, make me shirk this line of reasoning.

explorations of the genre. While the Hollywood western captured the Indian in the narrative space of manifest manners, these European westerns eschew a simple ideological reading wherein the Indian remains simply a victim of the capitalist/imperialist Anglo-Saxons. The UFA sauerkrauts, however indebted to the western genre they appear, perform a sacrosanct reversal, encouraging the viewer to identify with Winnetou, May's "blood kin," and the Apache's indigenous plight. Schneider continues, "The May films' overriding narrative preoccupation with the 'tragedy' of the Indians' 'fight for survival' obviously sets them significantly apart from the overt ideological concerns that have traditionally dominated the American Western" (148). Despite May's employment of the stereotypical Winnetou and the narrative theme of Christian conversion in the novels, the sauerkrauts empathize with the Indian (o)ther to such an extent that Schneider identifies this as a schism from traditional westerns. Gerd Gemünden also notes that Old Shatterhand's evangelizing gesture "is translated into mere action film" (249). The producers of the sauerkraut westerns ignore May's Christian proselytizing in favor of the conventional action found in American westerns, while concomitantly transforming the genre into an original European form. German identification with the *Indianer* elicits Lacan's infamous question: "*Che vuoi?*" Many readings of Native American representations in the sauerkrauts and *Indianerfilme* ask what the Germans want with the Indian; however, the question is twofold and locates May's mourned object in the Germans as well. Jean Laplanche writes, "the enigma of mourning takes us to the function of enigma in mourning: what does the dead person want? What does he want of me? What did he want to say to me?" (255).<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup> Here, Laplanche makes the move from the "enigma *of*, to the enigma *in*, and then to the function of the enigma *in*," which Žižek points out is a Hegelian move. See Žižek's *The Monstrosity of Christ* (38).

postcolonial readings of American westerns expose the negative representations of Indians. But through the distinctly German identification with the Indian (o)ther, the indigenous voice speaks predominantly through the *mise-en-scène*, the Native position more elevated in these films than in May's novels. I do not mean to suggest that one should not take these representations to task, as many Native American scholars do, but these German films do present the narrative from the other side, from the Native perspective, as reflected/refracted from a German eye. What does the *Indianer* want of the German; or, more importantly, what does the *Indianer* in these films ask of the audience? The Indian's absent presence encourages the viewer to recognize a hidden counter-narrative. The Real of the on-screen image remains at the margins and lurks underneath the headdresses and stoic representations. The gazing *objet petit a* invites the viewer to turn the imperialist into the monstrous other and identify with the Indian. Opening up the fissures of historical memory, the cinematic Indian beckons the viewer to resituate his or her own symbolic beliefs concerning indigenous peoples.

Separating themselves further from the American western genre, the sauerkrauts overturn the predominant understanding of landscape in the genre. Kitses's discerns antinomies of garden and desert or wilderness and civilization. In American westerns one thereby finds Adorno's dialectic of Enlightenment in the landscape; however, Schneider claims that the May films deny the desert imagery. Filmed in Northern Yugoslavia, the "mythico-political" context shifts from America to Europe, rubble punctuating each scene, something critics often note about the *Indianerfilme* as well. Schneider mentions that the Winnetou films mitigate the ideological impact of place in favor of contradictions within the characters themselves, reminiscent of my dialectical

cine-trickster position (148-9). Certainly not every character embodies a trickster figure, but, as Schneider notes,

protagonists and antagonists more often than not appear to simply 'pop up' somewhere in the landscape, ready to settle the narrative conflicts arising from the general, quasi-natural opposition between the forces of 'the good' and 'the evil' which determine the films' diegetic universe," which sounds similar to the itinerant trickster's chance encounters. (149)

Consuming the landscape's contradictory nature, the characters act as cine-tricksters in the sauerkrauts exposing the dialectic of Enlightenment that Kitses finds in his reading. Although this ideological reading seems to disappear from most of the criticism of the sauerkraut westerns, it stigmatizes the *Indianerfilme*.

A few exceptions withstanding, contemporary scholarship surrounding the sauerkrauts does not consider the scope of Karl May in a comprehensive analysis of both the UFA sauerkraut westerns and the DEFA *Indianerfilme*. For the moment, a few preliminary remarks about the East German films will be necessary. DEFA produced fourteen *Indianerfilme* between 1966 and 1985, and the predominant academic reading of them places them in the socio-historical situation in which they emerged. Co-produced during the Cold War by studios in Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, Cuba, Bulgaria and Romania, these films are consistently referred to as communist films. I will turn to the wandering tricksters in the *Indianerfilme* after discussing two sauerkrauts. With the first Rialto sauerkraut western, *The Treasure at Silver Lake (Der Schatz im Silbersee, 1962)*, Reinl adapts Karl May's novel of the same name for the screen. The plot revolves around a group of bandits, led by the colonel, searching for the Indian treasure at Silver Lake. The Apaches and the Butler family join forces to prevent the bandits from absconding with their gold. The film introduces Lex Barker, heretofore

famous for playing Tarzan, and Pierre Brice, a French actor and dancer, in their recurring roles as Old Shatterhand and Winnetou. As Bergfelder points out, Barker's physical features correlate with the Teutonic racial stereotype May employs, while Brice's "almost feminine" features clash with the typical Hollywood representations of Indians. It is commonly known that the two "were frequently referred to, and without any apparent irony or innuendo, as the 'dream couple' of 1960s West German cinema" (83-4). Remaining true to May's homo-social order, this masculine "dream couple" contrasts starkly with the fraternal relationships in American westerns at the time. Doug Williams writes that Tom and Ransom in Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty's Valence*, "would be the ideal Western couple—but while the frontier in the Western has a tradition of same-sex couples, as [Leslie] Fiedler noted, to found a civilization on such a couple was not part of the myth in the early Sixties" (108). The sauerkraut westerns, capitalizing on May's homo-social narrative, cinematically exhibit the masculine couple that Fiedler discusses, without entangling an actress in triangulated desire as found in many American westerns.

The seemingly unconscious homoerotic subtext remains significant in terms of this first May adaptation because of what it denies in its transmission from novel to screen. The film altogether ignores an important gender-crossing trickster figure, Tante Droll, an imperialist German wandering across the American West.<sup>15</sup> Tante is a man dressed in women's clothes, a practice that the novel excuses by simply stating that this is common in the West. Why would a gender-bending German get eliminated in the cinematic adaptation? Tante's place in the novel infers a connection to the Native

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<sup>15</sup> Günter Rätz's *Die Spur führt zum Silbersee* (1989), a puppet film from East Germany, does include Tante Droll.

American Two-Spirited person, the indigenous third gendered individual, but one that gets displaced onto a German character. As Franchot Ballinger's research on the Two-Spirit people suggests, they violate gender boundaries and resemble a trickster (103-9).<sup>16</sup>

Richard Dyer distinguishes between the Tante and the Bube in his discussion of the turn-of-the-century German gay sub-cultural style. Dressed in drag, a Tante was characterized as being effeminate, standing in opposition to the masculine Bube (19-20).<sup>17</sup> Perhaps German gay-subculture appropriated Tante Droll to perpetuate this effeminate stereotype? If this claim holds a trace of truth, it stands to reason that Reinl purposefully excluded the character because homo-social content already permeates the film. A challenge to this line of reasoning arises from the fact that western cultural production exposes the gender-bending trickster via such characters as Bugs Bunny dressed in women's garb. Why would Reinl need to remove the character from the film adaptations unless he wanted to maintain Western generic conventions?

Where do humor and, more importantly, the cine-trickster emerge in *The Treasure of Silver Lake*? In the absence of Tante Droll, Reinl evokes laughter through other characters in May's oeuvre. Sam Hawkens, played by German comedian Rolf Walter, recurs as a comic figure in many of the sauerkrauts. Reinl transforms another humorous character, the "Englishman" Karl Heinz Leopold Ulrich Lord Castlepool (Eddie Arent),

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<sup>16</sup> Many Indian tribes call Two Spirited people other names, such as the *winkte* of the Lakota/Dakota Sioux, but the indigenous third genders are derogatorily referred to as the *berdache*. They assume various roles in each of their respective tribes, sometimes even helping with childcare. Similar to sacred clowns in this respect, "Two Spirited people were assumed to have accepted their gender in response to a vision," which designated their sacred nature (Ballinger 104). To view this side of the trickster in western cultural production, one can view the gender-bending Bugs Bunny, dressed in drag, teasing Elmer Fudd.

<sup>17</sup> Dyer goes on to describe *Nosferatu's* Count Orlok and Hutter as playing the Tante and the Bube, respectively.

from a quick-witted gambling man into a butterfly collector sporting a peculiar safari outfit. The Englishman's hobby evokes further humor by giving the British Lord a German name and reasserting butterfly collecting as a British stereotype. Castlepool's exaggerated mannerisms and effeminate disposition connote his trickster qualities; however, his quest for the *Papilio Polymnestor Parinda* butterfly in May's fabled American West disorients this erudite wanderer. The aforementioned butterfly does not even dwell in the United States, which some critics have suggested is a cinematic goof. May's novel, however, rectifies this snafu: when asked where he is headed, Castlepool responds, "To Calcutta" (86). Lord Castlepool's deficient navigational skills presumably led him to believe he entered East India, recalling Columbus's similar misunderstanding upon landing in the Americas. Although Reinl deletes this detail in the adaptation, Castlepool's costume humorously recapitulates a similar confusion by correlating the scientific explorer with the cowboy. Conferring the cowboy mythos onto a Chaplin-esque safari hunter subverts classical western conventions while drawing attention to their interstices.

Castlepool's initial on-screen appearance in the film evokes the trickster through formal filmic elements. Castlepool first appears three shots after the viewer glimpses the local drunk entering the Prairie Saloon, camera panning left across the patrons until it rests on the stereotypical Native American drunkenly dancing. The camera then follows a "medicine man" dressed like a magician back across the crowd. The next tracking shot reveals Sam Hawken, who, upon opening a curtain, spies Castlepool's off-screen approach and dubs him a "greenhorn," Old Shatterhand's initial trickster nickname. This carnivalesque *mise-en-scène* accentuates the appearance of the trickster figure, Lord

Castlepool, the archetypal stranger. The next shot cuts outside to reveal Castlepool's comic inability to dismount his horse, which he momentarily attributes to the fact that his horse is just a little too tall for him. The town drunk, thrown out of the saloon, enters the frame as he falls to the ground. Picking the drunk off the ground after peering into his eyes, Castlepool spouts absurd wisdom in his ear: "Don't ever go out into the sun without a hat, my friend." This advice falls to the ground along with the drunk. Eliciting humor, the shared gaze of (mis)recognition between them at this moment portends the treatment Castlepool receives as an alien in May's American West while simultaneously recalling the trickster's helter-skelter insight.

Assuming the trickster role in the film, Castlepool represents an aporia in the cultural symbolic order of the American West. Once Castlepool pushes past the swinging saloon doors, his liminal position becomes increasingly apparent. The bar patrons ask him if he is okay, and a woman says, "I could fall in love with him." When the barkeep hands him a shot of rum, Castlepool cannot stomach the liquor. This fact reveals his limitations as a Western hero. The disclosure of Castlepool's unique quest exposes the greater importance of this comic character. The bartender asks, "Who or what are you looking for?" This common narrative convention is used in classic Westerns to reveal the avenger's backstory. Expecting to hear either about the search for gold and riches or the wrongs committed by an outlaw, the bartender appears slightly confused by Castlepool's response: "For the Pilio Polymnestor Parinda." When the bartender, mistaking the animal for an outlaw, asks about this man's physical characteristics, Castlepool describes the butterfly right before another patron shoots his hat off his head. The incongruity between the western hero/avenger's exploits and

butterfly collecting further underscores Castlepool's buffoonery. The butterfly, however, supplants both the outlaw and treasure as Castlepool's *objet petit a*, and this illustrates the absurdity of chasing these things. Zupančič states, "Man, a human being, interests comedy at the very point where the human coincides with the inhuman; where the inhuman falls into the human (into man), where the Essence falls into the appearance and the Necessary into the contingent" (49-50). To a Western hero, Castlepool's butterfly hunt appears inhuman precisely because the incongruity between the hunted outlaw and the insignificant butterfly broaches creaturely life. Disrupting the order of things, Castlepool's quest provokes laughter directed at the politics of the American West.

Castlepool's farcical quest exposes a gap that even Old Shatterhand cannot reconcile. Alighting upon Castlepool slyly chasing the butterfly around a tree, Old Shatterhand's band snickers; Old Shatterhand then persuades him to utilize caution around the many killers inhabiting the frontier. To convince them of his capabilities, Castlepool boasts that he has a great horse and a rifle. Not convinced by Castlepool's boasts, Sam Hawksens ask him if he even knows how to shoot. Peering up, Castlepool, framed in the foreground, aims his gun skyward and fires. Sam restates the question, asking about his expertise at shooting creatures, but Castlepool's patience pays off when his prey, a dead bird, plummets into the frame and lands on Sam's face. After this act shames Sam, Old Shatterhand invites Castlepool to join them because they saw him overcome his greenhorn status.

Despite Castlepool's tom-foolery, he does not completely embody the trickster, sacrosanct nature intact. The successful distribution of *The Treasure of Silver Lake*

signifies how well it resonated with Germans and Europeans. But what does this particular comic transaction between this cine-trickster manifestation and the viewer do besides produce laughter? Castlepool as a trickster figure upturns or deconstructs the cowboy mythos, while the film simultaneously recreates the mythos of the American West within a distinct German nationalistic agenda. Castlepool searches for the creaturely butterfly instead of the gold the Anglo-Saxon imperialists seek. For the English Lord, gold remains extraneous. On the other hand, all of the characters that interact with him smirk at the absurd notion that someone would cross the Atlantic to track a measly butterfly. Castlepool's desire to escape his own bourgeois existence leads him to hunt this butterfly, the creature that symbolizes transformation.

Castlepool's comic chase of the creature evokes the circular quest to master nature. In order for Castlepool to actually find the butterfly, however, he must join forces with the Natives and Old Shatterhand. Here the significance of the butterfly is that a butterfly trickster acts as the mediator for the Raven in the myths of the Haida Indians of the Pacific Northwest. A reading of the butterfly chase scene, thus, renders Castlepool a trickster searching for a creaturely trickster. This film, which takes itself too seriously at times, needs a trickster to undermine it from within. A self-conscious image of a trickster figure chasing a trickster metaphorically exalts the cine-trickster's position, while it simultaneously demarcates its absent presence from the film.

The trickster's absent presence in the sauerkraut westerns points toward the difficulties in trying to locate the fluctuating Native American, German, and American identities within these films. Kathryn W. Shanley's "Talking to the Animals and Taking Out the Trash: The Functions of American Indian Literature" begins by interrogating the

present-absence of Native peoples in western media representations that do not focus specifically on tribal cultures. Shanley addresses the negative attitudes toward Indians promulgated in contemporary films like *Jumanji* and *Conspiracy Theory* that use tribal music and a mise-en-scène of the primitive jungle with no Native people gracing a single frame. Shanley writes,

But “Indians” is what those films are also about—“Indians” as the contrapuntal core element in American identity. Helen Carr, in *Inventing the American Primitive*, describes well the mix of “guilt and desires” at the heart of American identity when she writes of eighteenth century American thought, “Simply put, the Indian is not sufficiently civilized, the European is overcivilized, and the Euro-American is just right.” Put another way, “[O]ne might say, while the ‘rational’ savage (i.e., the Indian as a lover of freedom) justifies bourgeois political ascendancy, the ‘sentimental’ savage (i.e., the Indian as natural poet) authenticates bourgeois subjectivity.” . . . Preoccupation with the melancholy of dying “savages” seemed to satisfy the bourgeois appetite for identification with Native life more than any popular Indian literary form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (33)

Shanley’s observation, although aimed at American popular culture and identity, also is applicable to Karl May’s *Winnetou* tales and the sauerkrauts. In the case of the former, the trick within May’s oeuvre stems from his need to escape, rather than authenticate, bourgeois subjectivity. He does so by providing an alternative space for Germans to come into consciousness. With the rise of Hitler, this complex escapist space gets re-appropriated and used to uphold German bourgeois ideals. In the case of the sauerkraut westerns, *The Treasure at Silver Lake*, for example, intertwines the American mythos of the western with the romantic melancholy of Indians to project German guilt and desire onto a simulacrum of the American Western frontier. Castlepool’s venerated butterfly, flying across the frame, is the film’s creaturely trickster figure and the remainder of a tribal presence.

One sauerkraut western in particular elucidates this creaturely cine-trickster even more explicitly than the Reinl adaptations. This film, Harald Phillip’s *Winnetou and the*

*Half Breed (Winnetou und das Halbblut Apanatschi, 1966)*, gets scant critical attention because it does not rely on any particular May text as its source material. Instead, Barker and Brice resume their roles as Old Shatterhand and Winnetou in a plot only loosely based on the Winnetou tales. This film engages with May's underlying wild humor and trickster provocations more so than the other sauerkrauts. Ironically, the one sauerkraut that explicitly evokes the trickster strays from being a strict adaptation. The plot revolves around a group of bandits led by Curly-Bill (Ilija Dzuvalakovski), who are trying to find the gold Apanatschi (Uschi Glas) inherits on her birthday. The bandits murder her father and kidnap her younger brother Happy (Marinko Cosic). Winnetou, Old Shatterhand and Jeff Brown (Götz George), Apanatschi's love interest, combine their prowess to stop the bandits from stealing the gold. The reviews of this film contend that Phillips adds nothing new to the genre. This assessment holds true if one looks solely at genre conventions; nevertheless, the trickster emerges in this film explicitly from the opening sequence. Phillips keeps the trickster magic at the fore rather than marginalizing it in supporting characters.

The film's opening sequence evokes a creaturely trickster through a collusion of animal and child imagery. Three shots of Winnetou riding his trusty steed across the desolate landscape and an expository voiceover situate the viewer before the film cuts to a low angle shot of an eagle circling overhead. The next series of shots reveals Happy peering down at an eagle's nest before the mother eagle returns to protect her eggs. Attempting to pilfer a feather from the nest, Happy tosses down a rope ladder, the end of which almost strikes the mother eagle. Happy slowly descends to retrieve the feather; however, on his return the great bird attacks. Crying out for help, Happy

struggles on the mountainside while clutching the rope and feather. Fortunately, Winnetou, hearing Happy's desperate screams, rushes to him and hoists the rope ladder, Happy, and feather out of harm's way. Winnetou tells Happy, "The eagle will always protect its nest," and Happy then relates that he plans to give the feather to Apanatschi as a birthday present. The images present a horrific narrative devoid of humor, but the campiness of the scene makes the spectator laugh at the mess.

The gaze of the Lacanian Real erupts in this sequence. One can read the sequence as a microcosm of the film's larger narrative, as the desire to give Apanatschi a birthday present ultimately jeopardizes the lives of her family members. The sequence evokes the creaturely trickster through images of the child and the eagle while simultaneously revealing their antagonistic nature. The image further attempts to suture the viewer into the narrative fabric by identifying with Happy's predicament. However, this identification reminds the viewer of his/her own vulnerability; the eagle acts as the gaze of the threatening Real. As Todd McGowan notes,

In Lacan's conception of desire, the gaze is not the vehicle through which the subject masters the object but a point in the Other that resists the mastery of vision. It is a blank spot in the subject's look, a blank spot that threatens the subject's sense of mastery in looking because the subject cannot see it directly or successfully integrate it into the rest of its visual field. This is because, as Lacan points out, the gaze is "what is lacking, is non-specular, is not graspable in the image." Even when the subject sees a complete image, something remains obscure: the subject cannot see how its own desire distorts what it sees. (11)

Spectators watch the eagle threaten Happy's quest, but they identify with the child. This obfuscates the eagle's ideological importance because the gaze emerges at points of rupture or creaturely fissures. These disruptions function as "points where the film disturbs the spectator, but at the same time they are the points where the spectator enjoys" (15). Captivated by Happy's traumatic narrative, the audience can dismiss the

eagle as a device to propel the narrative rather than recognizing it as a creaturely disruption.

The political significance of this bird harkens back to the 1919 debate concerning the National Eagle on the German coat of arms. The left wanted the Imperial emblem adorned with a “simple letter R,” and conservatives responded in their right-wing satire magazine *Rote Hand*,

The previous coat-of-arms which witnessed the rise of the German nation to wealth and power, shall be exchanged for the representation of a fowl that better expresses the changed character of the age. Adolf Hitler traded on the controversy, calling the new emblem a “Jewish bankruptcy vulture.” (Simmons 323)

If read as a dialectical image, the iconic eagle attacking Happy recreates the National Socialist attempt to decimate a race of people, the Jew replaced by the Native American child. Viewing this opening sequence through this lens, it becomes clear that the identification with the indigenous child positions the viewer against National Socialism. The trickster hermeneutics involved in this reading transform the eagle-trickster into a figure of the oppressors; but one might also read it as a cautionary moment wherein Winnetou and Happy deflate the trickster’s puffed-up pride.

*Winnetou and the Half-breed’s* central trickster motif continues in a later scene. The bandits kidnap Happy after seeing him playing catch with a chunk of gold during Apanatschi’s birthday celebration. Disguised as a magician, Jeff infiltrates the rival gang at a saloon. His most important trick involves wrenching a child out of the gang’s clutches. Before entering the saloon, Jeff filches a top hat from the sleeping drunk outside, holds it behind his back, and swings the door open when the gang questions the necessity of waiting until they get the order to fire by mocking, “You make it sounds like a circus.” Jeff announces his presence by responding, “Did someone say circus?”

Curly Bill inquires about his vocation, to which Jeff responds, "A magician." Jeff pulls an egg from behind Curly Bill's ear; this magic act culminates in emptying the egg into the top hat, flipping the hat onto Curly Bill's head, and freeing a bird from underneath it. Undermining Curly Bill's importance as the head of the gang, Jeff exposes his impotence and deflates the leader's pride.

This common trope in the sauerkraut westerns to confer trickster status onto the Euro-American (o)ther separates them from the *Indianerfilme*. The displacement of the trickster-magician onto Jeff relegates the Indian representations back to that of the films of manifest manners. This displacement is indicated by the title, "half breed": the trickster manifestation in the non-indigenous character involves an inversion of the trickster into the Euro-American (o)ther. The DEFA *Indianderfilme*, on the other hand, consistently keep the humor with the Native American characters, even though Europeans, as in the sauerkraut westerns, play indigenous characters.

I contend that the creaturely trickster haunts the sauerkraut westerns and the *Indianerfilme*. These films place the trickster into the caesuras, the crypt of the Real. Entombing the trickster figure, these films awaken the phantom of the creaturely trickster. Concerning phantoms, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok observe, "[W]hat haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others. . . . What comes back to haunt are the tombs of others. The phantoms of folklore merely objectify a metaphor active in the unconscious: the burial of an unspeakable fact *within the love-object*" (171-2). In this way the trickster becomes the metaphoric corpse, unacknowledged yet encrypted in these images. To work through the traumatic encounter with the trickster's truth here would mean to begin to work through the

historical traumas of National Socialism; moreover, implications concerning the Native American genocide lurk in this fissure as well.

The fourteen DEFA *Indianerfilme*, wrought with an eye to ethnographic precision, lead the audience to identify with Native Americans while eschewing any connection to May's American fantasia. East Germany's "blacklisting" of May's books and stage performances after WWII explains the conscious denial. "The DEFA films," Sabine Hake argues, "tried to offer an alternative to the West German *Winnetou* series by emphasizing the perspective of the Indians and showing their struggle against imperialist aggression" (128). It thus stands to reason that the DEFA films, despite the explicit effort to cast off the traces of May's world, ultimately recapitulate it. Hake contends that the sauerkraut "[w]esterns allowed for a displacement of German history into the mythological spaces of the New World; therein the May adaptations fulfilled a similar socio-psychological function as the DEFA Indian films" (153).

The first of the *Indianerfilme*, Josef Mach's *The Sons of Great Mother Bear* (*Die Söhne der großen Bäarin*, 1965/1966) was an adaptation of a Liselotte Welskop-Henrich's series of books of the same name. A professor of history at Humboldt University, Welskop-Henrich maintained that her extensive study of Indian history and her visit to the Americas "provided her with enough experience to write an authentic and historically accurate novel" (Lischke and McNab 289-90). From her experience of crossing the Atlantic, she attests to the authenticity of her accounts. Marketing these films as ethnographic studies of Native Indians, the *Indianerfilme* encounter the same pitfalls as May, validating cultural products via claims of historical accuracy and ethnography. As Lacan states in *Seminar XVII*, "Ethnography conceals all kinds of

confusion within itself, through adhering to what it gathers as if it were natural. And how is it gathered? It is gathered in writing, that is to say, detailed, extracted, distorted forever from the supposed terrain on which one is supposedly uncovering it” (153). The very act of writing down what the ethnographer views transforms the truth into a trace. These films, based on “ethnography,” distort that truth even further. Ute Lischke and David T. McNab contend that the *Indianerfilme* reconfigures the stoic Indian that one finds in the literature/cinema of manifest manners without delving into tribal mythology.

However, one cannot dismiss the “unconscious” influences of May’s texts on these films. In the place of Pierre Brice, Yugoslavian physical education student Gojko Mitić catapulted into the starring role of many of the *Indianerfilme* and was christened the “DEFA-Chefindianer” (Gemünden 253). Gemünden argues that Mitić incorporates the “Yugoslav partisan, the model German, the Native American tribal hero, and the displaced Jew,” to irrefutably signify an East German Indian (251). This distinction seems a bit tenuous, especially considering Mitić slips into his Indian garb today to appear at German malls and grace the stage as May’s Apache Chief Winnetou.

The *Indianerfilme* erase the trickster figure despite the obvious trickster-like disjunctions in the setting and characters. Dika argues in her online journal article that *The Sons of Great Mother Bear* uses a “system of imitation [that] had no intended humor. Instead the film was fashioned almost as blank parody, a copy of the U.S. Western that included culturally and historically resonant German elements with little irony.” One of the reasons the DEFA films dispense with the trickster lies in the fact that no one wanted these films to be viewed as childish. As Lischke and McNab observe,

The Indian films tell us more about the politics and culture of former East Germany and Germans in the late twentieth century than they do about Native people in

North America. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 (a period referred to in German as the *Wende*), East Germans were known to West Germans as wild, uncultivated people in much the same manner in which “Indians” used to be viewed as part of the Wild West. So there is a historical correspondence in the DEFA Indian films between how the “Indians” were stereotyped in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and how East Germans were represented in the rest of Europe, particularly in West Germany. (284)

If the Indians signify East Germans, one understands why they would not want to propagate the notion that they revered humor like real Native Americans.

The *Indianerfilme*, adhering to the Western genre, avoided childishness, despite production values that today provokes humor. The trickster figure in both *The Sons of Great Mother Bear* and *Apaches* (1973) receives minimal on-screen time, appearing for only a few minutes in the latter and only slightly longer in the former. In *Apaches*, the creaturely trickster appears in the opening sequence via shots of a fumbling prairie dog—replacing the child—that are crosscut with shots of the hero, Ulzana (Mitic). Non-diegetic, childish music alerts the viewer that this sequence should elicit laughter. This dialectical montage conjoins the human and the creaturely.

Laughter in *The Sons of Great Mother Bear*, on the other hand, converges with images of children, whose marginal on-screen appearance gets conflated with the creaturely culture hero, the bear. The trickster in this film actually consists of a juxtaposition of the creaturely totem animal, the child and the brave warrior, Tokei-Ihto (Mitic). These all stand in stark contrast to the effeminate warrior acting as the trickster-buffoon who appears in the sequence when Toke-Ihto returns to the tribe. This creaturely trickster pastiche seems quite germane because, as Germünden asserts, “The Black Hills are in Yugoslavia, the cowboys are German, and the horses are Russian” (243). The final images of the children at the end of the film develop a *mise-*

*en-scène* of rebirth, as they escape on a raft accompanied by a baby bear. This shot suggests the possibility of reconstituting a new social symbolic order.

Adorno maintains that the collusion of childishness and tricksterism often gets erased by adults—in this case by adult filmmakers. And yet creaturely trickster children do appear in the post-war rubble films and Italian neo-realist films. For example, Gustav Iller and Willi act as tricksters in Gerhard Lamprecht's *Somewhere in Berlin* (1946), and Edmund Köhler assumes the role in Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1948). In these films the dark humor of the children, laced with a trickster thrown into the historical fissures of their reality, give rise to the creaturely trickster. Even post-war German literature contains children performing creaturely trickster roles, as evidenced by Oskar Matzerath in *The Tin Drum*. And one should not forget that, although not a child, the German folklore jester Till Eulenspiegel is a trickster figure. Utilizing a sadistic wit, Eulenspiegel's humor culminates in grotesque scatological comedy. Unintentionally correlating with Black Elk's story of the Lakota Sioux *heyoka* divvying out a sacred dog stew, Eulenspiegel boils a live dog in one tale. Dwelling in the German cultural imagination, these creaturely tricksters of the Real reconstitute the Indian trickster figure better than the *Indianerfilme*.

CHAPTER 6  
*CRYPTO-CREATURELY TRICKSTERISM: CHILD TRICKSTERS  
AND THEIR DISCONTENTS IN WAR CINEMA*

[I]n the death of a child it is possible to rediscover a version of sacred horror.

—Vicky Lebeau, *Childhood and Cinema*

After traumatic historical events in the West, humor often becomes taboo. In tandem with Adorno's oft-stated mandate that art cannot exist after the Holocaust, artists rarely open their comedic rucksack in the immediate aftermath of war. After WWII, for example, American officials told Wolfgang Staudte that American authorities would not permit German filmmakers to direct films for "twenty years." As post-war entertainers transgressed interdictions by both U.S. authorities and Adorno, they utilized crude humor and grotesque characters to enable their audiences to come to terms with the past and lay down cultural boundaries for future generations.

To achieve this goal, artists create a raft of post-war cinema and literature that utilizes the figure of the child. In *Childhood and Cinema*, Vicky Lebeau questions the use of an iconic image of a Jewish child in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966): "What image *can* follow the document of a child's fear, of a child, driven by gunpoint, to the edge of the frame? The question can be said to drive the turn to the child as a figure through which to explore the legacy of war and genocide during the twentieth century" (141). Lebeau argues that images of children are employed to interrogate the relationship between children and death. In this way, she evokes the relationship between the child and the space of creaturely life. In war and post-war films, children, finding their way through war-torn villages and catastrophic rubble, inhabit a peculiar space if viewed through trickster hermeneutics.

Although these films might not concern themselves with Native American iconography, they use images of the child to signify the trickster. As the German sauerkraut westerns and *Indianerfilme* attest, a mise-en-scène of children often denotes a trickster lurking on celluloid. Child tricksters appeared in many films prior to those aforementioned, but the figure of the child in war films enables us to examine the ways in which directors deploy children to explore the unspeakable realities and social injustices erupting in the bourgeois social order.

Locating the creaturely trickster in post-war films involving children should not be a daunting task. The childishness of the “primitive” mythic figure leads Jung to maintain that the trickster begins to help indigenous groups advance towards a more highly developed consciousness. In Jung’s analysis—reminiscent of G. Stanley Hall’s recapitulation theory<sup>1</sup>—tricksters work to sustain the status quo by helping children adapt to the world in which they find themselves. The polyvalent nature of the trickster permits scholars to reach these conclusions; such conclusions, however, stand in contradistinction to the resistance that the creaturely trickster more often embodies. The trickster’s ability to explore caesuras within the symbolic order is the core of creaturely trickster discourse. This opens up onto larger questions regarding the complex and contradictory roles children play in these films.

One problem concerning trickster children in war films revolves around the intended audience. No one would deem these films children’s films in any conventional sense. Just as one would never read Jerzy Kosinski’s post-WWII novel *The Painted Bird* (1965), Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum* (1959), or Sebald’s *Austerlitz* (2001) as

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<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 3, I discuss Hall’s recapitulation theory in relation to the constellation of children/trickster/cinema.

children's bedtime stories, "rubble films" such as Gerhard Lamprecht's *Somewhere in Berlin* (1946) or Staudte's *Rotation* (1949), do not come across as children's films even though children play significant roles in them. Exploring a child's relationship to the traumatic detritus of war, these films show the child as beyond the limits of the human and at the threshold of the creaturely. Roberto Rossellini's Italian neo-realist trilogy, *Rome, Open City* (1945), *Paisà* (1946) and *Germany Year Zero* (1949), Volker Schlöndorff's *The Tin Drum* (1979), René Clément's *Forbidden Games* (1952), André Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) and *The Mirror* (1975), Guillermo del Toro's *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and finally, Bahman Ghobadi's *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000) and *Turtles Can Fly* (2005) are all films that investigate the relationship between children and the effects of war.<sup>2</sup>

In many of these films, children act together as creaturely trickster twins. Ballinger delineates two variations of trickster twin oral tales,

those in which there is a pronounced opposition of values between the twins and those in which there seems to be a more indiscriminate mingling of trickster traits. In the first kind of oral-tradition twins, we often see differences between the brothers that are reminiscent of the split between tricksters and culture heroes, at least in the sense that there is a division of positive and negative or admirable and contemptible qualities. (117)

Ballinger later adds, "Seeing the twins only dualistically would be misleading; it should be noted that their creative transforming powers can be effective only when they act as one" (120). Trickster twins embody two of the structural figures of comedy Zupančič uncovers: split subjectivity (the ego and the It) and the double (the ego and the ego). The polyvalent nature of trickster twins necessitates hermeneutic strategies that either

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<sup>2</sup> For a longer list of cinematic examples, see Lebeau (141).

unite or render them diametrically opposed in order to elicit humor, transgress the limits of acceptable behavior and, ultimately, transform culture.

Creaturely cine-trickster children, who expose the gaps in the Western European symbolic order, force viewers to resituate the borders of permissible thought and move the participant audience into ethico-political action. The theoretical underpinnings of child trickster twins in war films warrants an interrogation of what Abraham and Torok refer to as intrapsychic crypts and transgenerational hauntings, especially when considering the trauma wrought by World War II. After conjoining Abraham and Torok's theoretical edifice with creaturely tricksterism, I will apply the crypto-creaturely trickster to the German rubble film *Somewhere in Berlin*. Finally, I turn my attention to creaturely trickster children who play with death in *Forbidden Games* and the more recent film, *Turtles Can Fly*.

### **Crypto-creaturely Trickster Twins *Somewhere in Berlin***

Juxtaposing creaturely trickster discourse with trickster children in war films requires a synthesis of the Lacanian Real with Abraham and Torok's notion of intrapsychic crypts. Abraham and Torok used this concept in their psychoanalytic practice in post-WWII Germany. One can view intrapsychic crypts as housing the hard kernel of the Lacanian Real. Tricksters reach into these crypts, unlock the traumatic kernel, and there exorcise the phantoms lurking in them. Abraham notes of the phantom,

It is a fact that the 'phantom,' whatever its form, is nothing but the invention of the living. Yes, an invention in the sense that the phantom is meant to objectify, even if under the guise of individual or collective hallucination, the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a love object's life. The phantom is therefore also a metapsychological fact: what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others. (171)

Subjects incorporate these repressed “secrets of others” into their own psyches; the phantoms, or “what comes back to haunt[,] are the tombs of others” (172).

Transgenerational hauntings occur when parents pass their intrapsychic crypt onto their children. By holding onto these incorporated cryptic objects, subjects believe they fill in the Void that completes them. The cryptic Kernel thus acts as an invisible and unconscious *object a*. Tricksters reach into these crypts to expose the impossibility of completion via endocryptic identification. The trickster acts as the analyst in revealing the “commemorative monument,” the symptoms of the incorporated object that “stand like tombs in the life of the ego” (114). The trickster turns the hidden phantom or traumatic word into an *object a*. Abraham describes this labor in the following way,

It is important to emphasize that the words giving sustenance to the phantom return to haunt from the unconscious. These are often the very words that rule an entire family’s history and function as the tokens of its pitiable articulations. Extending the idea of the phantom, it is reasonable to maintain that the “phantom effect” progressively fades during its transmission from one generation to the next and that, finally, it disappears. Yet, this is not at all the case when shared or complementary phantoms find a way of being established as social practices along the lines of staged words. . . . We must not lose sight of the fact that to stage a word—whether metaphorically, as an alloeme, or as a cryptonym—constitutes an attempt at exorcism, an attempt, that is, to relieve the unconscious by placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm. (176)

Conjoining the effects of cryptic phantoms with creaturely humor, the trickster attempts to exorcise the phantoms, forcing the participant audience to reconfigure its social symbolic order.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Lane’s scathing review of *The Shell and the Kernel* attacks Abraham and Torok for both misreading Freud’s usage of the term “incorporation” in “Mourning and Melancholia” and recapitulating the goals of American ego-psychology through the therapeutic exorcism of cryptic secrets. To argue against Torok’s understanding of Freud’s version of incorporation, Lane harkens back to the seminal essay without any consideration of Freud’s revision of the terms “mourning” and “melancholia” in *The Ego and the Id*. While Freud initially hitched incorporation to melancholy’s pathological wagon, he detached it in the latter essay. Freud writes,

Before applying this trickster notion to cinema, I would like to point out that locating intrapsychic crypts within the Real also renovates Dominick LaCapra's distinctions between structural and historical trauma. LaCapra posits that "[h]istorical trauma is specific and not everyone is subject to it or entitled to the subject-position associated with it" (722). In contrast, structural trauma is

related to . . . transhistorical absence (absence of/at the origin) and appears in different ways in all societies and all lives . . . .[I]t may be evoked or addressed in various fashions—in terms of the separation from the

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At that time, however, we did not appreciate the full significance of [incorporation] and did not know how common and how typical it is. Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its "character." (52)

Freud's revision turns incorporation into introjection, and Torok contends, he conflates the two terms. Interestingly enough, in Lane's section entitled "*Incorporation and Introjection; or, Freud vs. Ferenczi*" he prevaricates about Abraham and Torok's definition of the terms until the next section, where he only references the seminal "Mourning and Melancholy" essay.

Secondly, Lane attacks Abraham and Torok's notion of phantom exorcism as "advocating treatment through 'analytic therapy.' . . . The conceptual—but, above all, *ontological*—distinction between 'analysis' and 'therapy' is best grasped by their respective etymologies: 'Analysis' denotes a loosening and radical undoing, while 'therapy' is bound irrevocably to the 'art of healing'" (12). While this argument usefully recalls Lacan's contentions against American ego-psychology, Lane refuses a synthesis between the Lacanian Real and Abraham and Torok's crypt. Lane argues,

This tension between analysis and therapy, which corresponds conceptually to Abraham and Torok's paradigm shift from the unconscious to the ego, prevails throughout *The Shell and the Kernel*, haunting the authors' "rhapsodic" organicism [97] as the subsidiary meaning of "Kernel" (*noyau*). Rather than endorsing Abraham and Torok's 'fructification of change' [14], however this aspect of *noyau* designates a type of organicism that resists symbolization by conveying the "stone" of a fruit—the indeterminate center on which its flesh grows. Ultimately, we may be closest to Žižek's formulation of the "hard kernel of the Real" precisely when Abraham and Torok anticipate 'harmony' between sexuality and identity. (12)

Viewing the crypt as part of the Lacanian Real uncovers similarities that Lane overlooks, despite his connection between Žižek's "hard kernel of the Real" and Abraham and Torok's kernel. Perhaps his misunderstanding arises here because of his interpretation of Abraham and Torok's Shell and Envelope and kernel as a recapitulation of Freud's Ego and Id. The Shell appears as the Ego, that which remains conscious, while the Kernel seems to elicit the unconscious, the gaps in consciousness. However, the Kernel does not represent merely the Id. Abraham writes in "The Scope and Originality of Freudian Psychoanalysis," "[I]f Freud's theories form the protective shell around his intuition, simultaneously concealing and revealing it, what of the actual kernel? For it is the kernel which, invisible but active, confers its meaning upon the whole construction" (82). Abraham goes on to call the kernel "the active principle of psychoanalytic theory." Viewing the crypts in light of the Real problematizes Lane's contention that Abraham and Torok's goal remains "therapy" and synthesizes transgenerational haunting with creaturely tricksterism.

(m)other, . . . the eruption of the pre-oedipal or presymbolic in the symbolic, the entry into language, the encounter with the 'real,' . . . and so forth. (722)

LaCapra argues that structural trauma eschews the particular absence of historical trauma in favor of the universal lack constitutive of a subject's identity.

Transgenerational hauntings thrust upon the child a particular absence or gap in the parent's unconscious. With the Lacanian Real *incorporating* intrapsychic crypts, historical trauma gets injected into the traumatic/hard Kernel, and one can view the encounter with the cryptic Real as an initial step towards exorcising the phantom—a process of introjection, if you will.

Finding rubble aesthetically pleasing poses questions about positioning Abraham and Torok in my constellation. Applying transgenerational phantoms, the crypt, and the creaturely trickster to a German rubble film, I maintain that the war-torn landscape itself acts as a crypt. A mise-en-scène of fragmented rubble holds the remnants of WWII historical trauma as well as a National Socialist presence that continue to haunt the post-war German psyche. Filmmakers could lock out these memory traces from the rubble by staging domestic melodramas; however, when on-screen debris invades these films, the mise-en-scène juxtaposes the traces of historical trauma with the personal traumas unfolding on the screen. The ensuing reconfiguration of the symbolic order correlates with the reconstruction of the rubble-filled towns. After digging through the rubble of the Real, Germans needed to resurrect a new Symbolic order. Thus, the physical reconstruction of Germany correlates with psychical reconstruction. The latter work is predicated on exorcising phantoms also metaphorically buried in the rubble. Who can help initiate this process better than the wily trickster, who acts as a buffoon, culture hero, and shaman at different moments?

It should not be surprising then that Lamprecht's *Somewhere in Berlin* opens with a pan across a reconstruction site as a worker declares, "We can start now." What follows does not, however, correspond as one might expect with the clearing away of the rubble, but, rather, with the appearance of the trickster-figure. A high angle long shot reveals a criminal, Waldemar (Fritz Rasp), scampering amid the ruins. To evade the authorities after pilfering a wallet, Waldemar runs into a seemingly abandoned cellar. Entering the frame via the cellar window, Gustav Iller, the trickster child of the film, appears. Through the *mise-en-scène*, Lamprecht reveals Gustav's privileged position as a trickster by using a low angle shot of him in contrast to the high angle shot of Waldemar. After Waldemar lies to Gustav about chasing his dog, Gustav darts out of sight only to return momentarily and ask, "What kind of dog is it?" Gustav eventually "unlocks" the adult trickster Waldemar, and thereby recapitulates Abraham and Torok's idea of unlocking an intrapsychic crypt entombing a secret. After Waldemar's release, he steals and returns the cellar key to Gustav, to which Gustav replies, "You know lots of tricks." This further signals his trickster status.

The film relates Gustav and Willi's narratives as they move through the space of disintegration surrounding them. Gustav and Willi, as part of a youth mob, set off illegal fireworks while playing pretend war-games. Afterwards, the viewer sees Gustav's POW father, Herr Iller, return to his garage now reduced to rubble. The main narrative thread revolves around Gustav's efforts to inspire his father to rebuild the garage. In order to fulfill this wish, Willi steals food to raise Herr Iller's strength. Willi's crime forces Gustav to run away from home and eventually prove his worth by climbing the high wall of a

ruined building. His subsequent fall to his death forces both Herr Iller and the participant audience to reconfigure their positions within the social symbolic order.

Gustav and Willi represent trickster-figures in the film, and Lamprecht turns Willi into Gustav's double, or trickster twin, in Willi's first on-screen appearance. The (O)ther in the guise of a policeman enters Gustav's home to inquire about Birke, Willi's surrogate father, who provides the children with illegal firecrackers in exchange for food. In lieu of Gustav's confession, the policeman, accompanied by Gustav and his mother, interrogates Birke, and clever Willi absconds with Birke's contraband rockets through the window to save Birke. When a neighborhood girl catches him, Willie pleads, "Don't tell." Willie returns to Birke's interrogation and sarcastically asks the officer, "Why don't you check for yourself?" This elicits a wink from Birke. The act of removing the hidden fireworks situates Willi as Gustav's double because they both remove something from an intrapsychic crypt.

This trickster in this film is a split between Gustav and Willi. Jaimey Fisher points out that the youth in these films act as both "social threat" and "social cement." Fisher notes, "In contrast to youth who symbolize the dispersion of the social order . . . children also serve as the pillar of bourgeois social relations: they are the cornerstones of the private house and the motivation for productive labor" (102). Conjoining "social threat" with "social cement," Fisher in effect reconfigures these children as creaturely cine-trickster figures, who simultaneously transgress the Law and serve as culture heroes. Fisher underscores this dualism when she continues, "As the film's paradigmatic representative of youth—that 'adolescent' liminal space resistant to the bourgeois social order—Willi highlights the father's lack because, in contrast to Iller, he represents active

and effective agency, but remains unhoused and undisciplined” (110). I want to take this distinction one step further: Willi represents the social threat. Willi’s first words, “Don’t tell,” point toward his role as “social threat,” something that continues throughout the film as he steals fireworks and food from Birke. On the other hand, Gustav, guarding his father’s cellar, maintains the (O)ther’s signifying place amid the rubble. Gustav perpetually attempts to bridge the gap between the Law and the transgressors: in this way, he becomes the “social cement” aspect of the trickster as culture hero. Gustav discloses to the policeman Birke’s illegal activities, and when Gustav runs off to play war-games, he warns Willi and the other rubble children, “We’ll get in trouble!” Gustav acts as the policing agent, and, by the film’s conclusion, he fills the culture hero role that eludes Willi. Willi’s death exposes an objet petit a, both filling the culture hero’s Void/Shell and abandoning it, in the end, to achieve something akin to cultural balance.

I do not mean to suggest that either Gustav or Willi could serve as the trickster without the other. They work in tandem to produce their political edge. Their trickster responsibilities intersect throughout the film, the two characters representing different sides of the trickster coin. A sign of this connection occurs when a tossed rock hits Willi’s left ear; conversely, at another point Waldemar pulls Gustav out from underneath the kitchen table by his right ear. The pair thus stands in a dialectical relationship corresponding to Lacan’s formulation, “desire = demand – need.” Lacan notes, “[D]esire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)” (276). Because of Willi’s access to food at Birke’s store, he can fulfill “the appetite for satisfaction.” This is evidenced by the package of food for

Gustav's father he leaves at their door. Gustav, on the other hand, wants to substantiate his love by providing his debilitated *Heimkerer* [returning soldier] father with food, the food that Willi has stolen. The dual trickster roles of "cement" and "threat" overlap in Lacan's dialectic of desire, a dialectic in which both of these tricksters ask each other, "*Ché vuoi?*" ["What do you want from me?"]. Lacan argues,

This is why the Other's question [*la question de l'Autre*]*—*that comes back to the subject from the place from which he expects an oracular reply*—*which takes some such form as "*Ché vuoi?*," "What do you want?," is the question that best leads the subject to the path of his own desire, assuming that, thanks to the know-how of a partner known as a psychoanalyst, he takes up the question, even without knowing it, in the following form: "What does he want from me?" (690)

Gustav lacks what Willi has, namely food, while Willi lacks the parental love given to Gustav. These two complement each other, and each assumes for the other the position of *objet petit a*, that which each believes will complete him, but which in fact exposes the other's lack.

Throughout the film, Lamprecht also takes advantage of the trickster's voracious appetite. Hyde notes,

The trickster myth derives creative intelligence from appetite. It begins with a being whose main concern is getting fed and it ends with the same being grown mentally swift, adept at creating and unmasking deceit, proficient at hiding his tracks and at seeing through the devices used by others to hide theirs. (17)

The cine-trickster children worry a great deal about appetite. Gustav feeds outsiders, such as Waldemar, and he worries about his father's debilitating lack of food. The trickster's concern with food shifts from the trading of stolen food for illegal firecrackers to the stealing of food for the debilitated Herr Iller. The significant role of appetite changes after the *Heimkerer* enters the ruins and Herr Steidel, a war veteran who gazes

in a catatonic state out the window, points and says “Da,” it is as though Herr Iller’s return inscribes a physical reappearance of a transitional object.

The trickster’s concern with appetite plays out in two ways in the film: in the actual consumption of food and the acquisition of money. Elevating money and food into the place of the void of the Thing, the film’s trickster transposes them with *objet petit a* through acts of transgression that force characters to encounter the void of the Thing that they fantasize will complete them. Birke for one believes the stolen food will bring him to completion. Despite the fact that the Illers return the missing food, Birke refuses to forget Willi’s action because the food fills in the gaping wound created by lost money. Appetite oscillates between food and money, food turning into a commodity rather than a necessity. This plays upon Lacan’s dialectic of desire, while simultaneously hinting at an undercurrent of the National Socialist past that haunts the film through Birke’s fascistic obsession with food. Willie as trickster transgresses the Law, exposing the Real/Void within Birke. This enables the participant audience, Gustav, Frau Shelp (Willi’s guardian), and the Illers to reclaim their own empathic subjecthood and thereby reconfigure their Symbolic orders. Lamprecht’s dialectic of stealing and appetite reaches its zenith when Willi runs away and spends the night at Herr Eckmann’s house. After Willi divulges his good intentions in the theft, Eckmann declares, “Stealing is always wrong.” To this, Willi replies, “But adults can do anything.” In this way, Willi exposes the hypocrisy surrounding him. He “see[s] through the devices used by others to hide their” tracks, to recall Hyde’s formulation regarding the trickster.

Abraham and Torok’s notion of exorcising cryptic phantoms comes to the fore through the transitional space of rubble in the film’s opening and concluding sequences,

the symmetrical return to the landscape fusing intrapsychic crypts and encounters with the debris of the Real. Playing war by bombing the ruins with illegal firecrackers, the youth mob produces a “potential space” of play. This initial pretend war scene encapsulates the trickster logic of unlocking the intrapsychic crypt, throwing the hidden secret at the painter Herr Eckmann. The rubble as transitional space permits these children to dislodge the secret hidden within the fractured space. As D. W. Winnicott notes,

Into this play area the child gathers objects or phenomena from external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality. Without hallucinating the child puts out a sample of dream potential and lives with this sample in a chosen setting of fragments from external reality. (51)

These children did not choose these fragmented rubbles as their transitional space; therefore, it should not be surprising that they physically bomb it in order to engage in a form of creative destruction. Winnicott believes that the destructive impulses in creative play move a child from “object relating” to “object-use,” and the destruction of the rubble raises questions about the nature of the transitional objects that exist in this space. Within this “potential space,” the rubble and the contraband firecrackers function as transitional objects. The latter in particular exposes the cryptic secret of the past. Fisher believes that “the unruly children seen [stand] obliquely for the war;” moreover, Fisher claims another film, *Rotation*, “makes its point explicit, that is, that the young stand in for Nazis” (120). During the mob scene, the children, in a manner reminiscent of the Nazis, stand in line and count off as they receive their fireworks. Shattering windows, creating chasms amid the debris, and recapitulating the past as a microcosm in the present, the rockets unearth the secrets of the cryptic ruins—National Socialism.

Even more so than the rockets and the rubbles, another transitional object extracts from the crypt the Nazi past. The explosions force Herr Eckmann to encounter the Real of this crypt. The juxtaposition of children and fireworks intrude on his mental faculties as a rocket invades his home and burns a hole into his painting. Gathering together the children to underscore the severity of their transgressions, Gustav's super-ego takes over once again. The children return to Eckmann's door, and he yells at them, "The war's over! Come here at once! You're young warriors. . . . Nothing better to do? Always waging war, shooting and destroying." He then takes them inside to witness the hole in the painting, what the viewer recognizes as a figure for the Nazi censorship of art. These children confront head-on the destruction of an *objet d'art*, another transitional object. Winnicott notes, "The object is always being destroyed. This destruction becomes the unconscious backcloth for love of a real object; that is, an object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control" (94). Confronted with the hole in the artwork, Willi cries, while Gustav declares, "We can fix [the hole]." At this point, it is as if the children believe they can patch up the past with some glue and tape. The wound in the transitional object produces the love Gustav needs in order, as the culture hero, to lay down the rules of the social order. The transgression that exposes the cryptic secret creates the desire to reconfigure the social matrix and patch up the gap created by a lack in the social order. After the children swear off war games and depart, like good tricksters, they once more throw a rock into Eckmann's house, knocking the ruined artwork out of his hands. This second assault on the picture reveals the repetition compulsion that haunts transgenerationally the children, that returns at this moment in the fascistic hatred of art.

Willi plays an instrumental role in his return to the rubble at the film's conclusion. Willi stays at Eckmann's the night before climbing to his death; and, in a dialogue with Eckmann, he foreshadows his death in his narration of his hiding in Karo's doghouse. Willi claims, "It was warm there and nobody could find me. And everyone was looking for me." In this way, he metaphorically locks himself inside the crypt. The next morning, he exposes the phantom of the ruins—the hidden secret of the crypt—by becoming one more victim. The participant narrative audience, as well as the original 1946 the audience of the film, recognize Willi's attempt to become the culture hero, even saluting him as a "hero." Willi's death forces a reconfiguration of the Symbolic order of the participant audience members, most especially for Herr Iller, who visits Willi and reconstitutes the Symbolic order by promising to fulfill their wish to rebuild the garage. Nevertheless, the real culture hero is not Willi but Gustav, who uses Willi's phantom to rally the youth mob to finally clear the rubble from the garage and thereby exorcise the phantom(s) of the rubble's Real. The first words uttered in the opening sequence, "We can start now," return in this image of the children rebuilding the social matrices.

One problem with this reading arises from the assumption that Gustav and Herr Iller might incorporate the corpse of Willi into their psyches. If this is the case, the removal of the debris from the garage may simply clear a space for Willi's entombment, an endocryptic identification coming fast upon the heels of this action. The question thus remains open whether an exorcism of the intrapsychic crypt has occurred. Will Willi's phantom haunt the garage, reinscribing the National Socialist victims inside the new transitional space? Or did the encounter with the creaturely trickster lead the witnesses into a new form of ethico-political action? Only the trickster hermeneutic strategies of

what Rancière refers to as the “emancipated spectator” can render these possibilities viable.

### **Creaturely Cine-Trickster Children unto Death**

Cinematic portrayals of children as tricksters existed long before the German rubble films. However, the use in these films of the child to reveal the fissures of social reality necessitates a reexamination of the trickster’s significance. Crossing the borders of permissible thought, creaturely cine-trickster children inhabit a topsy-turvy reality comparable to the “Inverted World” Hegel describes in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hans-George Gadamar contends, “That which is suggested by the Inverted World is not simply...the bare, abstract countermeaning of the first world. Rather, this inversion, in which everything appears altered, shows in precise fashion the hidden perversity of our ordinary milieu” (417). Creaturely trickster children, cobbling together meaning from their disorderly world, simultaneously elicit a sacrosanct repulsion and peculiar fascination on the part of the film’s spectators.

In Clément’s post-war film *Forbidden Games*—an adaptation of François Boyer’s novel *Secret Games (Les Jeux inconnus)*—creaturely trickster twins, young Paulette (Brigitte Fossey) and Michel Dollé (Georges Poujouly), wander across a France during the 1940 German Blitzkrieg of Paris depicted as another Inverted World. The film—the first awarded an honorary Oscar, and this because the Academy did not have a foreign film category at the time—revolves around Paulette, who witnesses both her parents and dog’s death as they are shot while trying to escape. After losing her parents, she carries her dog, Jock, back to some Parisians, who then throw it into the river. Paulette fetches her dead dog out of the water and encounters Michel, a small boy chasing his runaway cow back to his father’s barn, who then takes her back to his family. At this

point she enters the rural world that Peter Matthews designates as part of a fairy tale topography. Raised in the city, Paulette in fancy dress contrasts starkly with the agrarian world into which she stumbles. As she learns about the ceremonies surrounding death, she decides to bury her dog and build a cemetery so that the dog will not be alone. Following their construction of the cemetery, filled with dead animals they have gathered from the countryside, the children become obsessed with Christian iconography of crosses, and in their final act of depravity, they pilfer crosses from a church graveyard.

In this topsy-turvy reality, the worldview imparted by the Dollé family, filtered through the children's innocent worldview, initiates a traumatic repetition of both Paulette's trauma and the Holocaust. After overhearing that the seven people killed on the bridge would not get a coffin and that the people will "dig a hole and in [the refugees] go like a dog," she becomes convinced she must bury Jock. She and Michel construct a crypt in an abandoned mill, presided over by an owl they call The Mayor. The owl is both a symbol of the repetition compulsion that will occur under its watch and Hegel's owl of Minerva. Soon Paulette asks Michel if he thinks Jock will get lonely in the crypt; at this point, these two pranksters seek out dead animals to bury in their graveyard. In certain cases, as when Michel steals baby chickens from a neighbor's backyard, it appears that he kills live animals in order to bury them. Paulette's appetite for dead animals is rivaled only by her love of crosses, and this macabre children's game comes to its climax when they pilfer crosses. The trickster's sacrosanct nature explodes into the filmic *mise-en-scène* when Paulette visits the church during the funeral of Michel's brother and informs Michel that her favorite cross is the priest's. He

subsequently gives in to Paulette's desires, and the priest spots him attempting to steal the cross while his sister goes to confession. Later, they take their innocent criminal transgressions one step further in stealing fourteen crosses from the church graveyard. After the authorities capture Paulette, her screams become an acknowledgement of her personal trauma, as she cries out, "*Maman!*" After having attempted to recreate her trauma in the mill, she finally unlocks the magic word, the film's final shot showing her disappearing into a crowd in search of her mother.

The creaturely tricksterism of these children restores order to this Inverted World via their naïveté. Imbued with an inchoate understanding of religious rites, the recreation in the pet cemetery of the Holocaust enables Paulette to transform it into a transitional space wherein she can come to terms with the personal trauma of losing her parents. Incapable of comprehending how their words act as the impetus for Michel and Paulette's actions, the adults are too caught up in their battle with the neighbors the Gouards to care about the children's activities. Without the creaturely trickster children traversing this narrative world, the film would lose its transformative power. As Matthews notes,

When Paulette and Michel steal crosses from the village church to adorn their own private cemetery of dead fauna (first her beloved dog, Jock, then moles, crickets, cockroaches, butterflies, birds, worms, buried in a mounting frenzy), they are at once blasphemers against and parodists of the official religion that the grown-ups practice so emptily. Yet in a world where the currency of death has been so cheapened, their crimes ironically restore to it a portion of its original sacramental awe and gravity. (10)

The sacrilegious activities of these trickster twins enable them ultimately to move into a sacrosanct place, launching them onto a dialectical journey of sorts.

Critics of the film were disturbed by the sense that good and evil become equivalent and innocence and guilt appear as flip sides of one coin. The morbid

relationship between the trickster children and the dead animals raises questions about whether viewers should understand these children as innocent or as embodiments of a perverse evil. It is “not for nothing” that Terry Eagleton, in the introduction to his book *On Evil*, dwells upon the murder of a toddler in England by a group of children.

Reflecting on a policeman’s designation of the children perpetrators as “evil,” Eagleton mentions the ambiguous position of children in contemporary culture:

Perhaps . . . we are ready to believe all kinds of sinister things about children since they seem like a half alien race in our midst. Since they do not work, it is not clear what they are for. . . . They have the uncanniness of things which resemble us in some ways but not in others. It is not hard to fantasize that they are collectively conspiring against us, in the manner of John Wyndham’s fable *The Midwich Cuckoos*. Because children are not fully part of the social game, they can be seen as innocent; but for just the same reason they can be regarded as the spawn of Satan. The Victorians swung constantly between angelic and demonic views of their offspring. (2)

In the children of *Forbidden Games*, the question of good and evil marks the ambiguous and, therefore, tricky nature of reality. Moreover, the film transforms the cultural imaginary to such an extent that the definitions of these binaries break asunder and are ultimately distributed in a new way.

Traumatized by the death of her parents and unable to articulate her own emotions, Paulette, along with her accomplice Michel, transform into trickster twins that do not oppose each other. Rather, the trickster qualities of each reinforce those of the other. Rancière notes that children in cinema “traditionally play...either the victim of a violent world or the mischievous observer that takes itself too seriously” (*FF* 16).

Dwelling in the interstitial space between victims and perpetrators, these tricksters cannot be simply designated, as too many critics want to do, as “evil.” Rather, Paulette uses animal corpses, forms of transitional objects, to come to terms with and exorcise the phantoms of her dead parents, whom she has incorporated in a melancholic fashion

into her psyche. These trickster twins, bricoleurs accumulating words and religious rites they cannot fully comprehend, reveal the ambiguous relationships a subject discovers in a world produced in war.

If questions arise about the innocence or evil of Paulette and Michel, where would one locate the horrific childhood depicted in *Turtles Can Fly*? These war-ravaged creaturely cine-trickster children precariously straddle childhood and an adult realm that threatens to rob them of their innocence. Because the film revolves around the children's proximity to death and destruction—the space of the Real—one wonders if they can even any longer be considered children. While developmentally they appear to be children, it seems at times as if they have surpassed the limits of childhood. Lebeau writes,

What price the image of the child? In pain, in death? At the limits of language, of culture, of knowledge, the child can always be used to make the familiar strange, the domestic uncanny, in a way that also draws on the attachment to the image of the child as an incitement to compassion, pity, feeling—above all, to the future. But what happens *if* that image fails? 'I...don't think that these children acting in the movie', Bahman Ghobadi has reflected on the filming of *Turtles Can Fly*, 'could be called real children. They never had a childhood.' (176)

Dwelling in the Iraqi-Turkish border in Kurdistan, the liminal children of *Turtles Can Fly* shake off conventional designations as children in part because of their misshapen bodies. Inscribed on the mangled bodies of these children are thus the ravages of war. Following the daily activities of a group of refugee children who, before the 2003 arrival of U.S. troops, disarm mines in order to make some money, Ghobadi's film depicts children in dire circumstances. However, even in this case, the viewer cannot too readily dismiss their child-like qualities.

If, as Ghobadi suggests in his notes on the film that these figures should not be considered children, how should the viewer understand them? To deem them adults would imbue the film with an ideological significance that would eradicate the social realities they experience. Moreover, if they were understood as adults, the film would become close to what we see in Kathryn Bigelow's Oscar-winning, *The Hurt Locker* (2009). *The Hurt Locker* can be taken as a counterpoint to Ghobadi's film, with adult American soldiers rather than Iraqi children doing the work of disarming mines, and the huckster child Beckham selling to the soldiers DVDs. Both Ghobadi's and Bigelow's films were similarly received: in both cases, critics choose to focus on the film's "apolitical aspects." Nonetheless, such a reading is a tenuous one, especially if we keep in mind Rancière's claim that the aesthetic regime corresponds to a distribution of the sensible that always already politicizes art in a specific fashion. These two films convey similar messages but the cinematic unfolding of each makes a tremendous difference. *Turtles Can Fly* relies on a mise-en-scène of maimed children in order to capture the devastation of their lived experience. The complex relationship between children and war remains the focus of Ghobadi's film, and this encourages the film's audience to reflect on the gross social inequalities experienced by them.

Ghobadi's assertion that we take these figures as "not children" suggests that he may rely too heavily on a modern Western definition of childhood. As Walter Benjamin observes in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, "I deliberately called to mind those images which, in exile, are most apt to waken homesickness: images of childhood" (37). Images of children living in close proximity to death contrast starkly with "involuntary memories" evoking nostalgia for a lost, youthful innocence. The trickiness of the term "child"

exposes a gap where language breaks down: if one cannot call Ghobadi's actors children in a Western sense, they are still children for the viewers of the film's mise-en-scène.

The challenges faced by these children lead Lebeau to argue that the film paints these refugee children as future-less or, at best, with a future impossible to imagine. However, reading them through the lens of a trickster hermeneutic opens up a way of seeing them beyond the bleak fate Lebeau envisions. For without an attention to the trickster's polyvalent nature and its creative creation of future possible worlds, these children would be cast into the rubbish heap of history. Lebeau understands these children as constrained to the film's setting in the months preceding the American invasion of Iraq; however, reading *Turtles Can Fly* fully aware that Ghobadi captures these maimed children on film after the fall of Saddam Hussein opens up a way to challenge the boundaries of such a reading. The film's opening sequence, which consists of Agrin plopping a stone into the lake right before she jumps off a cliff, lets the viewer know from the outset that within the film "time is out of joint."

The viewer may wonder whether the trickster could dwell in such a dark narrative. However, the characters's quips and sometimes comic turns remind us that we can locate trickster incarnations in these cinematic children. Like Iktomi ostracized from tribal connections, they thus lurk at the margins of their society. Ghobadi's trickster children operate in a historical fissure where the space of meaning breaks down. In this way, the film unearths for the participant viewer a realm of creaturely life. The film revolves around two protagonists: Soran, known as Satellite, a tech-savvy child wandering from village to village to install satellite dishes, and Hengov. Satellite controls

the local children and runs cunning circles around the village elders. When it comes to bartering with technological traders, his wily tricks become handy. He, too, does not work his machinations alone: Hengov, an eerily stoic and armless boy who has prophetic visions, helps Satellite achieve his trickster status. Satellite relays Hengov's prophecies to boost his own position, usually through an English he barely comprehends.

The film also includes Agrin, Hengov's sister and Satellite's love interest, who despondently looks on as her blind baby, Riga—a product of rape by soldiers—calls to her. Because of the villager's strict religious beliefs, Hengov and Agrin tell everyone that Riga is their brother. The child constantly reminds Agrin of what enemy soldiers did to her, and she thus concludes that she must abandon her child to find peace. The film ends with the arrival of U.S. soldiers after Agrin drowns her son and jumps to her death, an event foreshadowed in the film's opening sequence. Agrin's actions leave Hengov to fend solely for himself.

The main trickster figures here remain Satellite and Hengov, huckster children employing a cunning of reason. Satellite's tricksterism prominently figures throughout the film. A crucial moment of transgression occurs when he sets up a satellite dish for Esmael and the other Kurdish elders. His tricks begin when he turns on the very "sexy and music" channels that Saddam has prohibited. This elicits stern disapproval from the elders; however, after Satellite finds a news channel, where a speech by the U.S. President is being broadcast, his role transforms from the buffoon to culture bearer. Esmael asks Satellite to translate President Bush's words. After some deliberation, Satellite translates, incorrectly, Bush as saying "It will rain tomorrow," and concludes, "I

think it's a code." This misreading, at once tragically prophetic and darkly comedic, exposes the signifying stress, the failure of translation revealing *nonsensical*-ness to the viewer. Satellite keeps saying he needs to attend to the village children, who reside in the symbolic order he helps maintain. These children stand in distinction to the eruption of the Real found in the untranslatable English emitting from the television screen.

On the other side of this coin, Hengov brings his prophetic visions to the Kurds, offering revelations stemming directly from the void of the Real. Hengov understands the signifying stress that emerges from the visions. Agrin tells Satellite that, after Hengov made predictions in two different villages, things ended badly. Satellite then uses Hengov's predictions to forewarn the villagers. Although one could attribute too much seriousness to Hengov, he too engages in some hilarious acts; for example, even though he lacks arms, he is willing to fight with Satellite, head-butting him early on. In this way, Hengov displays his own inflated pride. Hengov's serious nature figures what Satellite lacks. Both are necessary to counterbalance the other, a deep dialectic developing between the two characters. These creaturely trickster twins through their sacrosanct power expose the historic fissure, the symbolic Real of their everyday lives.

These cinematic children meander through war rubble and deal with imminent death, and thereby highlight the importance of the creaturely trickster for making sense of the traumas they encounter. The horrors experienced by these children tricksters challenge conventional notions of childhood. Moreover, children in these films enable a reconfiguration of the social symbolic order during a post-war period of reconstruction. Despite how much some viewers may want to condemn the children to their historical fates, these cinematic trickster children are able to transform their worlds. Revealing

aporias in the social symbolic order, these creaturely tricksters children impel the spectator to acknowledge the necessity for some form of ethico-political action.

CHAPTER 7  
CODA: THE CREATURELY TRICKSTER TRANSCODED:  
THE DIGITIZED IMAGINATION AND AVATAR

Technologies never do anything you don't make them do. Nothing else produces poetry, beauty, truth, drama, tension or human feelings . . . nothing other than the human mind and the human heart. Digital technology doesn't do that. It doesn't do anything on its own. Technology is not entertaining us, not teaching us, not moving us. In the future of cinema you still have to do that.

—Wim Wenders, *What the New Technologies Offer*

Moving from the original oral nature of trickster tales to the cinematic gestures that transform the trickster on-screen, I have argued throughout this dissertation for a creaturely trickster that materializes in cinema and literature. Marshall McLuhan's maxim that "the medium is the message," haunts this project, especially as cinema moves from the analog to the digital and beyond. Technological advances in digital imagery reconfigure the boundaries of cinema to such an extent that some scholars now consider "film studies" a misnomer, offering "new media studies" or "screen studies" in its stead. The creaturely cine-trickster, inevitably scoffing at any medium, gets transcoded in our digital age in improbable ways. Transcoding, Lev Manovich maintains in his foundational work, *The Language of New Media*, refers to the ways that computer logic influences how we define ourselves, and this logic also applies to the ways artists now present the trickster in their works. Wandering into Internet memes and fan fiction, as well as into cinematic data, the capricious trickster helps us make sense of our ever-evolving world.

The cine-trickster moves onto slippery terrain as digital technologies replace analog video. This change signals for some the "death of cinema" as we know it. D. N. Rodowick observes,

What characterizes a medium as modern is our awareness that it occupies a continuous state of self-transformation and invention that runs ahead of our perceptions and ideas. Hence the uncertain historical interval, itself without a clear or focused image, that moving-image scholars now inhabit—we stand between the question “What *was* cinema?” and “What will digital cinema *become*?” (84)

An interstitial space holds the place for the cine-trickster as the digital revolution transforms moviemaking from production to post-production and from marketing to exhibition. Digital processes augment contemporary artistic practice, and digital cinematic spaces morph into viable new realms for creaturely tricksterism.

The turn from analog to digital image capture significantly shifts the boundaries of the “distribution of the sensible.” Filmmakers and artists, once restrained by bulky equipment, find themselves liberated by the advent of digital video. They can now take cameras into spaces and capture moments that previously eluded them. Consider, for example, the hospital scenes in Wim Wender’s *Lightning Over Water* (1980), a cinematic ode to Nicholas Ray made during his final days. Despite the fact that Ray contends that he abhors the shift from analog to digital, Wenders uses digital video to capture private moments in Ray’s hospital room. Instead of forcing the actors to come to the studios, the liberated camera can cross boundaries at a director’s whim.

A second change occurs in the affordability of new technologies. This opens the door to fourth world, or indigenous cinemas. Socio-economic situations once obviated certain people from becoming filmmakers; however, the shifting technologies smash these boundaries. Less expensive digital cameras and easy access to Internet distribution enables many more people to disseminate digital data across a popular cultural landscape already saturated with images. At the same time, indigenous directors, such as the Inuit Zacharias Kunuk, director of *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*,

2001), can now influence the landscape of contemporary cinematic practices and produce fourth world cinema. The ability to produce and create films independently mitigates the loss of sacred knowledge and old myths because these indigenous films preserve something of the filmmaker's culture before it completely disappears. Reconstructing sacred cultural myths in cinematic form, works like Kanuk's masterpiece revitalize cinema through its content and cinematography.

Creative minds and trickster-like play engender a digital imagination, one capable of manipulating digital images for their maximum potential. In our ever-shifting media landscape, new technologies create novel imaginative possibilities. James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), what I would consider a film of manifest manners akin to the sauerkraut westerns, stands as the apotheosis of the digitized trickster imagination. This film stretches the latest digital technologies to their limits because some of its sequences almost crashed the computers as the special effects crew manipulated massive amounts of digital data. In both form and content, *Avatar* showcases the trickster at work: he appears in both the digital performance capture Cameron's crew used to film and digitally manipulate the characters as well as the narrative revolving around the Na'vi dwelling on their sacred moon, Pandora. Before I delve into the creaturely tricksterism at work in *Avatar*, I need to foreground some of the connections between digital technological advancements, new media theory, and creaturely tricksterism that led up to the production of a film such as *Avatar*.

### **Creaturely Tricksterism Transcoded**

Digital video, computer-generated images (CGI), and the special effects they produce change the face of recent cinema to the dismay of film critics such as Rodowick and Stephen Prince, both of whom feel nostalgic for older forms of cinema.

Digital cinema will in a highly trickster-like fashion shift the respective boundaries and arguments surrounding cinema. Rodowick suggests that the only way to discuss digital cinema is to return to questions that haunted classical film theorists, including those about the ontology of the image, the importance of realism, the production of temporal and spatial relations, and the positioning of spectator's subjectivity. Rodowick calls for a return of the repressed, precisely that which contemporary scholars think has been put to rest.

Classical film theorists paved the way for later scholars to elevate cinema to the status of art. However, once cinema morphed trickster-like into the digital age, questions about whether digital film should be considered art once more gained importance. The debates concerning whether CGI characters should get nominated for awards harkens back to earlier questions about awards for film actors who do not necessarily perform an entire scene in one take, as do stage actors. Questions about the ontological nature of the image and its significance also creep back into consciousness with the advent of computer manipulation of images. The return of the repressed of questions that haunted film studies in cinema's nascent years underscores the way in which burgeoning technologies make theorists and practitioners "remediate" earlier forms.

Although filmmakers still seem to pursue the modernist dictum to "make it new," questions arise concerning whether digital cinema can transform the image enough to produce new experiences. John Belton, for one, argues that digital effects and computer-generated images do not. Belton traces the burgeoning technological advances of digital cinema only to conclude, "[D]igital projection does not offer

audiences a new experience in the theater” (114). Although Belton believes that digital cinema offers nothing new, others disagree. For instance, Prince argues,

The profound impact of the shift to video will lie not in the gaudy special effects and fantasy creatures that capture so much media attention, but in the perceptual registration of light information, first as the images are captured and then as the values read by the capture device are in turn read by the viewer. We are accustomed to thinking about cinema in terms of its content and its formal devices, and to regarding these as embodying its essential structural characteristics. From this standpoint, movies will continue to tell stories using editing, camera movement, lighting, and sound, whether on celluloid or digital video. But the quality and character of light itself, and the perceptual experience it induces in viewers, provides perhaps the most integral conception of the medium, and it is here—in the nature of the light-induced perceptual experience—that the medium is transforming most radically. (32)

One example of these perceptual experiences Prince discusses is panning with a digital camera, which creates a distracting strobe effect that affects viewers of digital cinema.

Another argument concerning new media is that of “remediation.” Remediation theory explains that new media is simply a recapitulation of a previous form of media. This notion lies at the heart of the argument about digital processes as technological advances change the way spectators perceive new media. In the contemporary moment, viewers consume online video in windows of varying sizes, on monitors, tablets, or even iPhones. Some of this digital data makes the viewer aware that these images are being mediated through the programs that they run on their computers; however, at other times, the viewer forgets the artifice. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin differentiate these perceptual effects as hypermediacy and immediacy. They claim, “At the end of the twentieth century, we are in a position to understand hypermediacy as immediacy’s opposite number, an alter ego that has never been suppressed fully or for long periods of time” (34). Two sides of the same coin, hypermediacy and immediacy highlight the trick of transparency in the digital realm: the enigmatic nature of the

transparent emerges in the way in which the spectator views the image. It does not need to arise directly from the data itself. For instance, watching the video game sequences of Nic Balthazar's *Ben X* (2007) through Netflix Streaming on a computer overemphasizes the mediated nature of the framed image of avatars playing on a computer in a film being watched on a monitor.

Hypermediacy and immediacy further obfuscate the enigmatical nature of the dialectical and digitized images by seeming to transform affect. The trick here comes in how the interfaces disguise each other, hypermediated clues hiding in plain sight. When one gets lost in the affect of images, the likelihood of seeing the hypermediated space decreases. This dual system allows the spectator to experience the image in ways that allow the digital trickster imagination to reveal what is in the frame, what is on the margins, and even what does not appear in the image. The creaturely trickster imagination emerges when laughter gets provoked, even without the political underpinnings that creaturely life bring to bear on Bolter and Grusin's categories.

Although theorists argue whether these digitized effects can engender new experiences, the possibilities of cinematic transformations become a selling point for directors and even inspire among them child-like awe. The constellation of child/trickster/cinema I outlined in Chapter 3 does not dissipate when the film market turns to digital imaging processes. The child figure becomes newly significant in terms of digitized processes and through trickster possibilities of films such as *Toy Story* and *Coraline* that cater to children with 3-D animation and digitization. A further interesting twist in the children/trickster/digital cinema constellation comes from one of the founders

of the French New Wave, Jean-Luc Godard. In “The Future of Cinema,” Godard observes,

Video has its own specificity. It can be used for its uniqueness, but, in my opinion, rarely is. On video, I love doing superimpositions, real superimpositions, almost as in music, where movements mix—sometimes slowly, sometimes brutally—then something happens. You can have two images at the same time, much like you can have two ideas at the same time, which, to me, seems very close to childhood. (2)

As Godard notes, the possibilities of superimposing two images change with the advent of video. He uses the processes of digital cinema to reconfigure Eisenstein’s dialectical montage in a way that can recreate a creaturely trickster. This is especially the case when used by political filmmakers such as Godard. Godard’s metaphor of the child and the digital imagination also recalls Lebeau’s argument about cinema’s proximity to infancy.

Another digital trickster possibility results from the space of manipulability in image capture. One of Manovich’s guiding principles of new media is numerical representation, the idea that artifacts of new media exist as data. Frames of celluloid transform into digital data represented by computer code. Like the computer screens of binary code flashing in *The Matrix* that create a world uncannily like our own, digital data creates an unparalleled space for play, manipulation, and world-building. The data of digital images underscores the fact that, if the trickster bumbles its way through this digital corridor, it exposes the aporias of our social symbolic, or the Real of our lived experience. The physical space of digital data in code both exists and does not exist because viewers experience a digital film the same way that they would a celluloid image. Nevertheless, the new storage space opens up a playful terrain for manipulating the cultural imaginary. While Kerry Conran’s *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (2004) was

the first film in which the entire diegetic narrative world came into being through digital processes, Cameron's *Avatar* first utilizes the latest technology to explore trickster machinations in a fully realized digital universe. In *Avatar*, the actors' performances get superimposed with CGI animation, and the indexical nature of the filmed subject both loses and gains anew a foothold in reality.

### **The Digital Imagination Unbounded: *Avatar* and Creaturely Tricksterism**

Cameron's technologically breathtaking *Avatar*, replete with sacrosanct reversals and trickster manifestations, reveals the great lengths that a director will go to capture cinematic tricks. The narrative focuses on a corporation that wants to colonize Pandora so that they can dig up a natural resource, aptly named unobtainium, located underneath the sacred tree of the indigenous tribe, the Na'vi. A group of anthropologists use avatars of the Na'vi to interact with them. Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), a paraplegic ex-marine initially working undercover for the company, helps the anthropologists gain new knowledge about the Na'vi, and he falls in love with Neytiri (Zoe Saldana). Once the company learns that Jake's identification with the indigenous other might impede their goal, they attack the Na'vi. An epic battle ensues, involving the creatures from every corner of the planet. Jake and the anthropological crew side with the Na'vi and help them defeat the corporate invaders. *Avatar's* childish plot and trite dialogue limit its value among certain film aesthetes; the technological advances that make the film visually stunning, however, promise to change the face of cinema. Cameron, no stranger to digital processes in cinema, is a trickster figure in his own right. As revealed in the documentary *Capturing Avatar*, when Cameron first approached fellow filmmakers about the project, they informed him that his idea would never work because the technology did not yet exist. Cameron visited the set of Robert

Zemeckis's *Beowulf* and started asking questions about the digital technology Zemeckis used, which prompted Zemeckis to inquire why his fellow filmmaker was curious.

Cameron concealed his intentions. Even though effects specialists told him that the film could not be made, he pressed on much like the trickster does in overturning any blocks in its path.

One rightly asks, what made Cameron's vision for *Avatar* so implausible to these people? He wanted to create a fully digitized universe called Pandora, but he wanted to do so by capturing performances in a new way, turning the physical bodies of his actors into a digital representation that could be manipulated with a computer. Woody Lindsey writes in "James Cameron's Filmmaking Techniques: Special Effects Narrative",

[Cameron's] actors wear special bodysuits and head rigs equipped with a standard definition camera that takes constant images of their faces. That data is then transmitted to another camera creating a real-time image of the live actor 'wearing' their CGI costume.

While this process broke the boundaries of what directors had previously believed possible in motion capture, it is Cameron's invention of the Simulcam or virtual camera—a device capable of superimposing CGI images over real-time images—that results in his tricksterism against the boundaries of cinema. This camera records actor's performances and automatically converts them into their digital double.

While some critics maintain that these technological advancements reduce the actor's physical presence on-screen, others believe that it actually brings versatility to actors who can now play characters of any age group or species. Yacov Freedman argues that industry standards do not allow an actor to gain recognition for her/his completely digital performance, yet the technological advances continue to shift in that direction. Part of the problem stems from the name that gets attached to the digital

process. Those wishing to denigrate it refer to it as motion capture, while those wanting to celebrate the acting call it performance capture. The Academy still refuses performance capture roles as accomplishments worthy of garnering an acting nomination. Nevertheless, the cast of *Avatar*, as well as Andy Serkis's Gollum in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, makes a strong argument in favor of the Academy either creating a new category or including performance capture into its acting categories.

Performance capture eliminates hours actors must spend putting on make-up, yet it still utilizes the facial features of the actor to add verisimilitude to the CGI images. Digital performance capture collapses the distance separating the real of the mask from the actor. As Zupančič writes,

[T]he “birth of tragedy” presents us with real human beings, the actors, who put on their masks and represent the essence with the help of the mask. The self of an individual (the actor) puts on a mask and, with it, puts on the character he is playing. In this way we come to a new mode of representation, which is not narrative (and in this sense figurative, imaginary), but is linked to the Real of the mask itself as the gap or interval between the actor and the character. (25)

The Real of the mask highlights the split in subjectivity on the stage. However, in the case of *Avatar* and digital performance capture the gap between the two elides a fully realized ideal-ego and an actor's sense of selfhood.

The digitally-enhanced ideal-ego, the Na'vi ideal-ego in *Avatar*, alters the mirror moment for the actors and actresses to the extent that Cameron becomes the mediating (O)ther and their reflections change species. This, of course, remains a major theme within the film itself. The indigenous and human characters “see” the other aliens as highly developed creatures, and the colonial and romantic themes get developed

through the repeated line, “I see you.”<sup>1</sup> As Lacan points out, the deceptive trick in the mirror moment comes through the misrecognition of the fragmented self as a totality. What happens to the ideal-ego and ego-ideal when the reflected image changes species? Saldana says of her digital transformation into Neytiri, “Jim says, ‘Action!’ I don’t know what happens. I, at least, have no idea that I am wearing [these dots]. I feel like I am blue, and I’m nine feet tall and I’m sexy as hell.” The fantasy of playing a Na’vi alien overtakes Saldana until she embodies a Na’vi’s ideal-ego. Saldana’s claim hints at a liberating reaction formation that occurs with her CGI counterpart. Only the ideal-ego matters, as the ego-ideal in the actress’s mirror moment gets rendered irrelevant. The lack of an indigenous ego-ideal gets underscored in the narrative itself as the (o)ther’s autonomy and visual sovereignty get recognized by the imperialists thwarted in their effort to obtain the unobtainum.

This lack of the (o)ther’s ideal-ego in the mirror moment between actors and their CGI images recapitulates a structural problem within the narratives of the cinema of manifest manners. The elusive ego-ideal of the Na’vi gets refracted through human intervention, in the form of anthropologists infiltrating the indigenous tribe. However, one may argue that Jake Sully, the imperialist avatar, adopts the cultural ways of the Na’vi to expose some kernel of truth about Na’vi lived experience, but everything in the Na’vi subscribe to the old myth of the “noble savage.” Displays of manliness, the fight to earn their place within the tribe through physical combat, and the search for spirit animals all

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<sup>1</sup> John James and Tom Ue discuss this at length in “‘I see you’: Colonial Narrative and the Act of Seeing in *Avatar*.”

can be read as reproducing the stereotype of the stoic Indian.<sup>2</sup> For example, Jake chooses his mountain banshee (or ikran), accepts challenges from Neytiri's brother Tsu'tey (Laz Alonso), and experiences a ceremonial vision quest—a scene cut from the theatrical release. During Jake's "dreamhunt," he goes on a vision quest and finds his spirit animal, Toruk, the great red bird, the riding of which during the last act of the film shifts Jake's greenhorn status to that of a Na'vi warrior.

The nature of digital performance capture transforms not only the real of the actor's mask but spatial relations in cinema. No matter what images will appear in a shot, it can be filmed in any location with a green screen, and computers can add the scenery later. Horses, for instance, would physically gallop in the same limited production space in which the aerial sequences would later take place. Transforming spatial relations in film, performance capture turns wire toys into creatures and vehicles for various flight sequences. In the documentary on the making of *Avatar*, viewers watch the production crew playing with the small replicas of the flight vehicles, dragons and banshees much like the metal toys played with in Calder's "Circus" episode of Richter's *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. The only difference is that Cameron puts markers on the toys so that the cameras could use motion capture to choreograph these sequences; these bare-bone toys become fully realized helicopters and dragons through computer animation.

Cameron's digital processes open up the trickster imagination in ways heretofore unseen, shifting time and space "out of joint" by combining performance capture and CGI effects. In the past, filmmakers could paint over frames or superimpose shots to

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<sup>2</sup> I employ the term Indian here precisely because Michelle H. Raheja includes *Avatar* among her list of recent films about Native Americans.

create the desired image. These innovative digital technologies now allow one to create entire universes in real-time. Cameron wanders into uncharted territory, and his ground-breaking efforts effectively position him as a trickster-*bricoleur*, cobbling together the filmic units through the CGI effects.

The narrative of the film also extends into the realm of creaturely tricksterism, as one would expect when dealing with the indigenous Omorticaya clan. In *Reservation Reelism*, Raheja maintains that the trickster would figure prominently in Native American film theory, from the way Indians laugh at the misrepresentations of themselves and inauthentic costumes to the counterstrategies of hegemonic resistance of the actors. However, in *Avatar*, the creaturely trickster manifests in ways similar to Old Shatterhand in the sauerkraut westerns. Arriving as a greenhorn, Jake embarks on his adventure with the indigenous people and physically transforms himself into a Na'vi.

German critics view James Cameron's *Avatar* as another re-imagining of May's fantasia of the indigenous Americans. Similarly, the most common reading of the film situates it as an allegory of the Native American struggle against imperialist Europeans. The film's ecological argument hammers its way into the viewer, while the film casts itself both as an anti-capitalist and anti-war film with sarcastic comments on the "war on terror." The film's refusal to pander to the status quo even resulted in the Pope denouncing it.

Pandora also resembles Hegel's upside-down world. Cameron casts Pandora as the anti-Earth in its very capacity to keep human life afloat. The anthropologists meticulously studying Pandora, the world turned topsy-turvy, morph Jake Sully from a

parapalegic ex-Marine into a Na'vi avatar that enters the new world to learn the secrets that lead him to empathize with the indigenous (o)ther he has become.

Viewing Pandora as Hegel's inverted world transforms the film into a trickster-like space of possibility where everything regarding the sacred gets skewed. The flora and fauna on Pandora destroy human life. As he begins to understand the world's cosmic life force, Jake notes in his video log, "Everything is backwards now, like out there [Pandora] is the true world, and in here is the dream." Cameron creates a digitized world resembling the inverted world, a world capable of upending the reigning worldviews.

One can read Hegel's description of the inverted world in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as though it applies to Pandora. Hegel writes,

According, then, to the law of this inverted world, what is *like* in the first world is *unlike* to itself, and what is *unlike* in the first world is equally *unlike to itself*, or it becomes *like* itself. Expressed in determinate moments, this means that what in the law of the first world is sweet, in the inverted in-itself is sour, what in the former is black is, in the other, white. . . . In another sphere, revenge on an enemy is, according to the *immediate law*, the supreme satisfaction of the injured individuality. This law, however, which bids me confront him as himself a person who does not treat me as such, and in fact bids me destroy him as an individuality—this law is *turned round* by the principle of the other world into its opposite: the reinstatement of myself as a person through the destruction of the alien individuality is turned into self-destruction. (97)

The inversion of the supersensible world that inaugurates dialectical thinking transforms a subject through what I call a creaturely trickster turn. The humans on Pandora find that the laws of the first world, the supersensible world of hegemonic dominance, are of little use in explaining how things work on Pandora. The backwards world exposes that which is left out of hegemonic discourse. These alien encounters resituate subjectivity in terms of the (o)ther, once the "distribution of the sensible" gets reconfigured.

The creaturely cine-trickster gets transcoded in various channels of data and in such digital cultural output as activist Internet memes chiding politicians and corporations for their roles in twisting the face of democracy. The trick to tracking the trickster lies in our own understanding of how the trickster maneuvers across the borders of time and space and maintains the capacity to speak the unspeakable. A trickster's work is never done, and the digital turn will not stop the trickster from shaking its finger at us. The wily, cross-cultural folk hero will continue appearing in the unlikeliest of places to reveal the possibility of the impossible and make the unthought known.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew Alan Feltman, born and raised in central Pennsylvania, earned his B.A. in English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania before travelling to the University of Cincinnati to acquire his M.A. in English and comparative literature. Wandering down a path that led to Gainesville, he pursued his Ph.D. in English (film studies track) at the University of Florida. He considers himself an interdisciplinary scholar with various interests, which include world cinema with an emphasis on European film history, new media studies, twentieth century continental philosophy, Native American studies, Holocaust studies and humor/trickster studies. After receiving his Ph.D., he plans to fall asleep under a tree and dream of coyotes and spiders.