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Lines that divide: Aboriginality, Canadian applied anthropology, and transgressing the 'national anthropological tradition'

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Lines that divide

Aboriginality, Canadian applied anthropology, and transgressing the 'national anthropological tradition'

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Is there a distinctly 'Canadian' anthropological tradition? This paper reviews recent literature that addresses this question, tracing two major threads in the history of anthropological research in Canada: the prominence of themes of aboriginality in the Canadian anthropological context dating back to early Americanist projects associated with Franz Boas; and the development of applied anthropological practice in Canada as a kind of subfield specializing in the documentation and mediation of Aboriginal-state relations. These facets provide context for the works of Regna Darnell, Michael Asch, David Howes, and others who specifically address the 'Canadian anthropology' question. Common to their arguments is attention to the relationship between public and scholarly attitudes indicative of an unassuming 'Canadianness,' and state codifications of a "bicentric" (Howes 2006) national identity in initiatives such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Whether and how these state-sanctioned productions speak to widely held public attitudes becomes central in conceptualizations of a reflexive Canadian anthropology both distinct and valuable for theoretical insights it offers the wider discipline. Paradoxically, in these works we find Canadian anthropology's strength is in its inherent tendency to evade any such hard and fast classification.

KEY WORDS Canadian anthropology, aboriginality, applied anthropology

How have local research contexts and the adoption of 'applied' research models shaped studies of Aboriginal-state relations in Canadian anthropology? How can attention to internal divisiveness or cultural "disunity" (Darnell 2000a:172) in Canada help to situate Canadian anthropology within the wider discipline? Following the notion that a shared collective consciousness constitutes the modern experience of nation (Anderson 1983), and further framed by scholarly debates around the prospect of a Canadian 'national imaginary' influencing a distinct Canadian anthropological 'tradition,' this paper's aim is to address these questions. A seemingly central feature of Canadian anthropology and constructive point of access for these issues is found in the sizeable body of ethnographic work focused on Indigenous peoples and public policy, commonly called 'applied anthropology' in the Canadian context. The particularities of applied practice are also, it would seem, contributing factors in Canadian anthropology's lack of visibility, or lack of a unified and coherent theoretical tradition identifiable as distinctive within

the wider discipline. Also notable from the outset is the vantage point from which this lack seems most strongly perceived: namely, the American anthropological tradition and scholars educated in the United States. Indeed, this paper is essentially a response to charges of 'disunity' from what some would call the discipline's largest 'imperial centre,' established as it is with a strong institutional structure (i.e. American Universities, the American Anthropological Association) and long and well-documented history of practice. The proceeding discussion of Canadian anthropology is, admittedly, partly an exercise in contrasting the differences between theory and practice as they have developed in these two nation-states.

That being said, the question of what makes Canadian anthropology 'Canadian' remains an interesting and worthwhile one. Focusing especially on policy-making and Aboriginal rights to self-government, this paper draws together attempts to theorize a relationship between applied anthropological approaches and Canadian national and cultural identities. Paradoxically, as we will see, the closest there may be to a unified tradition takes shape within a general resistance to notions of identity as either fixed or homogenous. Moreover, many authors cited here encounter a tendency within both Canadian scholarship and public life to juxtapose rather than synthesize encountered cultural, ethnic, political and religious differences. A series of examples discussed here culminate with Michael Asch's (2001) advancement of a "Self and Relational Other" model of political relations and his argument for its applicability in anthropological conceptualizations of Aboriginal-state relations in Canada. Asch's Self and Relational Other approach is also a proposed outlet by which applied anthropology can speak to the concerns of the wider discipline, while perhaps also carving out a constructive niche for a Canadian anthropology in its own right.

EFFORTS TO LOCATE AND TRACE the history of Canadian anthropology have been ongoing since the 1970s, following an academic boom that expanded Canadian anthropology departments with an influx of foreign faculty, especially from the United States (Darnell 2000b; Dunk 2000; Harries-Jones 1997; Harrison and Darnell 2006; Howes 2006). In these discussions the study of Indigenous peoples and communities, widely recognized to be the earliest anthropological focus in Canada, are often declared central to Canadian anthropological themes (Dyck 2006; Howes 2006). While some expressed concern that a Canadian specialization in 'aboriginality' began to dissipate during the boom era as researchers increasingly turned to international ethnographic pursuits, many scholars including Regna Darnell have argued such a focus continues to define Canadian anthropology (Darnell 1997, Harries-Jones 1997). Darnell has dedicated much attention to the history of Canadian anthropology and understanding the role played by the Americanist tradition (1997, 2000b, 2001). Her insistence on referring to studies of Aboriginal people and communities in Canada as 'Americanist' gives the impression she would deny the existence of a distinctly Canadian anthropology per se, although a series of her writings taken together suggest quite the opposite (Darnell 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Howes 2006). A quantitative institutional study of faculty specializations in Canada and evidence of a burgeoning field of applied anthropological research of Aboriginal-state relations and policy are support for a Canadian anthropology of aboriginality in its own right (Asch

1984; Darnell 1997; Dyck 2006; Dyck and Waldram 1993; Hedican 2008; Salisbury 1986; Weaver 1981).

Darnell (1997) does attribute the beginnings of professional anthropology in Canada to Boas and his students, and especially Edward Sapir. But she has also argued that Canada's Northwest Coast, as a research site, has critically shaped the Americanist tradition we find in practice today (2000b; 2001). While historians of anthropology in British Columbia have assumed that "Boasian incursions diluted some intrinsic Canadianness of the local discipline," she presents a contrasting view that local cultural particularities of the Northwest Coast fostered a series of developments in Boas's work that would become foundational in the discipline (Darnell 2001:14, 2000b). Three major developments she notes in Boas's work are the dissolution of presumed connections between both culture and environment, and culture and biology; the refutation of classic evolutionary schemes in favour of gathering "detailed histories of particular groups"; and the practice of gathering texts that reveal "native speakers' versions of their own culture(s)" (2001:14). Each of these shifts represented a substantial change in anthropological practice and theory, Darnell argues, which Boas adopted while working within Northwest Coast societies (2000b, 2001). She goes on to state that Boas's Northwest Coast specialization became a driving influence for research with Indigenous peoples all over North America, although most important here is her contention that local contexts, in addition to wider trends in theory and practice, critically shape anthropological approaches and analysis: "Our interpretations, then, respond simultaneously to the local conditions of our fieldwork and the theoretical issues within our disciplines" (Darnell in Darnell 2000b:34-35). This final point resonates with connections Darnell (2000a) would later draw between particularized and shifting community and cultural identities in Canada and theoretical advancements in Canadian anthropological practice and beyond.

Darnell's (1997) discussion of the continued primacy of Aboriginal-focused anthropology in Canada against those who believed it had been eclipsed by the popularity of international research interests is also important in what it has contributed to debates around the "visibility" of Canadian anthropology in the wider discipline. Cause for doubt that there is a distinct anthropological tradition in Canada, Darnell has noted, may lie in its characteristic "low-key" commitments to local research that tend to proceed "without fanfare"—this she declares may simply be the "Canadian way." Since the earliest days anthropologists in Canada have found themselves at the intersection of relations between Indigenous people and colonial, imperial, or state powers (Dyck 2006; Hedican 2008). The circumstances of these relationships have consistently produced spaces for anthropological research to participate in, or at least proceed alongside, various developments between Aboriginal communities or First Nations and the Canadian state. Perhaps without explicitly calling it so, Darnell has been referencing a set of practices commonly termed 'applied anthropology' by Canadian anthropologists. Darnell (1997) writes of researcher-community "partnerships" that form around everyday Aboriginal issues such as language "revitalization" and "cultural persistence," calling upon Canadian practitioners to develop new methods and approaches. Here and in her later writings, Darnell would demonstrate that despite a lack of visibility in the wider discipline, anthropological research with Aboriginal groups or First Nations in Canada has proceeded quietly but forcefully, ultimately becoming highly influential in the development of distinct Canadian approaches.

In the introduction to their volume *Historicizing Canadian Anthropology*, Harrison and Darnell (2006) note references to ‘applied anthropology’ as a defining characteristic of Canadian anthropological practice dating back to CSAA and CESCE meetings in the 1970s. Noel Dyck (1993; 2006) has discussed at length the rise of applied and advocacy anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century, especially in relation to projects that engage Aboriginal-state relations in Canada. Tracing its history of development, Dyck and Waldram (1993) identify a growing interest on the part of Canadian anthropologists to investigate and even intervene in “various relations and dealings between Native peoples and the agencies and institutions of the Canadian state” (1993:5). They write that this is a “departure from the discipline’s traditional preoccupation with ethnological research” that has without doubt affected the “scope, purposes, and practice of anthropology” (1993:5). Later, Dyck again notes a break from the “ethnological” (2006:80) leanings of Boas, Barbeau, and others in favour of more politically situated and social justice-oriented ethnographic work with Indigenous groups around the mid-twentieth century, and identifies this as a critical turn in the development of Canadian anthropology. Some examples of this turn can be found in Sally Weaver’s work on Indian policy (1981), Richard Salisbury’s (1986) work with the James Bay Cree, and Harvey Feit (1980) and Michael Asch’s (1984) works on Aboriginal rights and self-government in Canada. Major contributions to applied anthropology in Canada have also come from the Hawthorn Report, properly titled *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada* (Hawthorn 1966), and subsequent analyses of its impact by other anthropologists, for example Weaver’s discussion of its relationship to the 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy (Weaver 1993). Dyck and Waldram’s (1993) *Anthropology, Public Policy and Native Peoples in Canada* and Hedin’s (2008) *Applied Anthropology in Canada: Understanding Aboriginal Issues* (first edition 1995) are both important volumes that discuss key themes and methodological and theoretical issues facing applied anthropology in Canada.

A clear theme that emerges in a number of these discussions is the idea that Canadian applied anthropology exists on a separate tier from mainstream or more ‘theoretical’ anthropological research (Darnell 1997; Dyck 2006; Harries-Jones 1997; Harrison and Darnell 2006). Harries-Jones (1997) has suggested within the wider discipline, and especially within the British and American traditions, applied anthropology and its ‘activist’ orientations are often conceived as separate from the concerns of ‘theoretical’ anthropology. Others have argued however that such a separation runs counter to the “Canadian experience,” wherein Aboriginal activist anthropology in practice clearly employs its own mix of theory and “comparative ethnographic” methods (Harries-Jones 1997). Regardless, whether perceived or actual, this division would increasingly come to be seen as problematic. Dyck and Waldram (1993) once indicated theoretical contributions to the discipline should not be a primary concern of applied anthropology in Canada, a stance that may have perpetuated a conceptual separation that would not serve the subfield well. Some years on, Dyck (2006:84) has noted a decline in the number of published ethnographies of Aboriginal-state relations in the late twentieth century, due in part he surmises to growing disapproval exercised by state research funding bodies and others. He now expresses concern over what appears to be a widening gap between applied engagements with Aboriginal issues and the rest of the discipline, calling for the former to be better articulated with “broader concerns within anthropology” (2006:87–88). Toward this end,

he notes that studies of “aboriginality” in the Canadian context may offer insight in other kinds of anthropological studies of “political processes and institutional arrangements” that also speak to “state tutelage, nationalism and neo-colonialism” (2006:88). In his call for the reinvigoration of anthropology of Aboriginal-state relations and increased dialogue across a perceived disciplinary divide, Dyck (2006) supports the stance that anthropology in Canada has something of a distinct tradition, capable furthermore of contributing to anthropological theory and practice in a wider sense.

TO THIS POINT, THIS PAPER HAS drawn attention to a common set of practices that emerged in Canadian anthropology in the mid- to late-twentieth century, arguably as a distinct subfield that took shape in response to local research circumstances and contexts. The perennial question in discussions of the history of Canadian anthropology has been the extent to which a distinct tradition exists. Difficulty in locating a unified theoretical tradition and the perception in some circles that applied anthropology somehow stands apart from theoretical concerns have been cited as leading reasons for Canadian anthropology’s failure to distinguish itself within the discipline as a whole (Darnell 1997, 2000a; Dunk 2000; Howes 2006). This paper will now turn to the task of illustrating a relationship between discussions of Aboriginal-focused and applied anthropology on the one hand, and efforts to theorize the existence of a ‘Canadian tradition’ on the other. The overlap in these themes becomes most clear in discussions of Aboriginal-state relations.

ATTEMPTS TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT that shapes Canadian anthropology often look to state legislation or other institutional codifications that relate to public policy. The notion of certain qualities inherent in a nation’s constitutional framework that shape national imaginaries, consciousnesses, or identities, and in turn anthropological traditions, has been variously taken up in response to the Canadian anthropology question. With interested peers looking on, David Howes (1990, 2006) and Thomas Dunk (2000) have assumed opposing sides in one debate of this nature. It began with Howes’s (1990) assertion that the Canada and United States Constitutions correspond with Canadian and American conceptualizations of social worlds. Harking back to concepts popularized by Durkheim and Mauss (1970), he argues that a state constitution shapes and is shaped by the minds and bodies of those it governs. Drawing upon examples he finds in literary, artistic and academic productions, Howes asserts that “the mode of organization of the state is constitutive of the creative activity of the imaginary” (2006:201). Comparing the Canadian and American Constitutions and noting clear divergences, he uses the dyadic principles of “concentrism” and “bicentrism” to describe the alternate viewpoints they represent (2006:202). A concentric view of the world is identifiable in founding ideologies of the United States expressed in rhetoric such as “We the people.” Howes claims a “unity of we” is reflected in American artistic and academic works that produce generalizing theories or ideas that subsume populations within all-encompassing or homogenizing frameworks. Characteristics of the Canadian Constitution, by contrast, reflect the reality of two founding national cultures—the English and the French. However, the principle of ‘bicentricity’ is more complex than simply envisioning a nation composed of ‘two solitudes’ as opposed to one unified body. Drawing from details of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) to support his case, Howes (2006) finds what he calls an

“illiberal” version of rights and equality. ‘Equality’ in this formulation is not about providing identical treatment to the masses, but rather about seeking to recognize and ascribe collective rights to particular groups—for instance, Canada’s Aboriginal peoples. How this connects to a shared national attitude, and by extension to Canadian anthropological research, becomes more clear when Howes connects bicentrism as a concept to what he calls a “diathetical imaginary” in Canada. A diathetical imaginary, he explains, is “a way of thinking that juxtaposes but does not synthesize” (2006:204). Canadian artists and academics alike have demonstrated tendencies to be observant of distinct positions and viewpoints, and often strive in their works to look “both ways from some borderline position” (Howes 2006:204). The lack of a clear Canadian anthropological tradition seems to reflect this general refusal of definitive or homogenous assertions of identity. Against the American or British anthropological traditions, Howes writes, “one looks in vain for any comparatively unified theory of culture and personality in the annals of Canadian anthropology” (2006:206).

Whether or not one agrees with Howes’s use of the Constitution here, his recognition of distinct and autonomous collective identities within Canada’s wider national and institutional structure critically connects to other characterizations of a Canadian consciousness considered in this paper. In his 2006 reiteration of an earlier stated position (1990), he has also made more concrete connections between the ‘bicentric’ or ‘diathetical’ principles and anthropological practice in Canada. Especially relevant in this regard is his call for the scholarly investigation of a “First Nations constitutionalism,” which he claims may offer a constructive means of envisioning “the whole” (or the conglomeration of parts, as it were) that seem to make up Canada today (2006:210–211). Although brief, his description of First Nations constitutionalism makes use of the “rule of transformation,” another expression for a “rule of law” (2006:211). Here, boundaries or dividing lines are conceived as shifting or transformative (Howes 2006:211). Howes’s suggestion that the adoption of a broadly construed Indigenous political philosophy (by his particular characterization) is a constructive avenue for Canadian anthropology is part of a wider current of thought expressed by Darnell (2000a), Asch (2001), and others to be discussed below.

In opposition to Howes’s ‘constitutional’ focus, Dunk’s (2000) thesis on the matter draws upon economic historian and communication theorist Harold Innis, and in particular his theory of staple development in Canada. Insofar at least as it serves Dunk’s purposes, Innis’s staple theory suggests that Canada’s position within the global economy and its regional diversity of commodity production and export are key influences in the formation of attitudes and social life in English Canada. Sociocultural anthropology in English Canada, Dunk argues, has come to reflect this inherent regionalism in its focus on local particularity and consistent effort to contextualize cultural phenomena as such. While both Howes and Dunk have argued the search for a unified Canadian tradition precludes the Canadian vision itself, they have clearly arrived at this from different places. Dunk has expressed concerns about the tenuous link Howes constructs between the Canadian Constitution and the “Canadian imaginary” (2000:135). In his 2006 piece Howes in turn deflects Dunk’s criticisms of the Canadian Constitution as an ineffective measure of the Canadian imaginary and reduces his staple theory proposition to economic and environmental determinism. Whether or not this is a sound critique, Dunk’s position is interesting in its suggestion that Canadian attention to regional economic and cultural

differences “foreshadows” present anthropological concerns with globalization and “dislocation” (2000:136). His argument also shares interesting connections with those advanced by Darnell (1997; 2000a), to be discussed in more detail below. But while both Darnell and Dunk are attendant to the ways local particularity shapes anthropological practice in Canada, and both furthermore suggest these qualities uniquely position Canadian practitioners as insightful contributors in current global concerns and dilemmas faced by the wider discipline, there are key differences. In what follows we consider how Darnell takes up a thread more closely aligned with Howes (1990, 2006) in her examination of phenomena at the intersections of culture and governmental policy.

Darnell has published one paper in which she applies an “anthropological and ethnographic approach to Canadian national identity” (2000a:166) itself. Many years working at the University of Alberta and in “northern Alberta Cree communities” gave her opportunity to observe a series of complex and shifting relationships between diverse cultural communities (2000a:169). With these experiences in mind Darnell problematizes the very existence of a singular national consciousness or identity. She writes that “succeeding waves of settlement,” including the “three founding nations” of Canada’s Indigenous population, the English and the French, followed by more recent immigrants, “have retained the character of their particularized experiences” (2000a:166–167). In ethnographically placing these groups within a series of structural relationships to each other, Darnell finds that “Canadian social cohesion resides precisely in the intersecting binaries which divide Canada along multiple axes” (2000a:165). Importantly, these relationships are constantly subject to change as groups negotiate their “standpoints” and face new “situationally specified contrasts” (2000a:165). In other words, Darnell’s understanding of social ‘cohesion’ in Canada basically refers to an acceptance of perpetual relationships of difference among diverse populations, and their willingness to operate on that basis. Having arrived at this fleeting conception of ‘Canadianness,’ Darnell notes its striking similarity to prevailing understandings of ‘culture’ in anthropology in general—namely, understanding culture “in terms of a multiplicity of standpoints” (2000a:170). She argues furthermore that an ongoing state of “uncertainty”—or the sense that one’s own ‘community’ is not central but merely one among a shifting conglomeration of standpoints—is a “national attitude” particularly amenable to postmodern anthropological approaches to the present global climate (2000a:167). For this reason the Canadian national attitude she has identified “cries out for anthropological analysis,” presumably due to insights or theoretical advancements it may bring to the discipline (2000a:167). Although perhaps not the specific type of theoretical contribution that Dyck (2006) has called for, both Darnell and Dunk have drawn attention to potentially constructive points of dialogue between Canadian practice and the wider discipline.

But in this discussion Darnell (2000a) has done something even more important. Staying true to her focus on studies of aboriginality as a central feature of Canadian anthropology, she has made a case study of the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and the ways it “exemplifies the political process whereby Canadians both envision and re-envision their nation” (2000a:166). She describes the Royal Commission as a kind of “institution of Canadian introspection” representing diverse standpoints and with “potential impact on the society’s reflexive capabilities” (2000a:170). In this way the Royal Commission provides a link, she suggests, between ethnographic

research or relationships on the ground and “the symbolic discourse mediating diversity of standpoints” (2000a:170). Of central importance in the RCAP report is its strong incorporation of what Darnell calls “First Nations values,” which she argues are thoroughly reflected in a “Canadian penchant for social cohesion based on small-scale, local, and intermeshed patterns of identity” (2000a:166–170). Composed of four Aboriginal Commissioners and three non-Aboriginal, the RCAP was mandated in 1991 to make policy recommendations regarding the relationship between Canada and First Nations, ultimately producing a massive report in five volumes (Darnell 2000a; Hedican 2008). Aboriginal rights and issues of self-government and self-determination were central themes of the Report, and Darnell (2000a) quotes directly from strategic sections calling for the reestablishment of a just and equal relationship between Indigenous peoples and forms of government with those of settler nations. It is proposed that First Nations be “reconstituted” as autonomous governing bodies in a process “likened to provinces joining Confederation” (Darnell 2000a:171). But perhaps even more significant are the ways the Report worked to revolutionize the very definition of First Nations as recognized in policy. The Commissioners argued that First Nations membership no longer be defined “on racial grounds,” but instead Nations should be more broadly regarded as “organic cultural and political entities” (Erasmus et al. in Darnell 2000a:171). The report reminded that “all descendants of the First Peoples had rights, whether or not they were currently constituted within ‘nations’” (2000a:171). As the Commissioners fought here to clarify, there is no singular model of a ‘First Nation’ to call upon: their structures are varied and their memberships internally diverse, as are the concerns and interests of their members (Darnell 2000a:172). Furthermore, membership itself, as presently institutionally defined, is called into question. All of this is to recognize unique Indigenous rights to a distinctive identity, self-determination, and self-government within the context of the Canadian nation-state and Canadian citizenship. The Report’s emphasis on the recognition of internal diversity and “variable standpoints,” argues Darnell (2000a), is key within broader reflexive envisionings of Canadian identities. Connecting all of this with anthropological practice, she emphasizes how these proposed approaches to Aboriginal policy can be constructively applied elsewhere.

As a number of the authors cited here suggest, “disunity” (Darnell 1997) and resistance to homogenization are features of the Canadian context that may be used to trouble essentialisms that prevail in discussions of national and scholarly identities and traditions.

In a published version of the speech he delivered upon receiving the Weaver–Tremblay Award in Canadian Applied Anthropology, Michael Asch (2001) draws upon a similar set of concepts to re-model or re-envision the Aboriginal-state relationship. He is interested moreover in describing how applied researchers might foster and constructively apply this model in their work. This involves understanding the role of the applied anthropologist in Canada as an active facilitator of the political relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the state. Asch’s efforts to connect his own applied work to a philosophy of social justice were the original basis for this discussion. To this end he offers Noam Chomsky’s proposition, once advanced in a 1971 debate with Foucault entitled *Human Nature: Justice Versus Power*, that the worthy goal of social struggle is “to further the ends of justice” (Asch 2001:203). He goes on to draw connections between the primary notion of furthering justice and principles that often are (or indeed could or should be) applied in anthropological studies of Aboriginal-state relations.

LIKE DARNELL (2000A), ASCH ALSO DRAWS upon the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, but focuses on its recommendation that “the concept of treaty advanced in Indigenous thought” become central in Canada’s political relationship with First Nations (2001:206). The concept of treaty sets up a dialogue between autonomous entities engaged in ongoing negotiations. This is both a political theory and a guide for applied researchers that involves constructing an engaged position for the researcher informed by elements of both Western and Indigenous political thought. Drawing from his experience working with the Dene Nation and others, as well as Leroy Little Bear’s (1986) description of treaty-making in “the Indian concept of land ownership,” Asch argues the pursuit of justice in Aboriginal-state relations can be facilitated with the notion of treaty-making and its fundamental connection with the basic concept of “sharing” (2001:203). The principle of sharing within treaty-making, Asch argues, references the need for a sustained and flexible relationship between First Nations and the Canadian state as autonomous political entities. This can be contrasted against political models that tend to subsume non-dominant or subjugated groups and/or belief systems within a prevailing or hegemonic ‘whole.’ Emmanuel Levinas’s ethical philosophy, which models a relationship of ‘I and Thou’ (referencing Martin Buber’s 1970 book *I and Thou*), provides further philosophical support for what Asch prefers to call a “Self and Relational Other” model. He explains,

to Levinas, a philosophy based on ethics necessitates that there are always two parties, a Self and an Other than cannot be reduced to one or the other. It respects that the difference between them must remain irreducible; and places them immediately in relationship. Both parties remain autonomous, yet joined. In that sense, both are responsible for themselves and for the other. (Asch 2001:205)

Such a political relationship, as Asch, Little Bear, and others have envisioned it, presents constructive possibilities for unfolding of Aboriginal-state relations. Self and Relational Other is also a constructive model that applied anthropologists can strive to embody in anthropological practice and writing in Canada and beyond. Noting anthropology’s “long history of appropriating voice,” of speaking for and about Indigenous people “as though they were not there” (2001:204), Asch suggests that a ‘Self and Relational Other’ model of social justice exercised in anthropological writing can afford agency and autonomy, or a place from which to speak, for both the researcher and Aboriginal ‘research subjects.’ Asch optimistically concludes that “the historical encounter with First Nations is changing Canada” (2001:206), despite a number of setbacks in the long struggle for Aboriginal rights and legal and political recognition for First Nations. Like many others cited here, Asch encourages his readers to consider connections between policy makers and legislators, the Canadian ‘imaginary’ and attitudes toward difference, and the insights garnered in applied anthropological practice.

IN DRAWING TOGETHER A SERIES OF interlinked practices and ideas, this paper has identified key themes in Canadian anthropology and worked to situate them within the wider disciplinary context. Official forums for policy making are frequently central to analyses of the Canadian anthropological imagination. While the report from RCAP has neither been widely applied nor without critique (Darnell 2000a; Hedican 1998), this

focus on Canadian policy making and process, as a lens through which to understand both Aboriginal-state relations in Canada *and* national imaginaries that feed scholarly practice, is salient here. This is not to claim that revelations of the RCAP have revolutionized relationships between Aboriginal peoples or First Nations and the state—“Reports are theoretical and idealistic,” Darnell (2000a:170) plainly admits. Nor is Asch’s (2001) Self and Relational Other model a fix-all solution to a complex array of issues that persist even as successful treaty negotiations continue in the second decade of the twenty-first century. This paper has raised the issue of Aboriginal self-government as central both to applied anthropological pursuits and in discussions of the negotiation of Canadian identities.

But how does a focus on treaty-making and self-governance, or ‘First Nations constitutionalism,’ eclipse other dimensions of Indigenous experience? Marcia Crosby (1997:24) has argued that inherent rights to self-government and land sovereignty are defining and authenticating “signposts” of aboriginality that, despite their failure to represent the whole, are often haphazardly applied in scholarly analyses. Crosby notes for instance the difficulty immediately encountered if we attempt to place urban Indigenous experience somewhere within or alongside such widely accepted defining and authenticating constructs. Casting doubt on the practicality of policy recommendations that rely upon First Nations membership and belonging to a land base, Hedican (2008:142) has also noted the RCAP report’s “regrettable neglect” of “issues pertaining to urban Aboriginal people” and those living off-reserve. This calls into question the applicability of Asch’s (2001) treaty-making based model, although its insights should be recognized for their extension beyond land sovereignty negotiations.

Scholars cited here have demonstrated how local and particularized cultural contexts, and contingent and shifting identities and relationships, have shaped Canadian approaches to anthropological research. Whether and to what an extent this provides an answer to the debate around national anthropological traditions (and by extension, a prevailing national consciousness that can act to produce or influence it) is still, as always, up for debate. Be that as it may, anthropology in Canada, and the common methodologies and theoretical debates taken up therein, are demonstrably responsive to the sociopolitical issues and institutional structures that have shaped life in Canada throughout the twentieth century. Actively locating and negotiating cultural dividing lines, and engaging in relationships that respect these differences, are ethical attitudes and approaches that Canadian practitioners should continue to promote within and across anthropological ‘traditions.’

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