

THE CANADIAN JOURNAL OF  
NATIVE STUDIES



Vol. 41, No. 2, 2024

ISBN 0715-3244

THE CANADIAN JOURNAL OF NATIVE STUDIES / LA  
REVUE CANADIENNE DES ÉTUDES AUTOCHTONES  
VOL. XLI, NO. 2, 2024

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## PERSPECTIVES

## CRAPANZANO'S LITERATURE: ANTIDOTE TO TEMPORAL RELEGATION OF THE NAVAJO

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**Abstract:**

The American anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano eulogizes the Navajo and Apache in his work *Imaginary Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* in order to linguistically capture the essence of Self and Other, in the spirit of mutual celebration. The difficult path to striking the delicate balance necessary to speak about the other when he is not always part of the conversation is delivered in this article by looking at figures of speech that are used to connect the interlocutors, but which have in-built distancing power that unfortunately involuntarily temporally relegates the native (excludes him because his physical absence signifies that he exists in a not-so-distant past in comparison to the interlocutor telling the story, in the present). This is evident in the poetic appropriation of the myth of the noble savage as well as the hinterland metaphor, which are used for describing native characters and their geographical origin. This piece discusses the difficulty to speak about aboriginal subjects by non-aboriginal researchers. It is shown that imagination is the work that reconnects, and poetry the work that gives voice.

keywords: temporal relegation, schizogenic visualism, imagination, metaphor

**Résumé**

L'anthropologue américain Vincent Crapanzano fait l'éloge des peuples Navajo et Apache dans son ouvrage *Imaginary Horizons : An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* afin de capturer linguistiquement l'essence du Soi et de l'Autre, dans un esprit de célébration mutuelle. La difficulté de trouver un équilibre permettant de parler de l'autre alors que cet autre n'est pas toujours

partie prenante de la conversation est exprimé dans cet article par l'analyse de figures de style qui sont utilisées pour connecter les interlocuteurs. Malheureusement, ces figures de style ont toutefois un pouvoir interne de distanciation qui, sans le vouloir, relègue temporellement le sujet autochtone (et l'exclut puisque son absence physique signifie que le sujet existe dans un passé récent en comparaison avec l'interlocuteur ice, qui fait le récit dans le présent). Cela est évident dans l'appropriation poétique du mythe du bon sauvage ainsi que dans la métaphore de l'arrière-pays, lesquelles sont utilisées pour décrire les personnages autochtones et leur origine géographique. Cette contribution aborde la difficulté de parler des sujets autochtones par des chercheurs se s non-autochtones. Il sera montré que c'est l'imagination qui permet de reconnecter et que c'est la poésie qui permet de donner voix.

Mots clés : relégation temporelle, visualisation schizogénique, imagination, métaphore

### **Myths dissipated like illusions**

The myth of the noble savage is associated with the 18th century Enlightenment philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau who defended the honour of the indigenous against Western accusations of backwardness, brutality and savagery by describing the original "man" as a noble human who was "free from sin, appetite or the concept of right and wrong." The image was popularized to stand for the "literary stock character" of someone who "embodies the concept of the indigene outsider, wild human, an 'Other' who has not been corrupted by civilization, and therefore symbolizes humanity's innate goodness."

I want to take the opportunity to consider what Crapanzano says of the Navajo and the Apache, in order to appreciate the deliberate strategy to construct anthropological knowledge in such a way that he can, at a later stage, provide the counterargument that would transcend the use of similar aesthetic but confining structures.

My essay is less argumentative than appreciative; hence I do not over-emphasize the noble savage myth in every topic sentence in each paragraph, but let the reader feel its essence as he or she explores the boundaries of Crapanzano's work by palpating his texts under, my guidance, like in a pleasurable discovery of knowledge despite the problems related to the fact that the observer and the observed are not always existing in the same contemporary time frame (since writing about the native requires distance, and this distance imbues the descrip-

tion with objectifying qualities). Because the noble savage myth is the result of an unresolved problem in anthropology, I do not focus on the negative, but on positive appreciation.

What I see is Crapanzano using anthropology's traditional objects (the native Navajo and Apache subjects) as the cornerstones of a thesis summarizing the way in which anthropology makes stories. He makes recourse to the hinterland metaphor in order to flesh out how the native is temporally relegated by a fascinating field of study that idealizes him all the while keeping him always in its mind like a relic of the past (Cf. Johannes Fabian).

I then see him using the Navajo and Apache (the now idealized "original" objects of this anthropological discourse) as the pretext for discussing psychoanalytic research, and the convergence of anthropology and literature, which is the outcome of Crapanzano's pioneering work in his fieldwork in Morocco with the Hamadsha (a Moroccan Sufi order or tariqa), the Harkis in Algeria (those Algerians who served as auxiliary troops for the French during the Algerian war of independence) and White South Africans during apartheid.

The analysis of the above fieldworks puts Crapanzano on the path of considering the human condition as the object of study that becomes the culture-as-text (term borrowed from Clifford Geertz) understood to be the "code source of civilization" (Cf. Derrida who professed that language precedes lived experience), considered so central to understanding Man. Crapanzano makes the move from specific quasi-clinical case-studies in ethnopsychiatry (the Morrocans, the Harkis, ...) to the general appreciation of the human condition, now attained through an elaborate literary register even if literary anthropology is called out for creating pseudoscience (in the sense that the humanities are never scientific enough).

### **Promising possibility in poetry**

#### **Triumph of poetry over factuality: Metaphoric relationship I**

A paradoxical situation ensues. We essentially have, in the first chapters of Crapanzano's book about "Imaginative Horizons" a local history of the Navajo which claims to respond to a universal horizon of potentialities that the observer assumes. We look back at Navajo history as our history. And yet this looking back is a form of understanding that, as Martin Heidegger had argued, is always "ahead of itself" or "ahead as possibility" (sich vorweg), projecting expectations about Navajo ideals that interpretation then makes explicit for us (Heidegger, 1947). The Navajo represent the noble savage myth but are pregnant with infinite future meanings which can only be discovered through language.

Somehow, Navajo history becomes our story. Somehow, our expectations about the quintessence of a Navajo culture related as a

past-history become our immediate future. (I strangely qualify my statements with the rather vague adverb “somehow” and the first-person plural pronoun “we” and “us” to address fellow interlocutors in a conversation about anthropology because a differently fully transparent understanding cannot be attained.) The ambiguities of lived experience make the endless endeavour to clarify the meaning of experience dense and obscure. The upshot is perhaps what Heidegger had thought all long, mainly that the study of language is the “home of Being” (Heidegger, 147). Poetry has, in his view, special powers to disclose being in philosophical terms, and the so-called “being-there” of lived experience and fieldwork in anthropological terms. By utilizing Navajo history as a gateway for introducing the problem of stereotype and temporal relegation, Crapanzano emphasizes the triumph of poetry over factuality, objectivity, and the scientific method. As his master once posited, in poetry’s home, “human being dwells” (Heidegger, 147).

### **Triumph of poetry over factuality: Metaphoric relationship I, Degrading or endorsing the Navajo as hinterland**

This text is inspired by theories of time and temporal relegation made first by the Amsterdam anthropologist from Poland Johannes Fabian (Fabian, 1983). The motor that activates relegation to mythologize the Navajo is the reference to “hinterland,” which text-plays with the device of “*arrière-pays*” (FR “depths of a country”) formerly deconstructed by the French poet Yves Bonnefoy in a literary work under the same name. We witness here a synthesis of the sign-source Navajo (in the role of signifié) and sign-representamen hinterland (in the role of signifiant).

Are the Navajo the death of the country (actualizing a metonymic relationship of substitution), or is the interior of the country just analogous to how far deep the Navajo exist in the hinterland (actualizing a metaphoric relationship of similarities between two different ideas)? We will never tell, but there is certainly an analogy at play, which has the unfortunate consequence of relegating the Navajo to the outer limits of our reality, since they exist in the outer limits of our imagination.

The reference to the word “hinterland” carries the metaphor from the semantic realm of “origins” to the semantic realm of “a world separated from ours by distance.” It can be the land of our longing and unfulfilled wishes, but the meaning of the metaphor may be negatively distorted as signifying “time lag” or “twilight.” In German, when used with accusative or dative, the word “hinter” (in hinterland) means “behind,” and “beyond” (further away than), although it also means “after” (in pursuit of), just as longing exists in the pursuit of the desired subject or experience, ... longing lets run “after” the object of desire.

The crux of the problem is that the poetization of the Navajo

has alas fetish-like qualities, which when distorted, reduce its members to noble savages for the reason that they exist further away from our present than imagination can allow for, in a space so far away from our present that is indeed a past relative to our current reality or — a transcendental dimension beyond. This may or may not presuppose a negative stance, that we (as anthropologists) want to relegate them, which is a point of view misreading perhaps a hidden intentions or the subconscious. But this has nothing to do with intentions: temporal relegation represents the problematic reality of storytelling; temporal relegation is embedded in narration.

And yet it is not clear if the Navajo exist more behind than ahead — like in the sense of the quality of Heidegger's aforementioned "ahead of itself" (sich vorweg) that was linked to the realm of potentialities that had yet to be explored (Heidegger, 1947). A charming and even animating spirit qualifies the fusion of the adverbs "behind" and "ahead" in (the metonymy or metaphor of Navajo as our) "hinterland." Indeed, the interior of the country is a delightful phenomenon both in the past and in the future.

However, the Navajo, as the depths of their country, take the form of another land to be explored or finally colonized (against the observer's deepest desire to be neutral). The desire to explore the future of hinterland will demand to find ways to discuss it by assigning to it the observer's possessive own name-terms, which are a form of (subdued) appropriation because he will "claim" what the hinterland is for him, or demand that the inland take a form envisaged by his imagination.

The hinterland is seductive as past because relegation would express then the nostalgia for the primeval that also exists in the outer limits of the imagination. In both the hinterland as past and as present, the figures of speech make learning pleasant, as espoused by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* who professed that "To learn easily is naturally pleasant to all people, so whatever words create knowledge in us are the pleasantest." This ennoble the Navajo since "qualities of the exotic and the fascinating" (Aristotle) are fleshed out (for pleasure), "but at the same time one recognizes that strangers do not have the same rights as fellow citizens" (Aristotle) (difference marks boundaries between self and other).

When the hinterland is considered as past, the rhetorical figure makes, in Crapanzano's work, tentacle-like associations with Chinese, Japanese and Muslim concepts of qi (vital force or breath), ma (emptiness or space) and barzakh (the space between the living and the dead), which furthermore edify the Navajo since those spellbound motifs are of paramount importance to our civilization, and yet which, might simultaneously represent traditions that may be perceived as extinguished, and therefore also ones furthermore existing in our past.

All this may not look so good on Crapanzano because, as he

considers them to be a past relative to our present, he endorses the Navajo by invoking rhetorical figures which put unwillingly, through temporal relegation, an imposed distance which is a nail in those peoples' presupposed coffin. Distance always alienates the observer from the Other creating a favourable ground for bias/visualism to evolve. But this distance is the distance of the marked boundaries of respect, enabling a celebration of the other!

### **Triumph of poetry over factuality: Metaphoric relationship II, Deferral through figuration pays respect**

The poet in Crapanzano shows himself through the analysis of Lamartine and Woodsworth, the epitomes of French and British literary traditions. He treats the narrative of the Navajos with the same love as characters in a poem. Navajo-as-text is thereby a device considered like an instance of poetry. This pays respect. In fact, the deferral through figuration (imagination transformed into image) is a postponement in time that is, as mentioned just above, the utmost expression of respect, he writes.

### **Triumph of poetry over factuality: Metaphoric relationship III, Antidotes to the contingency of chaos**

Metaphor is crucial because it signifies the kind of figuration that enlivens writing. It is around the nodes of metaphor that elements of colourful writing are stitched. Metaphor represents the visual junction between source-code (signifié) and graphia (chain of representamens transformed into diagrammatic signs) that are bound into the syntax of language that produces textuality.

He explains that for imagination to work arbitrary contiguous elements must be related to each other through language, and in terms of each other (metaphorically).

Through a process analogous to metaphorization and translation (def: process of moving something from one place to another), two or more seemingly arbitrary (def: based on random choice or personal whim) contiguous (def: sharing a common border; touching; next or together in sequence) elements are linked and given, thereby sense.

Or if you will, through metaphorization and the moving around of references, two or more random words lying next to each other may be joined to give a new meaning to any given thing.

Metaphor saves us from the contingency (def: a future event or circumstance which is possible but cannot be predicted with certainty) of chaos and fatum (destiny or doom) because it produces a meaning that releases the anxiety of getting lost in the world and facing nonbeing.

Borders, boundaries, and unreachable frontiers

Crapanzano is interested in the blurred horizons, "auras" may be a more appropriate word, which accompany experience and resist full articulation (Crapanzano, 2). He is fascinated by the space mediating the relationship between self and Other, which he articulates in the form of the difference between the synonyms of the word borders: borders, boundaries, frontiers according to the following typology (Crapanzano, 13-14):

borders (unless closed) can be crossed  
 boundaries can be transgressed  
 but frontiers cannot be crossed.

The tripartite divergence of meaning of these terms in English does not exist in other languages. For instance, in my native language Polish, the three words translate as *granice*, *granice*, *granice*. The subtle deferral of meaning between the three words lets the observer appreciate a rich and layered ontological register. The upshot, as Crapanzano gracefully remarks, lies in the fact that frontiers are unreachable in representation (Crapanzano, 14). It is thus this space which preoccupies him. And it is related that this space, unreachable in representation, is the sacred space where the heart of the Navajo lives, which he now captures with literary figurations.

### Exploring the Beyond

What Crapanzano achieves is to mythologize the origins of the Navajo, poeticizing the primordial events that made society and the natural world what they are. He explores the sacred as the structure of the world, sculpting a myth, by collecting evidence that Navajo tell to make a universal account of a creation. He responds to his readers' "nostalgia for origins" that appears in many religions and recreates for those readers (including the Navajo), poetically and conceptually, a primordial Paradise (Eliade 1949).

At the frontiers of knowing and sensing, in the Beyond of imagination, Crapanzano writes that man cannot exist but differently than at the surface of things, at the bend in roads, in randomness (Crapanzano, 16).

He stylizes the Beyond in terms of the unbridled negative. The Beyond is like shadows which cannot be contained. It is full of life and yet it is negative, it is nonbeing, it is absent. The Beyond provokes fear because it is inaccessible and elusive when man wants things which he cannot trap due to the empiricism which blinds him. Its irrepressible mood presses on his or her intuition; it cannot be sustained nor resolved.

The ambivalence of disquiet is felt in front of unreality even if writing in Schein (text-play with language and discourse in anthropol-

ogy) gives pleasure, release, and escape. Man is a victim of puritanical epistemology of presence namely because he wants that which is perceptible and present, and not that which is elusive and unreal (Crapanzano, 17).

Poetry is then in essence pure approximation. And yet the hinterland of the Navajo is unbridled since it exists in the *leurre du seuil*, in the lure or snare of thresholds (Crapanzano, 16). It is the land of pure possibility, of desire, of fear: "It would be impossible to account for these delightful and moving pages; one can only read them" (Bénichou 1995, 481n.) Consciousness needs impossible virtuality, tempestuous immediacy and nonconceptual clairvoyance...

## Conclusion

Discussing native culture is tricky due to the fear of cultural appropriation and the fear of sounding racist since the researcher is frequently excluded from the reality of the subject of anthropology's study. I tried to show here how Vincent Crapanzano navigates the delicate subject thanks to his penmanship.

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