

**Our stories are our sacred ground; our language is the air we breathe --
toward a Halq'eméylem-based literary aesthetic: The Aboriginal worldview
in contrast with the European philosophical tradition**

Kerrie Charnley
Simon Fraser University

Language is formed of the collective experience and worldview of a people. In post/neo/colonial contexts differences between indigenous and non-indigenous European viewpoints are embedded in philosophical notions about human being and language. These different views, regarding if or how human beings, environments and languages intersect, are at the root of the predicament of problematic identities and histories which both groups find themselves in contemporarily. The paper describes this predicament with reference to Halq'eméylem language revival, and culminates in a zeroing in on my own family linguistic history. In the end language is life. The two philosophical traditions might compliment each other: the 'I think therefore I am' and the 'We speak together therefore we are'.

A focus on Stó:lō scholar Ethel Stelómethet Gardner's dissertation regarding Halq'eméylem language revival and on the recently published work by First Nations philosophers from "across the line" in an anthology entitled *Native American Thought*, edited by Anne Waters, clarifies how profoundly entwined First Nations language is with First Nations values and worldview and how these are in stark contrast with the presuppositions of the Western European Platonic philosophical tradition. The 'authority' of the Western tradition becomes questionable in light of an understanding of the First Nations worldview, and in particular the Stó:lō River worldview. Each of these two enduring cultural traditions expresses contradictory social values and aesthetic judgments which in turn inform their decision-making, activities and creations. Misunderstanding, mis-interpretation, and ignorance of these essential differences has caused much aggression and despair, at worst, and curiosity and attraction at best. Since the closure of residential schools aimed at eradicating First Nations language, twenty-six years ago, hard work on the part of a number of Stó:lō individuals has led to a revival of Halq'eméylem, the cultural heart beat of Sólh Téméxw¹. In drawing from these works I hope to delineate a

¹ St'áxem = not knowing their identity, history, language (Gardner, 2000; 9), alienated; Smelá:lh = knowing their identity, history, language (Gardner, 2002; 9), at home; Xwélmexw = Stó:lō person, Indian; Xwelítém = non-Stó:lō, non-First Nations person, 'white' person, foreigner; S'ólh Téméxw = Our Sacred World: "Our language connects

number of fundamental values inherent in our worldview and hence our aesthetic as it is reflected in our language as articulated in the words of First Nations scholars and researchers.

By contrasting the Western philosophic tradition, and its colonial mentality, with a generalized First Nations worldview, this discussion of the importance of Halq'eméylem language renewal will lead from the general to the specific in the focus on the Stó:lō worldview. Halq'eméylem is precious. Our cultural blood, our philosophical River worldview flows through our minds, our enunciation in speech and throughout our very world when this language is known and used. We are made out of story and out of language through speech and breath, oxygen, spirit. If our stories are our sacred ground, then our language as thought is the soil and our language as speech is the breath of oxygen through which our very lives are lived, as they become story and as memory. The life forces of oxygen, ground and breath combine in story, in worldview and in our living bodies...as thought and memory. At the core of intense work, in Stó:lō nation is an awareness that to retain our different and valuable philosophical worldview is to retain our very survival as a distinct culture. The very act of speaking our languages is a practice which opposes and transforms the imperial and genocidal colonial practices which has used the Western philosophical tradition, as the tradition had evolved and been Christianized and rationalized since the ancient Greek period, as its basis of authority, dominance and superiority².

In the overlapping worlds of the Western European continuum and of the Indigenous continuum there are asymmetrical value judgments associated with the textually written and the orally 'written.' That is, generally speaking,

us to our land,' my classmate says to me... 'look at the term S'ólh Téméxw.' She explained that the term 'S'ólh' means 'Our, Respectful,' or 'Sacred' and that 'Téméxw' means 'Country, Land,' or 'World.' 'Us, the People, are included in our term for the Land,' she says, 'and this links us to all of our ancestors. See the 'mexw' in Téméxw? That part of the word refers to us, the People, like in Xwélmexw, the word for First Nations, the word we use for ourselves' (Gardner, 2000; 9).

² The European drive to conquer and colonize and operate according to its concept of progress, both economically and scientifically, is based on the Western philosophical and patriarchal view of the Other with binaries such as feminine (masculine), as earth/material substance (sky/heaven/ideal forms), and so on. This philosophy also led to viewing the Other as the mirror where the dominant sees only its own creation, its own viewpoint, its own perspective reflected back on the mirror of the Other. The Other is the mirror opposite of the dominant and in this mirror the Other is only seen in terms that the dominant has already created, knows about. The so-called dominant seeks to reassure itself that it still exists according to that conception of itself; and where everything comes back to the dominant and his world as point-of-departure; and, where his aesthetic view is the only one in operation or valued. This concept of the Other comes from the Freudian-based psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan and has been taken up by post-colonial theorists like Franz Fanon and feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir and post-colonial feminist theorists like Trinh T. Minha, and applied to the post-colonial and gendered situations.

the Western view takes the written word as its primal authoritative aesthetic value, while the Indigenous worldview takes the oral word as its preferred primal aesthetic value, as the spoken word acts, enacts, and functions as a relationship asserter in the social milieu of the particular nation. In the Indigenous view the language, land, act of speech, and context of the speech together powerfully affects change or transformation in a living interrelational world. In contrast, in the Western world the scope of language is limited to the text as written, and is therefore, comparatively engaged in, as a relatively passive, context-detached, form: everything relates back to the written, the text in written form as authoritative. The focus in Western European-based law is the written word, written testaments and written laws, yet the fact that these laws are discussed orally in the courtroom shows that nevertheless the oral has pivotal power in the Western world as well even if this is not highlighted or acknowledged as such there. Once written the scope of language becomes less immediately and clearly active, while its authority appears unchangeable, static, rooted in one place and time, and irrefutable. It appears incontestable because, being a static form, it presents itself as inflexible and thus implies an opposition, an adversarial condition where change must be argued for. Distinctly, the living context-oriented active performative of First Nations orality allows laws to be alive to the needs of the current situation, the current place and time and thus there is a relative ease of adaptability in its application. Thus, a First Nations aesthetic reflects a value for the living word which is not rooted in one place and time in written form and thus can enact transformation and change in any given moment and in relation to any given audience and environmental flux. Consequently the language itself is forever adapting and changing its form and use, if and when the situation warrants it.

Furthermore, because there is an interrelationship with the orator's human and non-human environment there is a stronger sense of responsibility to the effect one's word has on his or her relationship and on those with whom she or he is speaking to or with. Thus responsibility is a valued aspect of the First Nations aesthetic. This is one of the reasons why Gardner's concepts of Smelá:lh (worthy) and St'áxem (worthless) people are so apt as central concepts in discussions of identity (Gardner, 2002 ;ix, xi). These terms apply to our aesthetic sense within our worldview. The worthy person is one who knows his or her cultural history and worldview and is thereby a perpetuator of the culture because he or she can pass this knowledge along not only through active teaching but also by the very influential act of living example, as a role model. The Smelá:lh is thus acting responsibly by contributing to the community.

Traditionally for Western philosophy knowledge is revealed and discovered, while for First Nations knowledge appears to be always with us, all knowledge is in existence. We access it as we need it in order live as harmoniously as possible. There is not this sense of needing more than we already have in order to be content. There is not this sense of reaching for something higher and better. This may be because the process of relationship is more important than an 'object' possessed. Anne Waters states in the introduction to the *American Indian Thought* anthology that "For Indians, the

story conveys the knowledge, knowledge does not convey the story as it does for Western philosophy” (Waters, 2004; xvii). She says that “The knowing is in the performance or ceremony; it is in the living, or life of the ceremony. Indian knowing is not propositional knowledge that can be had *about* the ceremony,” and hence it is not knowledge as object (Waters, 2004; xviii). For First Nations “to know is to synthesize the information in living” and therefore the longer you live the more you know (Waters, 2004; xviii). Waters states “meanings exist only in contexts of experience and environment” (Waters, 2004; xviii). In the Western tradition, Descartes removed context and separated the mind and body thus laying a foundation toward objectification of these separations taken out of their context.

Brian Yazzie Burkhart, a Cherokee PhD candidate at Indiana University considers the pivotal differences between the Western philosophical tradition as it evolved and the traditional First Nations philosophical approaches:

Galileo asserts that only the properties of matter that are mathematically measurable...are real.... He claims that subjective aspects, i.e. sound, taste, and so forth, are illusory. After Descartes published the *Meditations* in 1641 the world becomes understood as entirely mechanical, as an entirely determinate structure governed by laws, which are understandable only through mathematical analysis. This finally lays the ground for the idea of an entirely objective knowledge and an entirely objective science. (Burkhart, 2004; 24)

Burkhart elaborates on the differences:

In Western philosophy and science, generally, it is my experiences, my thoughts, and what I can observe that count as evidence or data, and nothing else. But for the American Indian philosopher to make such a break is to invoke a bias toward the individual and individual experience. This is what might be called the Cartesian bias, a bias that surely goes back much farther than Descartes to perhaps the beginnings of Western philosophy itself, but it is Descartes who gives it its clearest shape. Many philosophers think that the great bias of Western philosophy is Cartesian mind/body dualism: the notion that the mind and body are two separate substances. However, from an American Indian perspective, the real Cartesian bias is the idea that knowledge can only be acquired and manifested individually, in or by the individual. The *cogito, ergo sum* tells us, “I think, therefore I am.” But Native philosophy tells us, “We are, therefore I am.” A Native philosophical understanding must include all experience, not simply my own. If I am to gain a right understanding I must account for all that I see, but also that you see and all that has been seen by others – all that has been passed down in stories. What place do I have to tell you that your experiences are invalid because I do not share them?...If it is “We”

that is first and not “I,” then what counts as the data of experience is quite different. (Burkhart, 2004; 25-26)

Since we live in two worlds, we need to know what the philosophical views of each of these worlds is in order to understand what values and world views inform the way the people in each world are operating from in their day to day lives. In learning the philosophical traditions of each we can understand one another better and live in harmony. Cooperation and respect are the ideal outcome. The problem, of course, is that First Nations have been forced to learn some of the West’s philosophy and values already but the governments and others in power positions in the West have been slow to recognize the necessity of learning, appreciating and acknowledging the intellect and philosophies of First Nations for the purpose of forming relationships with us as equals and as partners, as brothers and sisters in the human family or for the purpose of forming a sense of mutual community. Vine Deloria relates a story that illustrates this tendency: “A missionary, Reverend Cram, once came to the Senecas to convert them and recited the story of Adam and Eve. When he was finished the Senecas insisted on relating one of their creation stories. Cram was livid, arguing that he had told the Senecas the truth while they had recited a mere fable to him. The Senecas chastised him for his bad manners, saying that they had been polite in listening to his story without complaining and he should have been willing to hear their tales” (Deloria, 2004; 9). Deloria points out that “what is important is the fellowship and dialogue between the parties and not the competition to define truth – since truth is a matter of perception” (Deloria, 2004; 9).

Gregory Cajete, Tewa from the Santa Clara Pueblo, and an education professor who investigates and articulates indigenous approaches to science, delineates a phenomenon he calls the “metaphoric mind,” as a fundamental aspect of indigenous thought:

Just as the focus on participation in Native science brings forth creative communion with the world through our senses, so too the application of the metaphoric mind brings forth the descriptive and creative ‘storying’ of the world by humans....The metaphoric or nature mind of humans is our oldest mind and has been evolving for approximately three million years....Paralleling its collective evolution, the metaphoric mind in the individual develops from birth to about the time a child begins to learn language. When language is developed and used extensively, the holistic experience of the metaphoric mind begins to get chopped up and labelled, until eventually, it recedes into the subconscious. Yet the metaphoric mind remains very important in continued development because it encompasses the perceptual, creative, and imaginative experience of a person’s inner world....At the deeper psychological level, language is sensuous, evocative, filled with emotion, meaning and spirit. In its holistic and natural sense language is animate and animating, it expresses our living spirit through sound and the emotion with which we speak. (Cajete, 2004; 50)

This reminds me of when a professor said, as she handed back my graded essay to me, "I believe you think metaphorically." I did not know what to make of that statement, but when I saw the grade she had given my paper I decided it must have been a negative judgment made about my thinking ability. When I questioned the grade she stated that my sources were not academic enough as among my citations were a conversation with an esteemed First Nations artist and thinker, and a film. She was an American non-native 'expert' on American and Native literature and visiting lecturer at my university for the year. This was fifteen years ago in 1990. These days I take her remark as a compliment. I now see that, unlike the practice of interpreting concepts by fracturing and separating into smaller parts, as promoted by the historical tradition of Western thought, my tendency is to think in holistic metaphorical terms where my ideas come to me whole. A representation of a given concept presents itself as a cohesive metaphorical example in story, or a scene, with an accompanying sense of the visual, aural, and tactile experience of the concept rooted in the material present experience, or memory of that kind of experience³.

In contrast to the West's entrenched philosophical concept of the world as separated into two, the first dichotomy set out by Plato⁴, the physical world

³ Cajete's provocative discussion on the metaphoric mind extends further as he states: "Despite the conscious separation of the metaphoric mind from the rational, both minds work together when the conditioning of separation is suspended during creative play, meditation, ritual, or other modes of spontaneous thinking. In Native societies...the two minds...are typically given more balanced regard. Both minds are respected for what they allow people to do, yet the metaphoric mind remains the first foundation of Native science" (Cajete, 2004; 51). He states that the metaphoric mind, in fact, "invented the rational mind" and "the rational mind in turn invented language, the written word, abstraction, and eventually the disposition to control nature rather than to be of nature" (Cajete, 2004; 51). He says, "Because its processes are tied to creativity, perception, image, physical sense, and intuition, the metaphoric mind reveals itself through abstract symbols, visual/spatial reasoning, sound, kineasthetic expression, and various forms of ecological and integrative thinking. The facilitator of the creative process, it invents, integrates, and applies the deep levels of human perception and intuition to the task of living" (Cajete, 2004; 51). He states, "Understanding Native science begins with developing the creative ability to decode layers of meaning embedded in symbols that have been used for thousands of years and are used artistically and linguistically to depict structures and relationship to places" (Cajete, 2004; 51).

⁴ In Plato and Aristotle's vision of reality and aesthetics as embedded in Western European thought, reality was divided in to two and thereby constructed a hierarchical dominant role. Forms are ideal. Material physical substance is simply a reflection of forms and is therefore removed from them. One needs to struggle to resist the passions associated with the material in order to reach toward the higher realm of forms. Forms are thought and, since God's thought created everything that exists, the ultimate form is one that is as close to God as possible (to some philosophers, perhaps, even God is thought). Therefore intellectual and rational thought is superior to the everyday physicality of existence. Furthermore, forms are real while the material physical world is not real but an illusion (Richter, 1998; 17). This definition of reality gets played out aesthetically, according to Plato, where imitative art, like poetry or painting is lower in status, in

and the world of ideal abstract forms, and then second progression of that separation, by French philosopher Rene Descartes, (which led to the perception of hierarchies at all levels of reality right down to binaries operational in language), is the general First Nations worldview which is holistic. The First Nations perspective of reality as holistic has implications for how we view our lives and how we relate in the world and consequently how we continue to survive as distinct cultural peoples. How we have been able to survive in a colonized world is likely because of our holistic worldview. How we are able to survive likely has to do with our ability to traverse from one culture to another; or rather how we are able to live in two worlds at once. That is, how we manage to live both in our holistic world and the Western dichotomous world at the same time; and, how we must understand both in order to be balanced effective First Nations communities and individuals. These two different entities, the community and the individual, reflect another value difference between First Nations and Westerners. For First Nations the primary consideration for action or thought as point of departure is the community, for the Westerner it is the individual. All laws, social structures, and cultural productions emanate from these two different basic entities in these two different respective worlds. This is emphasized by Gardner when she states, (curiously echoing similar assertions that one cannot be free unless one's fellow humans are also free of the French phenomenologists and existentialists) that, in the Stó:lō River worldview aesthetic, "achieving a sense wholeness for the individual Stó:lō means achieving wholeness for a Stó:lō people" (Gardner, 2002; 295).

A methodology Gardner uses in her research is the heuristic where "self-experience is the most important guideline in the pursuit of knowledge" and meaning and she thus presents the holders of such knowledge as her "co-researchers" (Gardner, 2002; 117) and bases some of her provocative findings on their "poetic monologues," trusting her co-researchers expertise, and modelling an egalitarian and respectful approach to doing research in First Nations communities. She is showing active responsibility to the community by presenting their status as fellow researchers, in a collaborative egalitarian format: she does not relate to them as informants but as experts and thus they are

contrast with the artisan who by making tools or bread created something new and therefore not imitations and thus were considered superior to imitative arts (Richter, 1998; 4). This low value placed on art is because, in imitating the physical world, it is thus twice removed from reality, the 'heavenly' world of ideal and 'perfect' forms. Curiously, this idea of creating something new as an aesthetic value does parallel First Nations holding a high aesthetic value for art as active creation of something new. Plato's student Aristotle, however did value art but it had to be art with the purpose of taking people away from the everyday emotional passion and brutality of the material and thus closer to the ideal forms. While Aristotle's view of art was to take people out of themselves, out of their material world into the abstract forms, today it seems there is a view of art as a way to bring back into the material concrete reality of our visceral existence. In his work, *Poetics*, Aristotle asserted a prescription for good art and thus he pioneered aesthetics (Richter, 1998; 3).

shown respect. Action is a component of our aesthetic; we value action as it relates to responsibility in our conception of what is beautiful.

Gardner mentions Martin's research on the difference between historical linear time and circular time with its timeless quality of enabling conceptions of past, present and future as if in one spatiality and at happening at one time (Gardner, 2000; 11). I think the dimension of motion, of movement, also comes to play here in this idea of time. The Native tradition, with its motion of transitional/transformational flow, is a harmonizing contrast to the Platonic tradition, with its motion of bursts of change through revolution. It seems to me that the historical time has accompanying it a motion of change which occurs or moves in bursts, where the significant changes are documented as occurring as revolutions, revolts of what came before, what Marx would call a dialectic, where there is a thesis, a resistance to that thesis and then some sort of a synthesis of the two. This dialectical, and often violent, approach is embedded also in perceptions of, not only the political social sphere but also in science, and religion. On the other hand, the motion of First Nations change in culture, society, politics, science, art is more of a flow with its consideration of all parties, including the environment. A consideration of all parties involved means transformation occurs in a more fluid, holistic and thus collaborative and peaceful way. This is not saying there is no conflict but even when there is conflict that conflict is on a relatively smaller scale. Thus when this is looked at by the Western philosophical view, which sees itself as dominant⁵, the flow is interpreted as stasis and the admirable qualities therein are missed.

⁵ "Hannah Arendt's musings on the terms used in discussing war and peace point away from the dialectic of binary opposition. She says opposites are not necessarily in tandem with each other, and therefore through revolution each does not necessarily become their opposite or synthesis as Marx and Engels would have it. That is, where the oppressed become the oppressors and the dominant become the oppressed given a violent war or revolution. She says power is not equatable with strength. Strength is individual and vis a vis the group, and thus strength may or may not be powerful. Power is given to the one by the group and is not inherent in the individual: "Power is never the property of the individual" (Arendt, 1993, 316). This means that power does not bring about violence or oppression necessarily. According to Arendt "violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until, in the last stage of their development, they... substitute for it" (Arendt, 1993, 317). But violence and its extreme in terror, contrary to its claim, signifies a power that is waning or which no longer exists. In power's extreme absence terror would reign supreme and society would likely disintegrate. With Arendt's distinctions in mind it does seem to make sense that, in the late 1800s when the population tide turned from a majority of aboriginal peoples to a majority of immigrant settlers and the entrenchment of a national government, aboriginal nations for the most part did not rise up and retaliate against the aggressions of the new national government to relocate them to "reserves". [What were these reserves reserving one wonders? Reserving is usually a temporary measure, as in reserving a table at a restaurant or eerily is the denotation of reserves for wildlife which are considered as eventually becoming extinct.] It seems to me that this restraint on the part of First Nations was because they understood that violence is a double edged sword likely to separate rather than integrate, likely to alienate rather than befriend. Also perhaps their understanding that history is a river that flows forward as well as backward made them

The holistic view where one is in relationship with everything which he or she encounters, and where everything operates in support of everything else which exists, makes the environment and sense of place have tremendous value and importance. This is why so much emphasis is given to land claims efforts, like the Gitksan We'tsuwetan case, and to holding on so tightly to our connection to our territories. Our stories and our very languages are formed through our experience with a given place: "With this knowledge, we finally came home to the River, to the Stó:lō, and realized that we and the River are one identity. Our language tells us so" (Gardner, 2002; 294), and "Thousands of years of living in a 'harmony with' relationship with the land is evident in the way we name our places, sacred sites and the flora and fauna" (Gardner, 2002; 299). As Gardner notes the Katzie belief is that everything is animated, living, humans, animals, plants, and even rocks. How much different, how much more or less of a leap of faith, is this than believing in Christ, in Jesus, as the son of God, – or for that matter in a burning bush that emits the voice of God – as believed by millions of people? Place more than time is the dimension First Nations give priority to. Waters notes: "colonial social cultures link individual identity with linear time (of discrete human events and institutions) rather than geographic place. Conversely, Indigenous cultures nurture individual identity formation with a communal interdependence and sustainability in a specific geographical location" (Waters, 2004; 154). Place is embedded in the stories we create and the language we interrelate with and through and vice versa, stories are associated with given places (Gardner, 2002; 299). In *Strawberries*, Gardner explains the Stó:lō concept of time :

For Xwélmexw, or mythic people (Martin, 1987), all of life's teachings were revealed at the time of creation, and through this 'sacred history,' or sxwōxwiyám the events of creation are relieved and re-enacted over and over through story and ceremony. The time of creation is ever present in the now and in the future....Mythic, or Xwélmexw, people

think twice about their actions. Settlers, as Susan Sontag notes in a 2002 CBC *Ideas* radio interview, come here to reinvent themselves and to forget their history. The two settler nations of Canada and the United States are the first of a kind and are an experiment that will always be haunted by the past it tries to forget. In a globalized world where nations are stratified by multi-national corporations it is not only that what happens in Iraq impacts what happens in Toronto or Canada-US border-crossing and access to resources nor that the t-shirt I covet is made by under-age garment workers working in life-threatening conditions for a penance, but it also means that how we relate or related to one another as groups today or yesterday (and as individuals I would argue) impacts all of our tomorrows and today's. Therefore aboriginal nations of yesterday and aboriginal people today are enduring and impactful. Our languages though are equal in value to, or possibly more valuable than, the land because language holds the landscape of our experience with the environment, human, geographical and animal. As poet Fred Wah says it is not where you hang your hat but how you hang your hat. If we don't have our language, be it English or Halq'emelem, then we don't have a 'how' never mind a where" (Charnley; 2006, 10-11).

are people of biological orientation who follow Nature's grand symphony of endlessly repeating cycles of birth, growth, senescence, and death, followed by rebirth. And these rhythmic cycles have the same behaviour, form, and power as at Creation...Time in Xwelitem, or Western, history is linear, placed on a continuum where one is separated from the past in a millisecond, uncertain of what the future will bring, thus the need to ever be progressing in the development of new technologies for human survival. (Gardner, 2000; 11)

Thus place, the geographical and the ontological/epistemological sense of one's place, connected with one's community, and the relationship one's community and family has with place, and the story of place are a supremely important aspect of First Nations' perception of beauty, balance, wholeness, identity -- our aesthetic.

Works such as Gardner's dissertation 'storify' (a more spatially and holistically conceived complement or contrast to the linearity of history) the life of our language. The story of our language also holds our worldview now, in addition to our language revival efforts. Gardner's acknowledgement that "The Halq'eméylem revivalists' stories [show] us that learning our Halq'eméylem language reconnects us with our River worldview aesthetic, restoring us to wholeness as Stó:lō, people of the River," along with her call "to escalate the work of recording our elders speaking onto audio and video media," in order access the "language in its purest form" and her later declaration that "Our Halq'eméylem language was borne of the land," point to a number of other related considerations. Not only is technological savvy important in order to perpetuate the language into the future but her statements alerts to an important central, yet often taken for granted, aspect of language. That is, the very sound of the language holds significance. Epelel affirms that "it was just the way mom said things" so that, as Gardner contends, "even a few words and phrases heard in times gone by was enough to give some people a strong sense of the language and its sounds" (Gardner, 2002; 289). I once heard a woman, making a speech at a gathering, say that her language sounded like the wind rushing through the pine trees in her particular part of her nation's territory and she was not being poetic. She asserted this as fact. I wonder if a similar environmental reflection in the form of sound might be delineated in Halq'eméylem language. How might our language reflect the sound of our various environments? For instance, I wonder if the pronunciation differences between Upper River and Down River, or Island languages might have to do with the variables of their respective environments. If we listen closely might our language sound like the way the River sounds at different points along its course from the canyon area down through to the flats of Musqueam and over to the rushing waves crashing on the shore of the Island? Certainly this kind of sense of one's language requires very close attention, and an intimacy with the language, on a very high level of fluency. What new or refreshing perceptions of reality might our language hold for us as we move toward fluency. Waters exemplifies Gardner's assertions:

Many times, totally unknown to us, we show who we are by our body language as we move, as we talk, as we perceive the world, and also by how we hear the world, through the sounds and rhythms of our environment.... These sound rhythms emanate from our body movement. This is how deep are our identity markers. (Waters, 2004;158)

Our worldview and our language can be completely revived into a renaissance, because, this may be approaching the metaphysical, the pattern of language lives on in our thinking patterns despite having the English language imposed on our thinking. Elders who speak Halq'eméylem might have adapted English, initially at least, in a way that reflected Halq'eméylem characteristics, values, and worldview. Gardner says that "the language [is] embedded in the collective memory of Stó:lō people, feels natural to them (Gardner, 2002; 289). Just as the mind is mapped out with mental visual markers according to environments one has travelled and spent the most or significant times in, our language is mapped by geography, reflecting its particular characteristics on many levels. Waters too echoes this idea: "identity and worldview, a history of place consciousness, preserved through oral history, manifests discrete geographical place symbols within consciousness that provide a conceptual framework of identity as place" (Waters, 2004;155). It would be fascinating to see what a study of this might reveal.

In our orally based culture we do not impose language onto our children. Psychoanalytical theorist Julia Kristeva, critiquing the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's hypothesis, postulates a theory whereby once a child enters into language he or she is separated from the Imaginary, the maternal body, and the sense of integration with the natural world (Oliver, 1993; 19-20). If this is so, then it could be argued, that in cultures where there is a longer duration for children to take up spoken language, they may consequently have a stronger, deeper and a more holistic sense of their inter-connection with the natural (human and non-human) world. Whether Kristeva's postulation applies to First Nations or not, it is a fascinating line of inquiry, and curiously resonates with some of Cajete's lines of thought regarding the nature of the metaphoric mind, which I hope to take up for my more comprehensive future project. As Cordova recalled about her own childhood, she was not told what or how to be a writer (Cordova, 2004; 253). Her tendencies were noticed and she was taken to visit a great-aunt who was a writer. By spending time with this relative in a warm, intimate friendship Waters 'watched' how the great-aunt conducted herself over time. Waters' intelligence was a given, she did not need to be told, rather the choice to take in what mattered to her was her own. In this way we become leaders of ourselves, we become self-guided individuals with a sense of intellectual integrity and contributive community members. Later Waters took up writing herself with her observations of her great-aunt, and the knowledge therein, informing her practice.

Teaching Halq'eméylem to Salish children, their parents, and their teachers has unquestionable value as it embodies our worldview, our

epistemology and our ontological matrix as a distinct culture. Our culture manages to survive in spite of residential school, and other attempts, at annihilating us in our difference, in our unknown-ness within the Western European frame at the time of contact, and the quick and eventual colonizing practices which targeted our language and our ability to speak, as the most calculated way to erase us. To continue, to thrive, and to return to not necessarily the same culture of our past but to our sense of pride in ourselves as the culture we decide we are today, as a continuum from that pre-contact sense of esteem, means we have a responsibility to ourselves to embrace our language independent of outside help. However, the Canadian government has a responsibility to remedy its calculated genocidal practice of silencing our language and ability to speak in order to take control of our environment and its monetarily valued resources, thus providing power to the European nations involved, and a hope for a life beyond poverty and oppression for the common folk who immigrated to this land looking for a better life than found in Europe. The Canadian government's responsibility is to provide funds, as Kirkness suggests we need to make the best use of whatever monies we do get though, to as quickly return our language to us, and our ability to survive culturally, and to return some semblance of self-governing control to us, according to a mutually agreeable form (Kirkness, 1998; 31).

A revival of Salish languages could be taken one step further. They could be a viable, accessible, language option for non-Salish Canadians so that they can truly be "Canadians" as they learn to value this environment. My own grandfather when he arrived here from Blackburn, England as a young man in 1908, along with his siblings and parents, looking for the opportunity to live out his ideals of a better life that was engaged with the land, and his passion for cattle, embraced the Katzie language so that he could talk with my grandmother's mother who spoke only Katzie (a similar language to Musqueam – she was originally from Tsawwassen)⁶. When my grandfather asked my grandmother's father for her hand in marriage my great-grandfather replied, with what I imagine to be a sweeping gesture of his hand toward and across the surrounding landscape, "I will give you permission but you must never take her away from this land here, her home"⁷. My grandfather kept his word, his promise. Our place, our home, our land, is of dire importance to our lives, our identities, individually and collectively. One of the reasons I believe my great-

⁶ His first visit was around 1902, and then his second trip a few years later was when he settled in S'ólh Téméxw.

⁷ This would have been sometime in 1922-1923.

grandparents gave their permission for my grandmother and grandfather to marry despite the difference in culture (his Xwelitem or 'foreigner' status outside of the Katzie social structure; and age – he was eighteen years older than her) was that he showed respect for and sincere interest in their culture and thoughts and this was evident in his investment in learning the language. Perhaps, to my great grandparents, in this way he had made himself a smelá:lh, a 'worthy' person, according to Gardner's definition, one who knows his culture, place and history: he had synthesized my grandmother's culture with his original culture. I think also that he saw the potential within his original culture to take up what he considered to be worthy values to live by. He recognized values which were lived out in the Salish culture but that British culture did not largely focus on to the demise of the common people and the lands they lived in. It is evident that potential recognition of First Nations values resides in all peoples, Salish and non-Salish, particularly since even many European philosophers have struggled to create a theory which addresses what is missing or lost or unfair in their own societies.

Another way of looking at the revival of First Nations languages and the prevention of their extinction is by acknowledging what Gardner asserts "that languages evolve": any and every language is always evolving and changing just as a culture does (Gardner, 2004; 292). Language is alive in this way and always malleable to the way it is used by a given society/culture and the transitions in thinking are reflected in the culture according to various changes, like technological or environmental, or political power changes, and so on. Meanings change, pronunciations shift, and context of use changes, and, additionally, in the written form, spelling and grammar are given to change. As Gardner asserts the Halq'eméylem language and River worldview are a "culmination of thousands...of years of invention, innovation and creativity" (Gardner, 2002; 295). Therefore there is no need to worry that the language as it is currently practiced may not be absolutely 'pure' or 'original' or 'perfect.' No language ever is rooted in one pristine historical moment. Like Gardner highlighted, and fellow co-researcher Katelila coined, what we might end up with is "Halq'eméylemish" and that is all right because we do live in a "Halq'eméylemish" world, don't we?

Given the First Nations view that we are all interrelated and support each other's life, what are the implications globally if languages, like so many species, become extinct? If it is true that language is 'alive' and in relationship with other languages, and if languages therefore influence each other, taking on foreign words as new words in the lexicon, or through translation taking on meaning from the source language, and thus nurturing, refreshing, and re-energizing each other, then it could be that if some languages become extinct, or dwindle in number, that eventually there will be only one language left, or else just a few languages in existence. However, if there is only one, or even two languages which remain in existence, how will they survive, how will they be nurtured if languages work together and are interrelated? The function of language may change dramatically and be reduced in application. The question arises: What would having only one language remaining on this planet mean for

human thought, since language and thinking processes are so intimately connected? Would our ability to think expansively, to grow, to learn be impacted by such a limit on language? Given its structuring function for thought? Would this impact political systems and the way we live as a human species?

Appendix I: Nurturing Halq'eméylem

Halq'eméylem language renewal means not only Stó:lō people reviving everyday use of the language but also the non-Stó:lō population having the opportunity to learn and speak Halq'eméylem. Opportunities to learn Halq'eméylem could be made available through night school classes at local school boards, community colleges and continuing education programming at universities. Additionally, conversation immersion weeks could be implemented during the summer at the University of British Columbia's summer language institute, and at other universities. This would employ, and support the work of those dedicated certified teachers of Halq'eméylem. Students would not only be having the opportunity of learning the Halq'eméylem language but also the Stó:lō culture through the language, just as one learns of the French culture when taking French courses. I suspect new immigrants to this country would be acquiescent, happy, delighted, whole heartedly take up the language given that most of the rest of the world outside of North America at least bilingual and often polyglots, and because usually immigrants and visitors are sincerely interested in what First Nations people have to say. What better to find out what people have to say than to learn their language.

Halq'eméylem could be offered as one of the second language requirements. Teachers could be brought in to the secondary schools to teach the second language requirement. Priority would be given to the native speaker as teacher just as it is preferable to have a native French speaker teach French the preference would be for a native Halq'eméylem speaker to teach Halq'eméylem. Furthermore, French and Halq'eméylem would be given priority over any other second language option provided in the school. For instance, if a secondary school normally has a French offering, and another language such as German or Spanish or Latin, then instead of those in addition to French, Halq'eméylem would be given preference in the curriculum. This program could be implemented in steps. The first schools to have the language offering would be those with the highest First Nations population of students and families with the idea that these families might have a higher interest at first in the classes.

All elementary and high schools ought to have available Halq'eméylem as a priority language equal or above French. Canada ought to have three official languages: English, French, and the local indigenous language. All signage ought to reflect this and government officials ought to be expected to have a working knowledge of these. Most countries throughout the world support more than one operating language, so, why not the geographically large and diverse Canada? Moreover, if it takes only the loss of one generation of

speakers to lose a language, like a species it thereby becomes extinct, it only takes three years of dedicated learning to become operationally fluent in a language⁸. However there needs to be progressive curriculum, as well as proficient advanced level teachers, available for the learners to be able to reach that high level of fluency.

Appendix II: Reconciling contemporary literary theory with a Stó:lō worldview

How do we reconcile stability with mobility; wholeness with fracture, while taking into consideration what happens in the spectrum between these polarities? Additionally, how do we reconcile the desire and need for a stable identity when our identities were annexed by colonization? How do we take up that past identity? How do we know where we might have been today if our past identity wasn't interrupted, if we were not a culture interrupted? How do we claim that identity so it and we can move forward and at the same time keep it as our own – as we change? As a graduate student I am faced with the task of reconciling my desire to hold onto a stable, rooted First Nations identity amidst the current trend in literary studies of celebrating recent theories of reading the world which highly value mobility, instability, nomadism, uprootedness, fracture, constant motion and the untetherable where meaning, language, and identity are concerned. This unstable, nomadic, slippery sense of meaning and identity is indeed freeing, especially as understood in their contrast and resistance to the Western tradition's desire for universalism, origin, and authority grounded in historical moments, in other words the very stasis it has accused indigenous peoples of. The trend toward understanding identity, definition and meaning as unstable, slippery and fluid is very much a post-colonial position because it uproots notions of indigeneity as historically rooted in a moment of contact in the distant past and the narrow interpretations of the indigenous world associated with that moment of definition. However, still concurrently with this task of trying to somehow reconcile this post-colonial strategy, I also face the task of unravelling blanket statements that First Nations have no concept of possession or ownership yet at the same time I want to claim ownership of what is and has been rightfully ours, our culture, our language, our contributions, that have been taken, broken, ignored and misused. The historical 'moment' of contact and colonial continuum still has affect and our major social institutions, like law and education, still reflect and operate in degrees according to that legacy and so must be addressed. Sometimes I worry that our cultural values of cooperation, collaboration, and communalism are being used against us in order to justify acts that have been unethical in both worlds. As Deloria rightly contends, some "might...describe the Indians as true relativists, possessing no criteria except what happens to strike their fancy. Such is not the

⁸ This is based on one to two two-hour classes per week with dedicated practice between classes. This is according to Yvonne Li Walls, director of the Chinese Language and Culture Program at SFU, Conversation July 2004. She is also the senior Mandarin instructor of the Program.

case. The transmission of stories of ancient times, along with social relations with other peoples, provided boundaries beyond which people did not go” (Deloria, 2004; 9).

Appendix III: Biography

I wrote this paper last summer in 2005 for a Directed Reading I did as part of my graduate studies program in the English Department at Simon Fraser University. My supervisor was Ethel Gardner who at that time was an assistant professor in the Education Department at SFU. My grandmother was a Katzie and, as a fluent mid-river speaker, she belonged to the elders group that met weekly at Coqualeetza Cultural Centre in Sardis in the 1970s. During these meetings elders got the chance to speak “Indian” with each other and to remember old times and share community news. At the same time they were interviewed in order to compile the *The Structure of Upriver Halq'eméylem – A Grammatical Sketch* and *Classified Word List for Upriver Halq'eméylem* which were published together in one text by the linguist Brent Galloway and the Coqualeetza Elders Group in 1980. During those years I was in elementary school and, when I spent weeklong visits with my grandma and my uncle during various school holidays, I enjoyed attending the meetings too and hanging out with my grandma, her friends and our elder relatives.

References

- Arendt, Hannah. “Power and Violence.” *The Essay: Old and New*. Ed. Edward P.J. Corbett and Sheryl L. Finkle. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1993. 315-323
- Burkhart, Brian Yazzie. “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology.” *American Indian Thought*. Ed. Anne Waters. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. 15-26.
- Cajete, Gregory. “Philosophy of Natural Science” *American Indian Thought*. Ed. Anne Waters. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. 45-57.
- Charnley, Kerrie. “The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Solving the Problem of Trauma in Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* and Finding, Fighting and Transforming the Ethnographic Identification Trap in Maria Campbell’s and Linda Griffith’s *The Book of Jessica*” Unpublished MA paper, 2006.
- Cordova, V. F. “Approaches to Native American Philosophy.” *American Indian Thought*. Ed. A. Waters. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. 27-33.
- Deloria, Vine, jr. “Philosophy and the Tribal.” *American Indian Thought*. Ed. Anne Waters. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. 3-12.
- Gardner, Ethel Stelómethet. *Tset Hikwstexw Te Sqwélteltset, We Hold Our Language High: The Meaning of Halq'eméylem Language*

Renewal in the Everyday Lives of Stó:lō People. Unpublished Ph.d. Dissertation. Burnaby: Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University. 2002.

- Gardner, E. Stelómethet. "Where There Are Always Wild Strawberries." *Canadian Journal of Native Education*. Editors: Archibald, Jo-ann, and Kenny, Carolyn. Edmonton: U of Alta., Vol.4, No.24, 2000. 7-13.
- Kirkness, Verna. "How Far Will \$20 Million Go?" *Aboriginal Languages: A Collection of Talks and Papers*. Arnprior, Ontario: Self-Published (2nd Print), 1998. 31-34.
- Oliver, Kelly. *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-bind*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993. 18-20.
- Richter, David H. "Introduction." *The Critical Tradition*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998. 1-14.
- Richter, David H. "Introduction to Plato." *The Critical Tradition*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998. 17-20.
- Waters, Anne. "Introduction." *American Indian Thought*. Ed. Anne Waters. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. xv-xxxviii.
- Waters, Anne. "Language Matters: Nondiscrete Nonbinary Dualism." *American Indian Thought*. Ed. Anne Waters. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. 7-115.

Kerrie Charnley
kcharnle@sfu.ca
kcharnley@fastmail.fm