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**“My Body Knowing”:
Witnessing, Truth, and Jouissance in Marie Clements's Theatre**

“...like a map, my body knowing every turn, every lie,
every curve they use to kill us.”

Since the 1990s, Aboriginal Canadian Theatre has emerged as a powerful avenue to explore central questions pertaining to Native peoples' lives in Canada. Plays engage with the centrality of Native cultural identity in relation to the land, the challenges of social relations within shifting urban and rural spaces, and the traumatic impact of colonial violence and racism. Different modes are employed—humour, parody, or dramatic reenactments of violence—to bring the materiality of Native people and cultures, and the effects of history, into visibility, while showing the power of culture to witness, resist, and recreate. Yet visibility may be a double-edged sword where power relations between the dominant and the marginal have been defined and enacted through the colonial gaze for, as Stuart Hall points out, “racism takes place in the field of vision” (1996). In the context of Canada's (post)colonial culture, it is the Aboriginal female body that is constructed as signifier of Native peoples' cultures simultaneously marking their excess and ‘flight into invisibility.’ This strategy of deterritorialization legitimizes the recontainment of the sign of the Native within colonial and neocolonial discourse and, ultimately, functions as an act of erasure.

This paper discusses Marie Clement's production as a playwright and performance artist as challenging the construction of the “Native” through technologies of vision in the service of a colonial project of conquest and assimilation which is channeled, and materialized, through the Aboriginal female body. While contextualizing the discussion within Clement's entire work, the paper focuses on three texts: *The Unnatural and Accidental Woman* (2005), first staged in 1997, *Unnatural and Accidental* (2006), its film adaptation, and *The Edward Curtis Project* (2010). By placing the female body at the very centre of her critical explorations, Clements exposes the ways in which gender and sexuality are central to (neo)colonial structures of erasure and assimilation—“regimes of disappearance” (Goode and Maskovsky in Culhane 2003) functioning through the spectacularization of the Native female body. In so doing, she rearticulates notions of ‘witnessing’ and ‘truth-telling’ central to current discourses about trauma and restoration of justice, which challenge yet simultaneously reinforce the victim-position of Native subjectivity.

In contrast, Clement's plays enact two deconstructive moves. First, they reenter the spectacle of the female body and disrupt its central logic by exposing the constructedness of the image. Second, they reposition the notion of loss at the heart of Aboriginal discourse from the locus of object-relation (loss of culture, language, land or status) to ‘loss’ itself as object—i.e., loss as constitutive to subjectivity. This movement can enable a shift in discourse (in Lacanian psychoanalytical terms from the hysteric to the analyst discourse) from ‘asking for’ truth and justice (a demand which always implies the subject's impossible demand for recognition) to ‘creating’ truth through the knowledge of the body (*jouissance*), a movement which releases the impasse of the victim-position and allows for truth/knowledge to function in different and productive ways.

Works Cited

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