

The Windigo in the Material World

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Abstract. Reconsideration of documentary evidence indicates that the Subarctic Algonquian windigo complex was of probable prehistoric inception, that a correlative psychiatric disorder entailing cannibalistic ideation and behavior is historically demonstrable, and that existing ecological explanations of the complex fail to elucidate its origin, persistence, characteristics, and distribution. Examination of the windigo complex from structural, pragmatic, and ideological perspectives suggests that instances of the psychiatric disorder were conditioned by Algonquian theories of dreaming and predestination

The celebrated windigo and its concomitant “psychosis,” perennial staples of Subarctic Algonquian ethnology and the literature on culture-specific psychiatric syndromes, appear of late as endangered species, Algonquian fictions uncritically taken as factual by credulous and subliminally biased anthropological consumers. At issue are whether ethnological writing has ever adequately elucidated the windigo concept in Algonquian terms and more specifically whether such a phenomenon as windigo psychosis ever occurred.

The noun *windigo* [Ojibwa *wīntikō*, Cree *wīhtikōw*]¹ refers to one of a class of anthropophagous monsters, “supernatural” from a non-Algonquian perspective, who exhibit grotesque physical and behavioral abnormalities and possess great spiritual and physical power. Either many or all windigos were once human beings, transformed, usually irreversibly, into their monstrous condition. In some cases the transition was conceived as rapid while in others the condition could be covert and volitionally disguised. The phrase “windigo psychosis” refers in academic literature to an Algonquian-specific psychiatric disorder whose sufferers experienced and acted upon obsessional cannibalistic urges. Cases of the disorder (cf. Teicher 1960), with few exceptions, occurred prior to the

present century. Culturally presupposed beliefs in windigo transformation have been understood as components of the disorder, causing both sufferers and their companions to identify psychiatric symptoms as signs of an inevitable monstrous condition. Diverse theories nominally explain the disorder itself in terms of anxieties focused on starvation and famine cannibalism (Cooper 1933: 21; Landes 1938: 214) or as the objectification of Algonquian personality characteristics (Parker 1960; Hay 1971). The discussion that follows eschews "psychosis" in favor of the more neutral "disorder."

Recent ethnological writing on the windigo complex has been dominated by ecological and materialist perspectives on the topic. Within this paradigm, it has been argued (Bishop 1975) that the psychiatric disorder was of historic inception, emerging as a consequence of resource depletion and consequent increasing frequencies of famine cannibalism. More recently, the factuality of the disorder itself has been vigorously questioned in an influential article by Marano (1982) that addresses also the evolution and function of windigo ideology. Marano argues that "windigo psychotics," insane Algonquians who experienced and acted upon cannibal urges, never existed; such urges were attributed to the insane or otherwise disabled in order to legitimize their execution. Given the primarily enthusiastic response to Marano's thesis, it would seem that the windigo is in double jeopardy. The "psychosis" is represented as a figment of the Algonquian and Western ethnological imagination while the complex of windigo beliefs themselves become reducible to their purported functional effects. Further, the image of the Algonquian windigo complex in ethnological writing is represented by Marano as an oversimplified and imbalanced distortion of a vastly more differentiated and recondite array of conceptions (cf. Preston 1977, 1978).

The discussion below examines early linguistic and documentary evidence which suggests an aboriginal rather than historic inception of the windigo complex. Next, more recent sources are used to demonstrate that the consistency between Algonquian and Euro-Canadian descriptions of self-defined windigos establishes the factuality of a boreal Algonquian-specific psychiatric syndrome with a component of cannibal ideation. These same data are used to reflect skeptically on the adequacy of the ecological or functionalist paradigm to encompass or explain the origin, distribution, and characteristics of the windigo complex. The essay concludes by arguing that structural, ideological, and pragmatic perspectives on the problem explain more than the ecological coordinates conventionally invoked. Cases of windigo disorder need to be interpreted within the context of Algonquian doctrines of dreaming and predestination, a perspective never systematically explored despite the voluminous literature on the topic.

The Historicity of Windigo

The windigo complex consists minimally of Algonquian beliefs in spiritually empowered anthropophagous monsters, Algonquian beliefs that human beings can become such monsters, and cases in which Algonquians experienced and sometimes acted upon cannibal ideation. In a foundation article on the topic, Fogelson (1965: 77) stressed “the absence in . . . early accounts of characteristics which were later associated with the Windigo being: as his gigantic stature, his anthropophagous propensities, and his symbolic connections with the north, winter, and starvation.” The suggestion of significant change in the complex during historic times was taken up by Bishop (1975), who proposed that beliefs in cannibal monsters were aboriginal but that concepts of transformed *human* windigos and derivative instances of windigo psychiatric disorder emerged historically as consequences of game shortages and ensuing starvation cannibalism:

Thus it was through both increasing occurrences of human cannibalism and the extension of the belief system to include this stress-induced behavior, that human Windigos and the concomitant psychosis were invented. The catalyst for these developments, however, and if one likes, the ultimate determinant, was a dwindling game supply, intensified fear of starvation, increasing dependence on trade goods, and weakened cooperative bonds in an atomizing social structure. (Bishop 1975: 247)

Bishop (1975: 244) recognizes the existence of windigo-related cannibalism, remarking that instances of windigo disorder without prior famine cannibalism and of windigo cannibalism in nonfamine contexts later developed as consequences of the belief that involuntary famine cannibals could become cannibalistic windigo monsters. Marano (1982: 394, 409) is less convinced than Bishop of the historic inception of windigo beliefs but favors nonetheless the hypothesis that “witch fear first crystallized around a windigo cannibal giant” among the environmentally stressed Crees of the coastal Hudson Bay lowlands and diffused subsequently to Ojibwa-speaking (and presumably Eastern Cree-speaking) groups. In both arguments, aspects of the windigo complex follow as consequences of resource scarcity.

Eastern Algonquian

Seemingly the earliest reference to windigo occurs as an entry in the Powhatan dictionary appended to Strachey's *Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1953 [1612]: 206). In a critique of Gerard's (1904) discussion of this entry, Tooker wrote:

Finally there is given [in Gerard] "*wintuc, wintuccum (wĩntúk, wĩntukûw)* a ghou, = Cree *wĩttikow*, = Ojibwe *wĩndigo*, in the mythologies of the Crees and Ojibwes, a gigantic monster in the form of a man, who feeds upon human flesh." In a footnote Mr. Gerard remarks "This word is printed 'fool' in the [Strachey] Dictionarie, through the misreading, by a copyist, of a word written 'gool' for 'ghoul.'"

Neither Strachey nor the copyist made a mistake, for the word means 'a fool' and not 'ghoul.' *Wintuc* = Lenape Delaware *wil-tak*, 'head-heavy,' 'a fool,' 'a sot,' 'drunkard'; *wintuccum* = Massachusetts *weentuhkekun*, 'he is head-heavy,' 'he is a fool.' (Tooker 1904: 693-94)

Tooker establishes here a purported set of Eastern Algonquian forms used to refer to fools and/or drunkards. Since the windigo condition involves psychological impairment in Algonquian understanding, both formal and semantic affinities of these forms to Cree *wĩhtikōw* and Ojibwa *wĩntikō* suggested to Tooker that they were cognates derived from the same antecedent. Marano speculates on the basis of Tooker's conclusions that "the original meaning" of windigo, apparently among all Algonquians, was 'fool' and that the sense of 'cannibal monster' is a semantic innovation developed in the boreal forest languages during a "150 years or more" period of food crises. In the wake of these shortages, the meaning reverted to the earlier sense of 'fool'. Marano cites Severn Ojibwa usage where the form is used to refer to "an individual who had lost his or her wits" (Marano 1983: 124).

Goddard (1969) has reconstructed Proto-Algonquian **wi·nteko·wa* on the basis of Cree, Ojibwa, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Illinois, Fox, and Kickapoo cognates. He suggests (personal communication) that Strachey's *wintuc* and *wintuccum* are not readily analyzable as reflexes of this form but rather are cognate to Narragansett *Wetucks*. The latter is given by Williams (1973 [1643]) as the proper name of "a man who wrought great Miracles amongst them," evidently a culture hero-trickster character with attributes readily identifiable as those of a fool. The cognates that Tooker provides without citing sources are his own fabrications. The Delaware form was invented by him and the Massachusetts form is a composite of words for 'head' (from some language other than Massachusetts) and 'heavy'.

The meaning of **wi·nteko·wa* was probably neither 'fool' nor 'cannibal monster' but 'owl'. Goddard (1969) demonstrates that there are two Proto-Algonquian forms—**wi·nteko·wa* and **mya·θwe·wa*—that each possess reflexes meaning 'owl' in some languages and 'cannibal monster' in others. Goddard notes the following reflexes of **wi·nteko·wa*: Cree

wihtikōw 'cannibal monster', Ojibwa *wīntikō* 'cannibal monster', Fox *wi·teko·wa* 'owl', Kickapoo *iitekoa* 'owl', Illinois *mentiḡo* 'owl', Miami *mindikwamasia* 'owl'. The etymological evidence suggests that the semantic shift was from 'owl' to 'cannibal' and the former is thus the most probable meaning of **wi·nteko·wa*. The presence of two sets of cognates with meanings distributed between 'cannibal monster' and 'owl' indicates a strong semantic association that contemporary ethnography cannot decisively elucidate. The formation of **wi·nteko·wa* is unclear, but connection with **wi·nl-*, **wi·nt-* 'name, call the name of' is probable. The understanding that owl calls prefigure the deaths of individuals, and thus in one sense "name" them, is shared by the Rock Cree of Manitoba and the Forest County Potawatomi of Wisconsin and is probably of more general Algonquian provenience. Additionally, owls, like windigos, are formidable predators, and there exists also a potential metaphoric resemblance between perceptions of the impassive staring behavior of owls and the glistening eyes and staring of windigo symptomatology. Goddard notes also that more recent Algonquian words for 'cannibal monster' are formed from transitive animate verbs for 'eat': Menominee *mo·we·hkiw*, Unami Delaware *mhúwe*. Stan Cuthand (personal communication) reports similar derivation from the animate intransitive *mīcisōw* in Woods Cree: *omīcisōw* 'eater'.

Since reflexes of the same protoform do not predictably retain the same descendent semantics, the fact that 'cannibal monster' is not the earliest reconstructable meaning of **wi·nteko·wa* hardly demonstrates that this meaning is a historical innovation in Cree and Ojibwa. On the contrary, the presence of reflexes with this meaning both in Cree and Ojibwa and in languages of the Eastern Algonquian subgroup (e.g., Micmac) (DeBlois and Metallic 1984: 189) would indicate, in the absence of evidence for borrowing, that 'cannibal monster' is reconstructible for the prehistoric period.

Montagnais

The earliest references to windigo *behavior* pertain to Quebec Montagnais in the mid seventeenth century. The first case (1634–35) involved an anorexic individual suspected by his relatives of cannibalistic designs toward them (Thwaites 1896–1901, 8: 31–33). The second case (1660–61) mentions only rumors that the Jesuits' Montagnais emissaries at Lac St. Jean developed a cannibalistic mania and had therefore to be executed. Bishop (1975: 239–42) argues that the concept of transformed *human* windigos, clearly presupposed by the Montagnais by this time, was the result of the increasing frequencies of starvation cannibalism to which they had been subject. These tragedies, as Bishop reconstructs the sequence,

initially engendered the belief that famine cannibals became volitional cannibal monsters. Neither famine nor famine cannibalism are mentioned as contextual variables in these two cases, demonstrating that the concept of human windigos who were not prior famine cannibals was already in place.

Bishop also questions whether Montagnais in the seventeenth century associated cannibalistic insanity with a specifically named windigo monster who initiated or resulted from the disorder. Although the word occurs nowhere in the *Jesuit Relations*, it was used by Montagnais and probably also by Cree groups at least as early as the late seventeenth century. The earliest occurrence of the noun known to me is in Fabvre's Montagnais dictionary compiled at Tadoussac in 1695. *ŝitigŝ* is glossed as 'loup garou', and the alternate plurals *ŝitigŝets* and *ŝitigŝek* appear (Fabvre 1970 [1695]: 240); the former is Montagnais and the latter probably Cree. 'Loup garou' or 'werewolf' is an expectable French gloss for windigo, preserving the attributes of monstrosity and anthropophagy. Montagnais knowledge of "large unknown animals which they believed were Devils" (Thwaites 1896-1901: 103) was noted as early as 1633-34, and this was most probably a reference to the windigo which would be "unknown" to Jesuits but not to Indians. All these references suggest that plural windigos were recognized rather than a single individuated entity.

Cree

The next references to windigo pertain to Crees trading into Hudson Bay in the eighteenth century. The phrasing of the first account (1714) of "a Whitego wch is an Apparition" (Smith 1976a: 21) suggests both plurality and monstrosity. However, other sources give *wihtikōw* as the proper name of a single malevolent deity conceptually contrasted with the creator being *Kicimanitōw*. This dualistic cosmology was first attested in the 1670s (Tyrell 1931: 382), and La Potherie later gave the names of the two beings as "Quichemanitou" (*Kicimanitōw* 'great spirit') and "Matchimanitou" (*Macimanitōw* 'evil spirit') (Bacqueville de la Pothèrie 1931: 226); neither source mentions *wihtikōw*. Subsequent sources indicate that *wihtikōw* was an alternate name of *Macimanitōw* or at least that this was how the traders understood the term. Isham (1949 [1743-49]: 5) glossed "whiteco" as "the Devil," and the opposition of good and evil deities was reiterated by Drage (1968 [1748-49], 2: 17 ["Manitou" : "Vitico"]), Ellis (1748: 193-94 ["Ukkemwa" : "Wittika"]), Graham (1969 [1767-91]: 160 ["Kitchimanitow" = "Wesucacha" = "Uckimow" : "Whittico"]), and Wales (1771: 128-29 ["Ukkemah" : "Wittikah"]). Umfreville (1954 [1790]: 21-22) seemingly copied most of his windigo lore from Graham (Pentland 1976) but added an anecdote about a Cree band afflicted by the "devil," an evident gloss for *wihtikōw*, "who came in search of their families" and required a human victim. Graham's account of the being is

the most detailed: “Whittico” is a single malignant entity of hideous appearance and terrestrial provenience, the recipient of sacrificial offerings, and the ruler of subordinate harmful spirit beings who take the forms of animals. “Whittico” left tracks in the snow and was sometimes hunted by the Crees when they were intoxicated.

The earliest known case of windigo-related murder and cannibalism occurred inland in 1741 and was recorded in the Fort Churchill journal (Smith 1976a: 22), but the noun *wīhtikōw* was not mentioned. In 1772 at Fort Severn, a deranged individual who had previously practiced famine cannibalism was executed by his family after confinement proved ineffective. The executioners’ fears persisted, however, after the death because “their superstition leads them so far as to imagine People deprived of reason stalk about after death, and Prey upon human flesh, such they say are Witik’s (i.e. Divils)” (Bishop 1975: 242). Clearly *wīhtikōw* was at least by this time used to refer to members of a class of monstrous entities rather than being exclusively the proper name of a single evil deity. It is also clear that humans were understood to transform into windigos, that windigos were anthropophagous, and that the condition was conceived as etiologically related to prior instances of famine cannibalism. There is no evidence that the condition was believed to develop only posthumously as this passage implies. Hearne (1958 [1795]: 34–35) described in 1775 the belief that famine cannibals developed a derivative cannibalistic obsession; this is clearly a reference to what are elsewhere explicitly described as beliefs in windigo transformation.

Thompson’s (1962 [1784–1812]: 75–76, 103, 194) remarks on the Cree windigo complex in the late 1700s reproduce certain ambiguities in the earlier sources. Like other traders, Thompson described the dualistic cosmology opposing Kicimanitōw and Macimanitōw, or “the Evil Spirit,” and stated that “the word Weetigo is one of the names of the Evil Spirit.” However, Thompson discusses the two separately and ascribes anthropophagy to the “Weetigo” (“Wee tee go is the evil Spirit that devours humankind”) while omitting it from his account of Macimanitōw. Although Thompson uses the word to refer to a single spirit being, his discussion of the self-identified windigo “Wiskahoo” makes clear that it could refer also to incipient human windigos. The first explicit differentiation of the windigo from Macimanitōw occurs in Richardson’s account of the religion of Cumberland House Crees, for whom Macimanitōw was the primary evil deity and the windigo was “a devil into which those who have have fed on human flesh are transformed” (Franklin 1823, 1: 119).

Ojibwa-Saulteaux

In 1767, Henry (1901 [1809]: 199–201) recorded the Ojibwa belief that famine cannibals developed a derivative craving for human flesh, and he witnessed the behavior and execution of one such individual. Thompson

(1962 [1784–1812]: 191) reported the execution of a self-defined windigo near Lake of the Woods in 1799, but it is unclear whether the sufferer was Ojibwa or Cree. Nelson's 1823 manuscript contains the first occurrence known to the author of Ojibwa *wīntikō* from which English *windigo* derives: "They [Indians] term this Win-di-go (according to the French pronunciation which is more correct than the English in this word)" (Brown and Brightman 1988: 85–86). The remarks on pronunciation are enigmatic but indicate that the Ojibwa word was already familiar to the English and French traders. Nelson's detailed discussion of the windigo complex unfortunately does not distinguish in all cases between the Ojibwa, Swampy Cree, and Woods Cree contexts with which he was familiar. In Nelson's usage, the term referred to transformed human windigos but also to a class of *giant windigos without human antecedency* who engendered the cannibal mania in humans. This latter concept appears to derive from Ojibwa rather than Cree sources. Gigantism is never mentioned in descriptions of Plains Cree (Preston 1978: 61; Dusenberry 1962: 153–60), Woods Cree (Vandersteene 1969: 53), inland Swampy Cree (Mason 1967: 57–58; Godsell 1938: 94–99), and Rock Cree (Smith 1976a; Brightman 1977–79), who conventionally figure the windigo as possessing normal human dimensions. Representations of windigos as giants were, however, present among Southwestern Ojibwa in the mid 1800s (Schoolcraft 1939: 105–18; Bishop 1975: 245; Kohl 1985 [1850]: 358) and appear in most ethnographic sources on other divisions as well (Hallowell 1955: 256; Jones 1919: 175–79; Landes 1938: 213; Jenness 1935: 40–41; Barnouw 1977: 120–31; Howard 1977: 115). Gigantism is also an attribute of some windigo beings among Eastern Cree, Montagnais, and Naskapi groups (Speck 1935) and among Westmain Swampy Cree (Flannery, Chambers, and Jehle 1982: 58; Honigmann 1956: 68). The records left by Henry and Nelson show that the components of the windigo complex—anthropophagous monsters, transformed humans, and associated behavioral disorders—were present among Ojibwa-speaking groups at least as early as the middle 1700s.

Summary

The earliest references to windigo exhibit sufficient diversity both within and between linguistic divisions to motivate arguments for a historic inception of the concept and for extensive historic development along different trajectories. Without ignoring either the diversity or the dynamism of the concept, however, a comparative cross-referencing of these sources suggests that the essentials of what we know from twentieth-century ethnographic sources as the windigo complex were present among boreal forest Algonquians from early in the contact period. Further, there is only negative evidence for the thesis that these components were unintegrated

at this time into the systemic complex, as, for example, with Bishop's argument that cannibal monsters were known but were not called "windigo." Beliefs in anthropophagous monsters were reported from the Montagnais in the 1630s, from Crees in 1773, and from Ojibwas in the early 1800s. Forms of the word *windigo* that refer to monstrous beings are attested from Montagnais in 1695, Crees in 1714, and Ojibwas again in the early 1800s. The belief that humans can develop a cannibalistic disorder and thus become windigo beings was recorded among Montagnais in the 1630s and among Crees and Ojibwas in the 1770s. Finally, cases of behavioral disorder associated by Algonquians with cannibalism are reported for the Montagnais in the 1630s, for the Crees in 1741, and for the Ojibwas in the 1770s. None of these reports is early enough to establish decisively the aboriginality of the windigo complex, but the weight of the evidence supports such an interpretation.

The major objection to the argument for aboriginality is the absence of known references to any aspect of the complex among the Ojibwas and Ottawas in the seventeenth century. Reports of the use of the term *wihtikōw* among Cree as the proper name of an evil being in a dualistic cosmology most probably reflect confusions introduced by one or two chroniclers that were then disseminated by copying (Pentland 1976). As with the creator being and the trickster-transformer (Graham 1969 [1767–91]: 160; Isham 1949 [1743–49]: 5; Brown and Brightman 1988: 36, 81), European observers conflated and confused *Macimanitōw* with *wihtikōw*, recognizing in both attributes of a single scriptural spirit. Additionally, the generic use of *macimanitōw* by Crees to refer to any malevolent spirit agency may have contributed to the confusion.

Bishop's thesis that the belief in transformed human windigos and concomitant instances of psychiatric disorder developed after contact with Europeans presupposes as a historical catalyst new experiences of famine cannibalism, previously absent or negligible given the abundance of the pre-fur trade environment. However, since famine must have existed aboriginally, although on a much-diminished scale (Waisberg 1975; Smith 1976a), the question becomes whether an increasing *frequency* of such tragedies could be the necessary or sufficient ecological coordinate or cause of the complex. There is little to add here to the existing discourse other than to note that the correlation of environmental deterioration with early references to windigo, credibly argued by Bishop for the Montagnais and Westmain Cree, does not hold for the interior Crees of Manitoba and Saskatchewan (Hearne 1958 [1795]: 34–35; Thompson 1962 [1784–1812]: 75–76), where the windigo complex existed in the 1700s well before the game shortages of the nineteenth century. It is probable that an increasing frequency of windigo-related disorder rather than the complex itself was associated with increasing frequencies of famine and starvation

cannibalism. Given that the thesis of an historic inception rests primarily upon negative evidence, Smith's (1976a: 34) conclusions "that aboriginal conditions accounted for the phenomenon" appear reasonable.

The Factuality of Windigo Disorder

While Bishop accepts the existence of windigo-related cannibalism, Marano (1982) has argued that "windigo psychotics," insane individuals who expressed, experienced, or acted upon cannibalistic urges, never existed. There existed cases of insanity, but these lacked the element of cannibal ideation. There also existed cases of murder and cannibalism, but these were motivated exclusively by famine. Remarking that no reliable eyewitness accounts of cannibal impulses or behavior exist, Marano argues that all such reports should be dismissed as the hallucinations or fabrications of the executioners, credulously taken at face value by naive ethnologists. Marano clearly considers himself to have disproven decisively the existence of windigo disorder. He speaks, for example, of "the discredited anthropological artifact 'windigo psychosis' which is a belief among academics that the Cree and Ojibwa are, for reasons peculiar to their culture, subject to a bizarre form of mental illness that compels them to eat human flesh" (Marano 1985: 61).

Since "folkloristic" elements, nonfactual from a Western perspective, intrude both into the depositions of executioners and into some narratives unfortunately included in Teicher's (1960) compendium of cases, Marano's skepticism has provisional credibility. Marano follows Honigmann (1967: 401), who remarked on the absence of "a trustworthy observer's eyewitness report of a person who in his own words or by his own actions clearly admits to a compulsion to eat human flesh." For "trustworthy observer," Honigmann clearly intends "Euro-Canadian," an individual sufficiently detached from Algonquian cultural premises to report cases in their objective factuality. While ignorance may lend objectivity, the opposite effect is readily imaginable: Western eyewitnesses with their commitments to scriptural or positivistic worldviews might leave us texts more refractory than the Algonquian testimony to what human windigos were experiencing. There remains a serious difficulty with the summary dismissal of all Algonquian testimony regarding the behavior of persons identified as windigo. As a semiotic problem, it is necessary to know what behavioral indices were taken by Algonquians as signs that an individual was experiencing desires to commit cannibalism.

There exists great internal consistency through time and space in Algonquian reports of the behavior of persons identified as windigos and the circumstances surrounding the disorder. Table 1 lists nine attributes abstracted from the more detailed documentary and ethnographic sources

Table 1. Windigo attributes from documentary and ethnographic sources

Attribute	Source				
	Henry	Thompson	Nelson	Kitts	Beaton Vandersteene
Prior famine/famine cannibalism	+	+			
Self-definition as windigo		+	+	(+)	(+)
Treats to kill/eat others	+			(+)	+
Conventional food present	+	+	+	+	+
Perception of internal freezing					+
Requests execution			+		+
“Devil” possession or vision		(+)			+
Anorexia	+				+
Manic-depressive symptoms			+		+

(Cree: Vandersteene 1969: 55; Brown 1971: 22; Flannery, Chambers, and Jehle 1982: 73; Teicher 1960: 93; Hearne 1958 [1795]: 34–35; Merasty 1974: 1; Preston 1978: 62–63; Ojibwa: Thompson 1962 [1784–1812]: 191–92; Landes 1938: 215–16; Kohl 1985 [1850]: 358); Teicher’s compendium provides additional material. These attributes derive from Euro-Canadian records of Algonquian testimony and should therefore, if Marano’s skepticism is warranted, be disregarded as the a posteriori embellishments or in situ delusions of Algonquian narrators. The significance of the table is precisely that these attributes figure *also* in the few cases in which Euro-Canadians, “trustworthy observers” in Honigmann’s idiom, were eyewitness observers of the behavior of accused or self-defined windigos.

Alexander Henry. The first case is the most persuasive. In 1767 north of Lake Superior, Henry observed an Ojibwa man who had killed and eaten four relatives during a food crisis. His guilt was discovered after he fell in with the band with which Henry was wintering.

The Indians entertain an opinion that the man who has once made human flesh his food will never afterwards be satisfied with any other. It is probable that we saw things through the medium of our prejudices; but I confess that this disturbing object appeared to verify the doctrine. *He ate with relish nothing that was given to him but,*

indifferent to the food prepared, fixed his eyes continually on the children which were in the Indian lodge, and frequently exclaimed, "How fat they are!" It was perhaps not unnatural that after long acquaintance with no human form but such as was gaunt and pale from lack of food a man's eyes should be almost riveted upon anything where misery had not made such inroads, and still more upon the bloom and plumpness of childhood; and the exclamation might be the most innocent and might proceed from an involuntary and unconquerable sentiment of admiration. Be this as it may, his behavior was considered, and not less naturally, as marked with the most alarming symptoms; and the Indians, apprehensive that he would prey on these children, resolved on putting him to death. (Henry 1901 [1809]: 199–201 [emphasis added])

This narrative confirms anorexia and verbal threats, characteristically indirect, as aspects of windigo behavior; it also suggests an association between the disorder and prior famine cannibalism. Marano (1983: 121–22) emphasizes Henry's qualifications, arguing that the cannibal's comments about the children were indeed "aesthetic" rather than predatory. If this was in fact the case, the remarks were, to say the least, contextually infelicitous. Henry's qualifications are not the least interesting aspect of the narrative since they represent his attempt, understandable in these circumstances, to rationalize an incomprehensible datum: that the cannibal's deportment "appeared to verify the doctrine."

David Thompson. Thompson observed the self-defined Cree windigo Wiskahoo in 1796 near Duck Portage in northern Manitoba. Wiskahoo was not a prior famine cannibal but had survived famines that threatened to culminate in cannibalism.

It is usual when the Indians come to trade to give them a pint of grog. . . . Wiskahoo, as soon as he got it, and while drinking of it, used to say in a thoughtful mood "Nee-wee-to-go" "I must be a Man eater." This word seemed to imply "I am possessed of an evil spirit to eat human flesh"; "Wee-to-go" is the evil Spirit that devours humankind. (Thompson 1962 [1784–1812]: 103)

Wiskahoo's companions interpreted his "melancholy" moods as symptoms of potential windigo transformation and executed him three years later when the moods increased in frequency. The passage makes clear that individuals sometimes defined themselves as potential windigos; "Nee-wee-to-go" is evidently Thompson's faulty transcription of Cree *niwihtikōwin* 'I am a windigo'. Further, Wiskahoo's fears were prompted by prior experiences with famine, although famine was not an immedi-

ate contextual variable in the conversation Thompson recorded. Marano (1983: 122) has argued that Wiskahoo's depression derived from a realistic fear that his inadequacy as a moose hunter might again result in famine and the threat of cannibalism. Since *wīhtikōw* almost certainly was used to refer to famine cannibals with or without derivative cannibal urges, the verb could be interpreted from this point of view as signaling only Wiskahoo's apprehensions about a future event of famine cannibalism and not fear of a resulting or intervening transformation into a windigo monster. Thompson's interpretation is more probably the accurate one, but we unfortunately lack information on the exact behavior that provoked the execution.

George Nelson. Nelson (Brown and Brightman 1988) recorded both windigo ideology and individual cases pertaining to the Saulteaux and Crees with whom he traded in the early nineteenth century. Nelson's writings on the windigo complex are the most reflective and detailed of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources considered here. He provided a firsthand description of windigo symptomatology that coincides exactly with the alternation between frenzied and depressive states described to Landes (1938: 215–16) by Southwestern Ojibwa informants.

I look upon this as a sort of mania, fever, a distemper of the brain. Their eyes (for I have seen people who are thus perplexed) are wild and uncommonly clear—they seem as if they glistened. It seems to me to lodge in the head. They are generally rational except at short sudden intervals when the paroxysms seize them: their motions then are various and diametrically contrary at one time to what they are the next moment—sullen, thoughtful, wild look and perfectly mute: staring, in sudden convulsions, wild, incoherent and extravagant language. (Brown and Brightman 1988: 91)

According to Nelson, windigos sometimes requested execution: “One of my best hunters here is thus tormented, or at least thus torments himself; and very often desires his friends in compassion to put a period to existence the first symptoms he may show of cannibalism” (ibid.: 93). Nelson also described “an Indian with me this winter who gave out his apprehensions that he was thus tormented” (ibid.). These observations suggest that preoccupation with windigo disorder was not uncommon among the Lac la Ronge Cree: “They have such a dread and horror of this that it is constantly in their minds” (ibid.: 91).

John G. Kitts. In 1879 the Northwest Mounted Police surgeon John Kitts made the following observations about an elderly Cree woman held in confinement at Fort Walsh, Alberta:

Within the last two years we have had the care of two lunatics. The first was an old squaw, somewhat inclined to cannibalism; she was completely maniacal and very difficult to manage. Her filthy habits infected the squad room to such an extent that she had to be removed to a small building by herself. (Thompson 1984: 91)

Kitts went on to observe that the woman “immediately recovered” when provided with kind treatment and good food; the immediacy of the recovery bears comparison with the Eastern Cree woman described by Saindon (1933). We unfortunately lack any description of the behavior which convinced Kitts that she was inclined to cannibalism, but the inference that she made verbal threats is plausible.

Francis Beatton. The case of the Woods Cree Mapanin, or Francois Auger, was discovered and described by Marano (1981: 166–71) and derives from the copy of a journal kept by Francis Beatton at the trading outpost at Trout Lake, Alberta. The authorship is ambiguous and the document is probably part of Beatton’s journal copied and augmented by the Reverend George Holmes. Mapanin arrived at Trout Lake in 1896, claiming to have experienced a vision of “the devil” urging him to kill and eat his children. Mapanin’s condition worsened, and he was executed after a period of restraint and attempted cure. Beatton left the following description of his behavior:

He said his son appeared to him like a young man[?] and he wanted to eat him. I thought he was starving and I was busy getting him something to eat, but he ate very little. . . . I went to see him today, he looks worse than ever. I gave him a dose of castor oil, he says his heart is freezing. He is always saying he is going to be a cannibal. . . . [S]aid he, you must look out for me, for I think I shall kill some of you. He wants them to kill him all the time before he gets worse. (Public Archives of Canada 1896)

This account parallels Algonquian testimony with respect to rejection of conventional food, spirit possession, perceptions of freezing internal organs, threats of cannibalism in nonfamine contexts, and requests for execution. Marano (1981: 169–70) suggests that Beatton was Metis and, as such, enculturated in windigo knowledge with the result that he committed lies or hysterical distortions of Mapanin’s behavior to his journal. Even if Beatton was Metis, his literacy and his conduct during the tragedy suggest a Euro-Canadian cultural orientation exemplified by his recourse to Christian prayer and his use of castor oil. That his successive journal entries between January 12 and 21 should consistently exhibit such distortions or prevarications is only marginally tenable.

Roger Vandersteene. Vandersteene, an Oblate missionary at Wabasca, Alberta, observed and communicated at length with a young Woods Cree woman who defined herself as an incipient windigo. The woman was anorexic and described her condition to Vandersteene as follows:

“The Devil wants me,” she said, “and will change me to a Witigo. . . . I am going away to the forest because I am so frightened! At any moment I could kill someone. My breast is frozen and I am frantic.” (Vandersteene 1969: 56–57)

The woman’s condition required lengthy hospitalization, but she apparently recovered when convinced by physicians that her disorder was organic and susceptible to treatment with Western medicine.

Summary. In fairness to Honigmann and Marano’s arguments, there are no non-Indian eyewitnesses to murder or cannibalism committed by a person defined as a windigo. Of the six windigos described, only the Ojibwa observed by Henry was a cannibal, and his behavior was induced by famine. Nonetheless, the lack of European observers does not discredit the existence of windigo cannibalism. Neither are there European eyewitnesses to the much more frequent occurrence of famine-induced cannibalism. The likelihood of a trader, missionary, or white trapper being in a position to observe such tragedies is minimal. As Kohl (1985 [1850]: 365) observed of the Lake Superior Ojibwa, windigo disorders were exceedingly infrequent, and their culmination in murder and cannibalism would be even rarer; detection and either cure or execution were demonstrably more frequent resolutions.

The internal consistency of the white and Indian accounts indicates that some Algonquians experienced a disorder characterized by cannibalistic impulses and ideation. It could be the case that all of these accounts, Indian and white alike, are fallacious, although the parallels between the two groups of narratives would then be difficult to account for. The cases observed by whites should lend greater credibility to the Algonquian accounts for those suspicious of Indian testimony. Rather than privileging either group’s capacities for observation, we need to recognize that the consistency is clearly greater than random and that each discourse reciprocally validates the other. The cases reported by Henry and Beatton, for example, forcefully suggest that Algonquians defined others as incipient cannibal monsters when those persons gave literal or indirect verbal expression to cannibal impulses.

Nonfamine Windigo Disorders

Although boreal forest Algonquians recognize famine cannibalism as one etiological factor creating the windigo condition, the defining attribute of

the windigo is its preference for human flesh when other food is available. As Sidney Castel, a Cree of northwestern Manitoba succinctly phrased this, "Never mind if you put good food out for it. It won't touch it. That's not what it's hungry for" (Brightman 1977-79). The most persuasive evidence for the factuality of an Algonquian-specific psychiatric disorder would be cases of cannibalism committed with food already on hand. There is no doubt that people defined themselves as incipient windigos when conventional food was readily available. Thompson (1962 [1784-1812]: 194), for example, wrote of the Crees in the late 1700s: "I have known a few instances of this deplorable turn of mind and not one instance could plead hunger, much less famine as an excuse of it. There is yet a dark chapter to be written on this aberration of the human mind on this head." Neither, however, did any of the cases observed by Thompson apparently eventuate in cannibalism. The Algonquian testimony contains accounts of windigo cannibalism unmotivated by famine (Smith 1976a: 22 [Cree]; Bishop 1982: 398 [Southwestern Ojibwa]; Teicher 1960: 49 [Southeastern Ojibwa]; Hallowell 1934: 9 [Saulteaux]; Flannery, Chambers, and Jehle 1982: 72-74 [Eastmain Cree]) which, as construed by Marano, are lies or embellishments of famine cannibalism. In the Cree case described by Smith, for example, the author of the Churchill post journal recorded the story of a woman and her mother who had killed the daughter's husband in self-defense after he had killed and, despite the availability of caribou in the area, eaten three children. Marano (1982: 394-95) proposes an alternative interpretation, questioning the veracity of the survivors and suggesting that they and not the husband initiated famine cannibalism. It would be, of course, possible to reinterpret all such accounts so as to conform to Marano's premise.

It is interesting from this point of view to examine the well-documented case of the Plains Cree Swift Runner, who was executed for murder at Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, by Euro-Canadian authorities in 1879. Marano (1981: 124-35) considers Swift Runner a famine cannibal mislabeled as a volitional murderer by whites and as a windigo by Crees. His analysis demonstrates distortions in Algonquian (Honigmann 1953) and popularized Euro-Canadian versions (Turner 1950: 499-501) of the case. The claim, for example, that Swift Runner's cannibalism transpired amidst abundant stores of dry meat was neither confirmed nor discredited in the reports of the investigating constables. It is nonetheless the Swift Runner case that substantiates nonfamine windigo cannibalism.

Swift Runner, together with his wife, six children, brother, and mother, separated from his wife's father during the fall of 1878. In the spring, Swift Runner returned alone, claiming that the other members had starved, committed suicide, or dispersed. He subsequently led a party of police to his winter camps where evidence of cannibalism was found. Swift

Runner subsequently confessed to killing and eating six of his family. At his first camp, the eldest son had died of starvation and was buried; the police recovered the emaciated corpse. At the second camp, Swift Runner killed and ate successively the next eldest son, his wife, and the remaining children; he disavowed knowledge of his mother and brother who left the group earlier in the winter.

Famine was an evident catalyst. The corpse of the eldest son demonstrates that Swift Runner's claimed illness and the famine that ensued were not fabrications. Possibly the famine was induced by an immobilizing psychiatric disorder afflicting Swift Runner, although an objective scarcity of game may be indicated by the inability of his wife or the older sons to provision the camp. Some collaboration of the victims in the murder and consumption of their predecessors is indicated by the fact that the serial murders were not at any stage successfully resisted. Although starvation may have prompted the first murder, it cannot explain the others. Swift Runner's winter camp was no more than twenty-five miles from the Hudson's Bay Company post at Athabasca Landing. Swift Runner's father-in-law, knowledgeable regarding both the terrain and its traversability in winter, gave the following deposition: "Prisoner and his family were never so far away that they or the children could not readily have got in to the Hudson's Bay post at the River Landing [Athabasca Landing] without risk of starvation even if no game could be found" (Marano 1981: 134).

Marano claims that all six murders were motivated by famine: "I argue that if he had had any other food to eat, he would have eaten it" (ibid.: 137). With a fur trading post twenty-five miles distant, there was conventional food to eat, but nowhere in Swift Runner's testimony is there reference to mobility toward the post. Even if the group was immobilized by famine, the corpse of the first murder victim would have provided the requisite food energy for the trip. Assuming that the corpse yielded twenty kilograms of edible meat, the first victim would have provided approximately 40,000 kilocalories to the survivors (see Garn 1979). A tragic case of such logistical cannibalism was noted by Thompson (1962 [1784-1812]) among Manitoba Crees. If the subsequent murders were motivated by a desire to conceal the first by eliminating witnesses, the question of why the victims were *eaten* rather than concealed remains unanswered. All but the first murder demonstrate preferential cannibalism. The question of why Swift Runner serially murdered and ate others while within reach of emergency food supplies raises, to say the least, complex interpretive problems. An important component of the explanation is the Algonquian windigo disorder, whose existence the Swift Runner case, together with the cases discussed earlier, decisively substantiates.

The Sufficiency of the Materialist Windigo

The demonstration that windigos did indeed (rarely) exist provides the occasion for evaluating the existing materialist perspectives on the origins and functions of the complex. "Materialist perspective" means here an analysis that identifies the proximal or "last instance" determinants of cultural phenomena as their demographic, environmental, or productive coordinates. Bishop (1975) and Marano (1982) provide distinguishable materialist explanations, aspects of which have already been considered in relation to the historicity of the windigo complex and the factuality of the windigo disorder. Here it is necessary to consider the adequacy of the material circumstances discussed by Bishop and Marano with respect to those aspects of the windigo complex that they are represented as explaining. The perspective taken here is skeptical; consideration of the windigo complex suggests limitations on the sufficiency of materialist analyses.

Bishop's formulation states that the new experience of famine cannibalism during the historical period was combined with existing Algonquian conceptions of nonhuman cannibal monsters to produce the *belief* that human famine cannibals could become cannibal monsters. Later the belief expanded to posit windigos who were not prior famine cannibals. From this sequence was engendered the psychiatric disorder in which the ideation and behavior of the mentally ill reproduced cultural premises about windigo transformation. As the argument is delineated, it is the prior belief in cannibal monsters that is critical, since it is with these anthropophagous spirits that the human famine cannibals were identified. Since beliefs in cannibal monsters are culturally ubiquitous (or universal?), it needs to be asked whether any society recognizing the existence of such beings and experiencing famine cannibalism will develop a windigo complex. The answer is that nothing in the tragic circumstances of famine and famine-induced cannibalism specifies, determines, or probabilistically predicts the inception of beliefs in windigo transformation or the correlative psychiatric disorder. Whenever the belief that famine cannibals (among others) could become windigo monsters developed, it was as a socially shared and symbolically constituted *interpretation* of famine cannibalism. Once in place, such an interpretation could influence the content of psychiatric disorder such that persons who "verified the doctrine," in Henry's idiom, would serve to enact and reproduce the interpretation over time. Without experiences of famine cannibalism the windigo complex could probably never have developed, but the significance of cannibalism itself is mediated by conceptions of the fragility of human identity, the significance of eating, and the prefiguring of events in dreams, conceptions not themselves derivable from material coordinates.

Marano's more functionally oriented thesis rejects the existence of the windigo disorder itself and refers the complex of windigo beliefs and their behavioral enactment in *executions* to their function in legitimizing homicide: "I suggest that the windigo belief complex evolved among the Northern Algonkians as a way to help minimize the chances of getting caught in a famine with those who had already broken the taboo against cannibalism, to minimize the liabilities imposed by the incapacitated, and to focus group anxieties upon individuals adjudged socially expendable" (Marano 1982: 388). Like other functional arguments in sociological and ecological modes, this thesis presupposes an explicitly teleological perspective on custom. Boreal forest Algonquians needed to kill people for two logistical reasons and one sociopsychological reason. They needed additionally a socially shared ideology that legitimized or rationalized such killings, and the complex of windigo beliefs evolved to fulfill this need for legitimation. The windigo complex is thus among the institutions that Malinowski (1944) would regard as performing "secondary functions," reinforcing other institutions with direct impacts on biological survival. Marano does not define "evolved," but presumably the windigo complex is represented here as originating and/or acquiring its characteristics because it was needed as a legitimizing ideology.

The conventional critique of functional analyses is that the lack of specificity between particular customs and particular functions precludes the explanation of customs by the functional consequences. To show that the teleological explanation is adequate requires demonstration that the custom in place is either the only one possible or the most optimal by some criterion relative to imaginable and ethnographically attested alternatives. Boreal forest Algonquians recognized the existence of human sorcerer-witches as well as underwater panthers, skeletons, and other spirit agencies inimical to humans. The question then is raised why the windigo complex evolved to meet the need for legitimizing killings when these other malevolent beings might as easily have sufficed.

Unlike most functional theses, Marano's legitimation argument incorporates an explanation for windigo beliefs as against other functional alternatives. He suggests that the threat of starvation resulted in socially shared modal fears of becoming the subject or object of famine cannibalism. These modal fears were displaced onto the physically or psychologically disabled, accounting then for the latter's identification as cannibal monsters (Marano 1982: 385). In another context, Marano (1981: 100) conjectures that the windigo complex is a symbolic representation of more prosaic threats to survival. The disabled, to the degree that they interfere with productive activity, factually threaten the healthy with starvation and thus with famine cannibalism. Through symbolic redefinition, the disabled themselves are defined as cannibals, their purported anthropophagy

a symbol of the famine or famine cannibalism that their continued existence makes imminent. The central issue then becomes whether any Arctic or Subarctic hunting culture will develop and project the same modal fear, a question to which discussion in this section climactically returns.

To take up the imputed functions in turn, while some technique for managing limitations on mobility and resource procurement raised by the disabled is patently advantageous, the adaptiveness of a *legitimizing* ideology immediately implicates questions of morality and sociality not readily conditioned by ecological expediency. Objections to the argument that an ideology was needed are raised by references to senilicide, euthanasia, and abandonment that were seemingly justified only by logistical expedience. Among Crees in the 1700s, insane or helpless individuals without close relatives were abandoned or killed; as among Eskimoan groups, elderly persons sometimes collaborated in or initiated their own abandonment or execution, petitioning their children to strangle them after a preparatory ceremony (Graham 1969 [1767–91]: 184; Ellis 1748: 89; Drage 1968 [1748–49], 2: 54). Abandonment is also reported among Saulteaux in the early 1800s (Grant 1890: 366). Legitimizing ideologies might be functional in certain circumstances and superfluous in others, depending upon such factors as the acquiescence of the disabled person and his or her social relationships with the executioners. But these are moral issues, attuned to complex cultural premises regarding human responsibility, the consequences of killing, and the processes and consequences of death. Nothing in the logistical requirements of mobility or production specifies how these questions are socially negotiated or requires that legitimizing ideologies shall evolve. If boreal forest Algonquians required such ideologies to mediate contradictions between culturally defined expedience and culturally defined responsibility, the requirement is not referable to infrastructural determination.

Equally problematic is the question of the availability to consciousness of the legitimizing functions the windigo complex imputedly performed. Marano (1982: 386) writes, "My reading of the archival sources indicates that, from an etic perspective, all executed windigo victims met death at the hands of their fellow Indians for reasons unrelated to the threat of their committing cannibalism." This means that the victims themselves posed no real threat to their executioners. It remains unclear in the argument whether the executioners perceived their victims as threatening or whether they made use of the windigo concept to rationalize killings prompted by purely logistical considerations. Marano (1983: 123) regards the fear of windigo monsters as subjectively real in some instances, and it takes a skeptical reading of the depositions in the Mapanin (Marano 1981: 166–71) and Moostoos (Teicher 1960: 93–103) cases to suppose that the participants were not gravely frightened through the prolonged

processes of attempted cure and execution. However, Marano (1982: 407) persuasively demonstrates that in at least one killing, windigo accusations were invoked a posteriori to justify euthanasia performed on grounds of expedience. In such cases, some consciousness of the windigo complex as a functioning ideology is presupposed. Marano (1983: 122) correctly argues that the "psychic dynamics of windigo slayers were not uniform." The question remains significant since, in the wake of the enthusiasm for systems analysis in ecological anthropology (Vayda and McCay 1975; Orlove 1980), the mode of articulation of the adaptive functions of institutions with the choices and consciousness of human actors has emerged as a central focus of consideration. The executioners are equipped in the functional thesis with alternating and distinct motivations for killing persons identified as windigo, and these need to be clarified in their relation to the evolution of the windigo complex.

Finally, the functionalist thesis makes use of a Western conception of aggression which, intensified among boreal Algonquians by such ecological stresses as epidemics and game shortages, found expression in windigo slayings. This aspect of the argument allows Marano to assimilate the windigo complex to cases of witch persecution and scapegoating experienced by societies whose members are experiencing psychological stress. Without questioning that some individual windigo killings may have functioned psychologically to vent the aggressions of executioners, it needs to be noted that treatment of the disabled by at least the eighteenth-century Crees precludes the thesis that social liabilities routinely became the objects either of hostility or logistical triage. Although the incapacitated were abandoned or eliminated in emergencies, or at the extremities of their own willingness to continue living, these contexts cannot be generalized to encompass a patterned orientation toward the disabled. The chroniclers of Hudson Bay, none of them by any means primitivistic in their assessments of the Indians, nonetheless described the Crees as solicitous of the elderly, maintaining parents and parents-in-law until their death, providing for widows and orphans, and rendering careful treatment to the ill (Graham 1969 [1767-91]: 151; Isham 1949 [1743-49]: 93; Hearne 1958 [1795]: 146; Thompson 1962 [1784-1812]: 106). Inland posts in the Churchill River drainage in Manitoba were enthusiastically welcomed as impromptu geriatric centers where the elderly or infirm could safely be left to overwinter (Brightman 1977-79).

A more fundamental objection to the scapegoating thesis is that windigos were more typically cured than executed. From this point of view, the windigo complex vented aggression in an at best circuitous fashion and, from an ecological point of view, imposed unnecessary constraints on time and energy. Even those cases that eventuated in execution typically involved delay or intervening attempts at cure. The Cree Wiskahoo

(Thompson 1962 [1784–1812]: 103) was killed at least three years after defining himself as an incipient windigo. The Ojibwa famine cannibal observed by Henry (1901 [1809]: 201) was killed shortly after his guilt was discovered, but it is clear that his threatening remarks provoked the killing. Mapanin (Marano 1981: 166–71) was killed nineteen days after his symptoms developed. In the interim, cures were attempted, and the Crees prevailed upon the post manager to perform the killing rather than to carry it out themselves. The Lake of the Woods windigo reported by Thompson (1962 [1784–1812]: 191) was killed a few days after he expressed an intention to eat his sister, but “The father was found fault with for not having called to his assistance a Medicine Man, who by sweating and his songs to the tambour [drum] and rattle might have driven away the evil spirit before it was too late.” Moostoos (Teicher 1960: 97–98) was killed after two days of attempted cures with the shaking lodge and other medicine techniques; his executioners were themselves ill at the time. Neither the time intervals nor the attention to curing indicate witch hysteria or scapegoating.

Secondhand accounts and ethnographic summaries also emphasize attempts to cure persons identified as windigos, the techniques conventionally entailing attempted exorcism, prayer, and the administration of hot grease that would warm the frozen viscera of the victim (Bloomfield 1930: 155 [Plains Cree]; Flannery, Chambers, and Jehle 1982: 76 [Eastmain Cree]; Teicher 1960: 75 [Saulteaux]; Landes 1938: 216–17 [Southwestern Ojibwa]; Cooper 1933: 22 [Eastmain Cree]; Rohrl 1970: 99 [Southwestern Ojibwa]; Brightman 1977–79 [Rock Cree]). The witch hunt hypothesis is of dubious validity as concerns the majority of recorded windigo cases. Writing of the Crees at Lac la Ronge, Saskatchewan, in the early 1800s, Nelson observed that

they are in general kind and extremely indulgent to those thus infected: they seem to consider it [windigo disorder] as an infliction [*sic*] and are desirous of doing all they can to assist. There are however many exceptions but these depend upon the circumstances attending them. (Brown and Brightman 1988: 93)

This confirms the evident variability in reaction to windigos but brings treatment rather than execution to the foreground as the conventional response. The available cases indicate that executions were prompted by fears that the condition was progressing to a stage at which the windigo could not be physically or spiritually restrained. Such behaviors as threats, requests for execution, and violence probably suggested that this stage was imminent.

The fundamental objection to a materialist windigo and an infra-structurally determined windigo complex remains the absence of any nec-

essary causal influence or constraint exerted by ecological variables or functions on Algonquian definitions of and propositions about monsters, cannibalism, human transformation, spiritual empowerment, and the like. While Marano's contention that modal fears are predictably projected onto social liabilities possesses a precision seldom encountered in functional argumentation, it evokes exactly that aspect of the windigo complex that has made it an ethnological standby, its exclusively Algonquian provenience. Since Eskimoan and Athapaskan groups in the Subarctic and Arctic lived also with the threat of famine and famine cannibalism, we would expect the same modal fear projected upon the disabled as among Algonquians. Such was not the case, a distributional problem that long ago engaged Thompson's attention.

From our exploring notes; it appeared to us that this sad evil disposition to become Weetego or Man Eater was wholly confined to the inhabitants of the Forests; no such disposition being known among the Indians of the Plains; and this limited to the Nahathaway [Cree] and Chippeway [Ojibwa-Saulteaux] Indians, for the numerous Natives under the name of Dinnae (Chepawyans) whose hunting grounds are all the forests north of the latitude of 56 degrees have no such horrid disposition among them. (Thompson 1962 [1784-1812]: 92)

Phrased in the form of a hypothesis, the functional argument is that, given resource uncertainty that makes famine and famine cannibalism a threat, modal fears of famine cannibalism will be projected onto the disabled who contribute to resource uncertainty. This hypothesis presupposes that the frequency of occurrence of famine cannibalism is directly a consequence of the frequency of life-threatening famine. Phrased another way, members of two societies who participate in distinguishable cultural systems and are exposed to comparable frequencies of life-threatening famine would commit cannibalism in equivalent numbers of cases. Although statistics are not available to address this question, it seems consistent with ethnological findings to expect that cultural differences would decisively regulate these frequencies, intervening between stimulus and the behavioral adjustment. Hypothetically, boreal Algonquians would be *less* likely to choose this adjustment to a food crisis since famine cannibalism carried with it the threat of subsequent degeneration into a nonhuman monster.

Since neither the boreal forest environment nor the productive strategies of different Algonquian and Athapaskan populations are uniform, another infrastructural approach would entail specification of variations in subsistence practices between Algonquians and Athapaskans with which variations in frequency of famine and famine cannibalism could be put into correspondence. If Athapaskans or, to expand the analysis into the

Arctic, Inuits experienced less famine than Algonquians, they would be less likely to develop modal fears of cannibalism that would then appear as legitimizing ideologies for triage homicide. There is indeed evidence for such a difference with respect to food storage. According to Thompson (1962 [1784–1812]: 106), the frugality of the Athapaskan Chipewyans, then occupying the boreal forest, prevented the starvation incidents suffered by Crees. The Crees conformed more closely to Western preconceptions of prodigal foragers. “They are remarkably improvident or else they might make themselves comfortable compared to what they generally are. For while they have anything they feast and enjoy themselves as long as it lasts, and let tomorrow provide for itself” (Hudson’s Bay Company 1822–23). Crees thus created famine situations where fewer might have existed through their relative inattention to food preservation. This is certainly an ecological parameter with potential relevance to the provenience of the windigo complex. Food storage or lack thereof may have influenced the complex through the mediating frequency of famine cannibalism. Rather than indicating an ecological or adaptive determination of the windigo complex, however, nothing more decisively demonstrates the autonomy of Algonquian cultures from material determination than the fact that food storage practices themselves were relatively arbitrary with respect to environmental incentives and constraints (see Woodburn 1980). Despite their more intensive food storage regimes, Chipewyans and other Athapaskans were sometimes involved in food crises that eventuated in cannibalism (Mackenzie 1927 [1802]: 131), but none of them developed a windigo complex.

The only nonpsychoanalytic writing on windigo that explicitly addresses this distributional aspect of the problem is Ridington’s (1976) discussion of the Beaver *wechuge* concept. This parallels the windigo complex with respect to cannibalism and the element of human transformation but differs from it in links with medicine for hunting success and with gigantic anthropophagous animals of the mythological era. The *wechuge* concept has been used to discredit the conclusion that windigo-related phenomena are distinctly and uniquely Algonquian. This is certainly premature, since no comparable concepts have been described for Athapaskans other than Beavers, and the *wechuge* complex is best explained through diffusion rather than convergent or independent development. Beavers and Crees occupied contiguous territories at least from the 1700s and probably prehistorically (see Smith 1976b). Ridington suggests that the general absence of windigo-related phenomena among Athapaskans is the consequence of a shorter and relatively less disruptive contact experience with Europeans; the implication is that Athapaskans would have developed a windigo complex if subjected to the same stresses for the same durations as Algonquians. Pending some objective mea-

sure of degrees of sociopsychological stress, it needs to be emphasized that the Mackenzie drainage Athapaskans experienced game shortages, famines, epidemic diseases, and European cultural hegemony (see Krech 1981) without, the Cree-influenced Beaver excepted, developing the concept of spiritually empowered human cannibals and correlative psychiatric disorders.

No historical, environmental, or ecological variable has yet been proposed that accounts for the presence of the windigo complex among Algonquians and its absence among Athapaskans. Demographic, technological, and environmental circumstances undoubtedly influenced the prehistoric and historic trajectories of the windigo complex but did so in terms of distinctively Algonquian meanings that decisively regimented and regulated these influences. The functional thesis proposed by Marano possesses the exceptional merit of focusing attention both on the ecological coordinates of the complex and on its pragmatic aspects relative to interested human actors. The triage homicide interpretation has undoubted relevance to some cases of windigo execution, and it is almost certainly true, as Marano claims, that executions sometimes occurred whose victims experienced no cannibal urges. The fundamental limitation on the argument's effectiveness is its insufficiency relative to the complexity of its object. It denies the factuality of an Algonquian-specific psychiatric syndrome whose existence the aggregate sources confirm. Shifting the emphasis from the windigos to their killers, the thesis creatively addresses from a novel perspective the functions of some windigo *executions* but is silent on the origin, uniquely Algonquian provenience, and characteristics of *windigo* executions and the windigo complex. This cultural specificity of the windigo disorder bewildered the trader George Nelson in 1823, and he addressed it in terms of a distinction between the culturally unique and the universally human:

There is such a singular, strange, incomprehensible contradictoriness in almost all these cases, and many I have heard, that I do most verily believe they are denunciations, witch, or wizardisms. In any other manner they are not rationally to be accounted for, *unless we suppose all those who feed on human flesh to be thus possest. Then it is natural to men in those cases, but why then not the same with us as with these people?* (Brown and Brightman 1988: 90 [emphasis added])

The Windigo in Algonquian Ideology

An alternative to the material windigo is a semiotic one, taking this fashionable term to refer to socially shared sign phenomena studied in their

historical and social contexts and relative to the purposes of human actors. From this point of view, there is no "explanation" of windigo in the sense that necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence or nonoccurrence of its origin, characteristics, functions, distribution, persistence, and development can be stated. The windigo complex is the consequence of a unique historical and cultural trajectory, and although its constitutive meanings and practices taken severally may resemble those of other societies and other times, the mode of integration is distinctly Algonquian and, within this grouping, limited to the cultures of people now identified as Cree, Montagnais, Naskapi, and Ojibwa-Saulteaux. The windigo complex was and is the developing product of an unstable dialectic between "structures" of relational categories, conscious ideologies, and patterned practices. None of these three aspects of the sociocultural object can ever themselves be entirely internally systemic or consistent, and none of the three aspects are either wholly autonomous from nor decisively organized by technoenvironmental or demographic variables.

"Structure" refers here to the familiar Saussurean concept of a complex of reciprocally differentiating categories or sign values that organize and constitute experience for participants in a given cultural system. The differentiation and the definition of the categories is relational and built up of resemblances and contrasts rather than reflecting objective discontinuities between or properties of discrete classes of objects external to language and culture. Such categories of the boreal Algonquian cultural continuum as "human," "windigo," "cannibal," "evil," "insanity," "cold," "spirit power," and "eating" find neither their delimitation nor their definition in states of affairs external to Algonquian culture. "Structure" as used here comprises not only the definition and delimitation of categories but also existential and evaluative propositions about their interrelations. These interrelations are characterized by complex skeins of metonymy and metaphor as, for example, with the frozen viscera of the windigo and its associations with winter, cold, danger, death, and the northern direction. Remarkably little has been done to elucidate the structure of windigo, although Fogelson's (1980) discussion of the Cherokee "Stoneclad" and McGee's (1975) structural analysis of the Micmac *jenu* are important advances in this direction.

"Ideology" refers here to conscious representations of structural categories and their interrelations as these organize experience of worldly events, objects, and interactions. Windigo "ideology" would be, in this sense, the complex of culturally transmitted (but not distributionally uniform) knowledge about the characteristics of windigos and appropriate orientations toward them. Such propositional knowledge becomes available to consciousness not, of course, as a relatively arbitrary structural scheme but as the reflection of circumstances that exist independently of

cultural constructions of them. Algonquians regard their knowledge of the windigo's frozen viscera not as a result of the play of tropes but as reflecting objective properties of windigos. The representations of windigo in the consciousness of Algonquian actors has been addressed by Fogelson (1965), Bishop (1975, 1982), Smith (1976a), and in sensitive detail by Preston (1980).

There remains the question of the working out of windigo structure and ideology in contextualized behavior, in recurrent and emergent patterns of behavior by and toward persons defined as incipient windigo beings. As Teicher (1960) pointed out and as the cases adduced above substantiate, windigo beliefs were reproduced in windigo practices, in classes of behavior including cannibalism, cure, execution, flight, and ostracism. Put another way, boreal forest Algonquians experienced and acted upon psychiatric disorders and starvation cannibalism not as objective qualities but as cultural signs whose meanings were relatively arbitrary in that they were never, as Athapaskan comparisons indicate, the only ones possible (Sahlins 1976: 205–21). Reciprocally, of course, the structural design and ideology of the windigo complex were continually reproduced and historically reorganized in these pragmatic contexts of windigo self-definition, windigo dreams, windigo murders, windigo cures, and windigo executions. In these contexts the structural categories acquired worldly denotata: a dream, for example, ominously prefigured tragedy and the denotatum of "windigo" became not a nameless monster outside the boundaries of society but one's relative or friend or self. Since no individual windigo incident would, in its particulars, replicate any other or conform in all respects to cultural presuppositions, distorting relationships between structure, ideology, and practice were inevitable. The open-endedness, dynamic qualities, and regional variability of windigo that Preston (1980) and Marano (1982) rightly emphasize are the necessary attributes of any cultural complex. It is in these behavioral enactments that the symbolic definition of ecological coordinates can most profitably be examined. For example, groups whose precarious resource base exposed them to relatively high frequencies of famine cannibalism, and thus to famine cannibals without chronic ensuing behavioral disorder, would not consistently define the causal relationship between famine cannibalism and windigo as inevitable.

The discussion below addresses the conjunction of windigo ideology with windigo behavior and is intended to delineate aspects of the process through which individuals defining themselves as windigos came in some instances to experience and act upon cannibalistic urges. The thesis is that concepts of windigo etiology were intimately related to such instances of self-definition and to anthropophagous ideation and behavior.

Famine Cannibalism

As is well known, famine cannibalism and the windigo condition were and are causally related in Algonquian ideology: the experience of eating human flesh catalyzes or effects the transformation of a human being into a windigo being. Such a transformative concept presupposes in turn concepts regarding food, eating, and unique characteristics of human flesh. The flesh of animals is understood by some Rock Crees to transmit to persons who eat it under appropriate circumstances desired attributes of the species at hand. Thus, for example, raw moose blood is said to impart to the human hunter a kind of "invisibility" relative to the perceptions of game animals, structurally a metaphoric likeness to the stealth and elusiveness of the moose (Brightman 1977–79). Eating is thus a communion. In the case of human flesh, Speck (1935: 37 [Montagnais]) recorded the idea that human flesh was excessively powerful in its spiritual potency, resulting in the windigo's ability physically and spiritually to overcome and eat human prey. The fact that cannibalism results in a monstrous and nonhuman condition can be referred to its position as the antisocial extreme of food sharing, an axiomatic and irreducible measure of human warmth and goodness. "That windigo thinks he's the strongest guy, the best guy. He can do what he likes with the other guy [the victim]. Kill him. Even eat him up" (Brightman 1977–79). With human flesh as with animal flesh, eating is simultaneously communion and domination.

Algonquian testimony sometimes represents the windigo condition as the inevitable consequence of famine cannibalism (Hearne 1958 [1795]: 34–35; Henry 1901 [1809]: 99; Preston 1978: 62; Merasty 1974: 1). Other sources suggest that the causal relationship was not inevitable (see Smith 1976a: 23). Isham (1949 [1743–49]: 100–101 [York Factory Crees, 1700s]) wrote that persons who had killed and eaten their children in food crises were given other children to adopt. Thompson (1962 [1784–1812]: 103–4 [Manitoba Cree, 1700s]) recorded the case of a Cree who was not condemned or ostracized after he killed his youngest child in order to feed the rest of his family. In fact, if not in ideology, not all practitioners of famine cannibalism developed psychiatric disorders interpretable as signs of a windigo condition. The categorical phrasing of the causal relationship must everywhere have been explicitly or tacitly qualified since it was refractory to practice. To Westmain Swampy Cree groups, whose unpredictable resource base exposed them frequently to famine, "Many instances of starvation cannibalism were recognized as one-time events with no subsequent effects on the individual's behavior" (Flannery, Chambers, and Jehle 1982: 59; cf. Honigmann 1956: 41).

The question of the point at which a person would be defined literally as a windigo, as against an incipient or transforming windigo, is

raised by the multiple articulations of the windigo condition with famine cannibalism. The windigo disorder was not understood exclusively as the after-the-fact consequence of famine cannibalism. Famine could itself induce a windigo condition that eventuated in cannibalism. Thus behavior categorized as windigo could occur in both famine and nonfamine circumstances (Bishop 1975: 246). In a Rock Cree windigo narrative, a starving woman encounters the frozen body of her son on the trail and perceives it as a young bull moose. Perceptions of human beings as animals are stereotypically attributed to windigos by Crees. The woman prepares to butcher and cook the "moose" before being jolted to her senses by her daughter. Here cannibalism is represented as something that only a windigo would commit, even during the extremities of famine.

Cannibalism was itself defined as a sufficient if not necessary cause for subsequent windigo behavior, as the tragedy observed by Henry (1901 [1809]: 99–101) demonstrates. Consequently, the ambivalent status of cannibals made multiple reactions possible of which fear, disparagement, murder, and ostracism are noted (Graham 1969 [1767–91]: 155; Hearne 1958 [1795]: 34–35; Kohl 1985 [1850]: 356–57). In Ojibwa, *wīntikō* is used to refer to famine cannibals even years after the event and in the absence of a derivative disorder (Teicher 1960: 53). Factors influencing whether famine cannibals were ostracized, killed, or readmitted to society necessarily included their prior social position but must also have been decisively influenced by their behavior. Since aversion to conventional food seems everywhere to have been a sign of windigo disorder, resumption of conventional eating habits together with a willingness to confess to the details of the tragedy (see Hallowell 1976: 412–14) would prefigure readmission. Conversely, concealment and anorexia would provoke fear and scrutiny or ostracism. Explicit antisocial behavior such as threats might provoke a definition of the sufferer as a windigo, leading to attempts at cure or to execution. Since suspicion and ostracism would in some contexts exacerbate psychological trauma produced by the tragedy, survivors of famine cannibalism incidents sometimes provoked their executions through inability to communicate a condition of normalcy to their accusers (see Teicher 1960: 82–83, 90–92 [evidently two accounts of the same event]).

Given the sensational character of the subject, it needs to be emphasized that cannibal incidents were themselves infrequent. Rather surprisingly, Euro-Canadian observers represented them not as exemplifications of savagery but as tragedies in which, as Isham (1949 [1743–49]: 100) phrased it, "hunger will Enduce any man to do an unhuman action." Isham probably advanced here more extenuation than the Algonquian subjects allowed themselves. Suicide (Drage 1968 [1748–49], 2: 54) or fatalistic resignation to death (Landes 1938: 218) were the characteris-

tic Algonquian responses to starvation. Graham (1969 [1767–91]: 155) wrote that “It must be owned that they go through incredible hardships before they have recourse to this dreadful expedient,” and Nelson wrote that “notwithstanding this dreadful privation . . . it is very rare they will kill a fellow to live upon him” (Brown and Brightman 1988: 39). Some instances of cannibalism were motivated by the logistical decision to sacrifice one life for the sake of others (see Thompson 1962 [1784–1812]: 104), an aspect underemphasized in both Algonquian and Western discourse on the windigo complex.

Possession

Rock Crees of northwestern Manitoba use the verb *adawiskawiw* to refer to the event of a spirit agency exerting influence over another animate being by physically inhabiting its body or otherwise determining its thought and behavior. This condition is today a conventional explanation for the windigo condition: “Some kind of spirit goes into them up there in the Northwest Territories and they go crazy” (Brightman 1977–79). This explanation occurs frequently in the utterances of windigos and their executioners. The Woods Cree Mapanin reportedly experienced “a vision of the Devil” (Marano 1981: 168). Thompson (1962 [1784–1812]: 103) interpreted a Cree’s self-identification as windigo to mean “I am possessed of an evil spirit to eat human flesh.” The testimony of a witness to the execution of Moostoos was translated as “I understand a Wehtigoo to be a man possessed by an evil spirit who kills everybody around him and eats them” (Teicher 1960: 97). The Woods Cree woman described by Vandersteene (1969: 56–57) stated that the “Devil” was turning her into a windigo. The word *Devil* in these contexts may refer to the evil deity Macimanitōw, often identified by Crees with the scriptural devil and perhaps historically emergent through mediated scriptural influences.

Dreaming and the Vision

Closely related to the concept of possession in the ideology of windigo causation is the concept of *pawāmīwin* (Cree), or ‘dreaming’. *Pawāmīwin* characteristically implies recurrent communication in dreams or visionary states between a human being and one or more individuated animate agencies with which that human has established a mutual relationship based upon reciprocation of respect and sacrifice for spiritual benefits. These “blessings” take the form of information, good health, hunting or gambling success, extraordinary abilities, and direct intervention in hazardous situations. Among Ojibwas and Crees west of James Bay, this relationship was purposely cultivated by males and some females during an isolated vision fast at puberty. Among Eastern Cree, Montagnais, and Naskapi

groups, the experience developed from cultivated or uninduced dreams and visions without a formal ritual of fasting and isolation. In the event that an individual wittingly or unwittingly established and perpetuated such a relationship with spirit beings associated with cannibalism, that individual's subsequent degeneration into a windigo was prefigured.

The first reference to this phenomenon is contained in Nelson's remarks on the Lake Winnipeg Saulteaux in the early 1800s and identifies the autochthonous nonhuman windigo giants as the spirit agencies that infect their human patrons with windigo disorder.

These Giants as far as I can learn reside somewhere around the North Pole and even at this day pay their unwelcome visits, but which however are attended with a complete fright only. It seems also that they delegate their Power to the Indians occasionally, and this occasions that cannibalism which is Produced, or proceeds rather from a sort of distemper much resembling maniaism [*sic*]. (Brown and Brightman 1988: 88)

Nelson's phrase "delegate their Power" represents the visionary experience that transforms the human visionary into the replica of the spirit guardian (cf. Landes 1938: 214 [Southwestern Ojibwa]). The Western Woods Cree and the Plains Cree lack the category of nonhuman windigo giants and variously represent the malign spirit agency involved as Macimanitōw (Dusenberry 1962: 160), an unspecified "evil spirit" (Preston 1978: 62), or *Miskwamiy* 'Ice'.

Two aspects of "windigo dreams" are especially relevant to the question of the subjective self-definition of some Algonquians as windigos. First, events in dreams in which the dreamer actively participates are understood in some instances to predestine inexorably events that will transpire, sometimes many years later, in the dreamer's waking experience (Brightman 1977-79). Second, beings and events in dreams are explicitly understood as symbolic. Objects and events represent themselves to the dreamer or are perceived as something other than what they are. Consequently, the dreamer may interact with beings or perform certain actions without being aware of doing so. A spirit associated with cannibalism may, for example, represent itself to the dreamer as a different being altogether, deluding the human subject into a relationship that will eventually result in cannibalism. Some Rock Crees say that the spirit agency *Miskwamiy* appears in dreams in the form of an animal from whom the dreamer then innocently accepts blessings. In such a case, the dreamer will develop a windigo condition when he or she eats the flesh of the animal impersonated; no dietary rule ordinarily proscribes eating animals of the same species as the guardian (Brightman 1977-79).

Nelson again provides the best documentary reference to these aspects of windigo dreams. He recorded the first-person account of a Lac la Ronge Cree who divined the identity of a cannibal spirit and rejected it.

Those who at any future period are to become cannibals thus dream of them. After the things usual in all dreams "I was invited by the North [spirit] to partake of a feast of ducks, the most beautiful I had ever seen and well-cooked. The dish was set before me, I set too [*sic*]. A stranger by me touched me with his elbow and said, 'Eat not thou of that, look into thy dish.' Behold that which I had taken for the wing of a duck was the arm of a child. 'He! what a narrow escape' said I. Then he took me into another room and gave me most excellent meat, the most delicious in appearance I had ever seen. I would not eat—I discovered it was the flesh of *Indians* thus served up to me. He took me into a third room and gave me Tongues. These I also perceived were the tongues of Indians. 'Why refusest thou what I offer thee? Is it not good?' 'I feel no inclination to eat,' I replied. Then he took me in a fourth room where fine beautiful hearts were served up and I was desired to eat but I perceived it was still the same. I therefore refused. Then said he, 'It is well done, thou hast done well.' Heh! Had I unfortunately eaten of this then had I become a cannibal in addition to all my other misfortunes." Those who eat at these feasts are frequently but not universally told thus: "This is a sign to thee that one day thou shalt become a cannibal and feed on the flesh of thy fellows. When thou shalt see children play with and eat ice (or snow) in thy tent say, 'My time is near' for then thou shalt soon eat *Indian* (human) flesh. (Brown and Brightman 1988: 90–91)

Although particular named spirit entities are conventionally associated with the windigo curse, the Crees of Nelson's time also believed that any spirit guardian was capable, if angered, of altering its blessings in such a way that windigo transformation resulted. "The Indians say it is a punishment (from some of their familiars of course) for so lightly esteeming their ceremonies, nay indeed and ridiculing them often" (Brown and Brightman 1988: 94; cf. Preston 1978: 62).

The Performance of Windigo Ideology

The primary desideratum in the elucidation of the windigo disorder is the psychodynamic process through which individuals experienced cannibal urges. That persons should fear such impulses is virtually dictated by cultural premises, but the transition from anxiety or anger or hunger to the impulses themselves remains unaccounted for. Granted strong emotions of fear or anger or both, why should these take expression in cannibal

impulses? The fact that Algonquians feared that cannibal impulses would manifest themselves is not a sufficient explanation for the manifestation of cannibal impulses. A subtler examination of the sufferers' subjective understanding of their own disorder is required, and the remarks below are intended as the ethnological component to such an explanation that requires also contributions from those with expertise in cross-cultural psychiatry.

The distal determinants of the windigo disorder in the Algonquian cultural universe implicate social others, alternately human or nonhuman or both, whose decisions bring the effective determinant—famine cannibalism, possession, or cannibal dream-vision—to bear on individual human subjects. From this point of view, the windigo disorder was an artifact of fatalism. The sources suggest that some Algonquians contemplated or committed cannibalism because they believed that the act was, for them, necessary, inevitable, and predestined. For some, it was as though the act had already occurred through the medium of sorcery and dreams. In place of the manic and enthusiastic monsters conventionally figured, the evidence indicates a less spectacular tableau of actors unwittingly and unwillingly cast in a tragic role that they must now play out with fatalistic resignation. The phrase "windigo performance" captures both the emergent qualities of such events and the subjective experience of playing out a predetermined role.

To consider first the most salient instances, individuals who retrospectively interpreted their behavior in visions or dreams as communications with cannibalistic beings or participation in cannibal acts were culturally conditioned to believe that their degeneration into a windigo was predestined. There is no reason to question the sincerity of the Cree exegesis: "Had I unfortunately eaten of this then had I become a cannibal in addition to all my other misfortunes." The impact and significance of such dreams is refractory to Western comprehension. Rock Crees discipline themselves to perform or not perform certain acts in their dreams, and they will travel extensively and pay exorbitantly for the interpretation and treatment of bad dreams. Even without an existing anxiety relating to the interpreted content of dreams or visions, emergent symptoms of psychological distress are and were conventionally referred to events in dreams (Brightman 1977–79).

Directly implicated in this orientation is the self-identification of the dreamer with his or her spirit guardian and the derivative requirement that events or desires experienced in dreams be enacted in waking life. Although there is little information to address the problem, it is clear that some Algonquians identified closely with their spirit guardians to the degree that they understood their own strong emotions in part as vicarious emanations. Persons are said by Rock Crees sometimes to take on

physical and behavioral attributes of the agencies of which they dream (*ibid.*). In a justifiably well known paper, Wallace (1958) delineated the dream theory of the Iroquois, showing that dreams were understood to express powerful and unconscious desires of the dreamer's personal soul that *required* enactment if death or illness were to be avoided. In this theory, dreams also prefigured events in waking life which could, however, if undesirable, be prophylactically averted by symbolic simulation. The dictatorial requirement that urges expressed in dreams be enacted in order to satisfy the *spirit guardian* is a closely related theory shared by Subarctic Algonquians (Speck 1935: 35 [Montagnais]; Hallowell 1976: 469–70 [Saulteaux]). So close was the relationship, for example, between the spirit being Miskwamiy and its human windigo dependents that it vicariously enjoyed and fed upon the latter's victims (Brightman 1977–79). Failure to enact dream directives was and is thought to invite illness, insanity, or death.

The specific relevance of Algonquian dream theory to windigo disorder is clarified by Kohl's writings on the Lake Superior Ojibwa in the 1800s.

It is a universal tradition among the Indians that in the primitive ages there were anthropophagous giants called Windigos. The people's fancy is so busy with them, as well as with the isolated cases of real cannibalism, that they begin to dream of them, and these dreams, here and there, degenerate to such a point that a man is gained over to the idea that he is fated to be a windigo. Such dreams vary greatly. At times a man will merely dream that he must kill so many persons during his life; another dream adds that he must also devour them; and as these strange beings believe in their dreams as they do in the stars, they act in accordance with their gloomy suggestions. (Kohl 1985 [1850]: 358)

I have observed in the 1970s and 1980s gentler exemplifications of this theory among Rock Crees, often complicated enactments of dream directives through which the health or welfare of relatives or an abundant winter's catch of furs might be procured. Like Iroquois, boreal Algonquians experienced some dream directives as mandates. Extrapolating from these accounts, it can be conjectured that the behavioral enactment of windigo dreams was understood subjectively to be necessary in order to forestall perhaps even greater tragedies or to preserve the life of the dreamer. Absent in Algonquian ideology is the Iroquois expedient of simulating violent dreams in order to prevent their realization in waking life.

Fatalism also penetrates explanations of windigo disorder through famine cannibalism and possession. In either case, events were understood

to be in progress whose culmination in windigo degeneration was predestined through the volition of human sorcerer-witches or malignant spirit beings. Famine cannibalism is doubly inflected by doctrines of fatalism. First, the commission of the act itself was understood to produce the windigo condition. Expectably, survivors of such tragedies exhibited symptoms of dissociation, anxiety, and depression (Isham 1949 [1743–49]: 227; Hearne 1958 [1795]: 35; Thompson 1962 [1784–1812]: 104; Brown and Brightman 1988: 88). Emotions of guilt, disgust, and shame were undoubtedly exacerbated by suspicion and ostracism, conducing to a “double-bind” situation in which the residual symptoms were experienced as portents of greater horrors to come. Such survivors not only internalized others’ definitions of them but independently created the same definitions. It is therefore significant that famine and famine cannibalism were contextual factors in the cases of the windigos observed by Henry and Thompson as well as in that of Swift Runner.

Fatalism characterizes not only the causal link between cannibalism and the windigo disorder but also the precipitating famine experience itself. Bishop (1982) precisely identified this conjunction: “At what point will an individual kill another rather than attempt, or continue to attempt, to obtain food in the culturally prescribed way? To this there is no certain answer, but the fatalistic beliefs of Northern Algonkians in the power of game spirits and sorcery might convince some Indians that their only means of survival lay in cannibalism” (Bishop 1982: 398).

As is now well known, Subarctic Algonquians in common with other circumboreal populations comprehend subsistence success in terms both of the objective presence of animals in the bush and of spiritually regulated *access* to them. Offended or malevolent nonhuman entities, including the spirit guardian, the owner of the species, and the animals themselves, can curtail this access. Alternatively, access may be impeded by the human sorcerer-witch, *macimaskikīwīdiniw* ‘bad medicine person’ in Cree. Nelson (Brown and Brightman 1988: 71–74) described in some detail how Crees in the 1800s understood this interference. Practitioners of bad medicine used their spirit guardians or manipulated images of animals to condemn their victims to starvation by frightening away game. The specific connection with the windigo complex is that sorcerer-witches or spirits were understood to inflict famine purposely, precisely in order to induce a cannibalism crisis and the derivative windigo condition. Paraphrasing the accounts of Southwestern Ojibwa, Landes (1938: 214) wrote, “A third occasion of becoming windigo is through sorcery practices of an enemy. This is really identical with the preceding—starvation—but an inimical personal element is added. It is a sorcerer who ‘sends starvation’ to the hunter he desires to injure” (cf. Preston 1978: 62; Jenness 1935: 40).

From this point of view, famine would be experienced not as a ran-

dom and transitory misfortune but as a preordained event already determined to eventuate in cannibalism. In such cases, responses to the situation would be influenced by the victim's confidence in the capacity of his or her spiritual resources, or those of an available specialist, to modify the predestining influences. Psychobiographical and contextual factors would determine the relative sensations of control or powerlessness expressed in responses, much as they would function in influencing the success or failure of treatment for windigo disorder. In all aspects of windigo etiology—famine cannibalism, possession, and dream predestination—fatalism is the culturally patterned although not inevitable reaction to exogenous influences conceived as limiting the subject's welfare and autonomy.

Adopting momentarily a perspective external to the Algonquian one, famine can be "objective" insofar as it is predicated on broken tools, injury, illness, unfavorable climate, technical incompetence, or game shortages. Alternatively, famines can be artificial, as when they are manufactured by the inactivity of producers. When such "objective" determinants of famine are experienced as the predestined and perhaps immutable consequences of visions, dreams, sorcery, or spirit agencies, one rational response is resignation and the cessation of further productive activity. Thompson was an observer of such interludes, most of which were happily transitory.

Amongst hunters who depend wholly on the chase, there sometimes comes a strange turn of mind; they are successful and everything goes well; a change comes, they either miss or wound the Deer, without getting it; they become excited, and no better success attends them, despondency takes place, the Manito of the Deer will not allow him to kill them; the cure for this is a couple of days rest; which strengthens the mind and body. It is something like the axiom of the civilized world, that Poverty begets Poverty. (Thompson 1962 [1784–1812]: 301)

Harmon's (1905 [1821]: 58, 66–68) journal provides concrete exemplifications with respect to the windigo complex. At Bird Mountain, Manitoba, during January 1802, the Cree or Ojibwa hunters attached to the outpost claimed to be unable to kill animals. It was Harmon's impression that there was no shortage of game. He wrote, "One of them will not go out of his tent; for he imagines that the Bad Spirit, as they call the devil, is watching an opportunity to find him in the open air, in order to devour him. What will not imagination do!" In July of the same year, an Indian told Harmon that an "evil spirit" was frightening away the animals before he could kill them. The anthropophagy of the spirit, in the first passage at least, strongly suggests the windigo. The behavioral response in both cases was to terminate hunting, a strategy that would eventuate in further famine.

If periods of unsuccessful hunting were interpreted as the consequences of decisions made by malevolent others that the hunter should starve, a further situated interpretation, among other possible ones, is that the famine is intended not to result in the hunter's death but in his or her commission of cannibalism with consequent windigo degeneration. Alternatively, persons convinced by their dreams or other signs that they were destined to become windigos might suspend work without initial discouragement. In either case, starvation and cannibalism could follow as consequences of the hunters' fatalism, created literally by their inactivity whatever the objective availability of conventional food. In such situations, as Bishop suggests, humans might prey on other humans in a purely utilitarian way, convinced that cannibalism was necessary for survival and that windigo transformation was a necessary condition of continued existence. The Swift Runner case, which involved serial cannibalism within twenty-five miles of a Hudson's Bay Company post and its food stores, indicates that objective famine need not necessarily be implicated. Conventional food, whether accessible or not, might have no significance persons who have already identified themselves as the worldly tokens of their culture's type embodiment of evil. If degeneration into a nonhuman condition is predestined by dreams or unconquerable agencies, resignation rather than resistance is a tragic but intelligible response. Dreams, as much as real or perceived food scarcities, could convince some persons that they were incipient monsters, their cannibalism and monstrosity prefigured by unalterable past events. Finally, in some instances, consideration should include the fascination which power and evil have exerted over individual imaginations in all known conditions of society. The extreme scarcity of cases eventuating in events of murder and cannibalism would seem to confirm the hypothesis that psychiatric disorders were implicated in them, interacting with the windigo complex and a fatalistic ideology of sorcery and dreaming. From this perspective, the Algonquian windigo is no more remarkable than the clinical "vampires" and "werewolves" of Western psychopathology, likewise human monsters created by arbitrary cultural schemes.

Conclusion

The title of this essay with its mention of material circumstances refers simultaneously to existing technoenvironmental analyses of the windigo complex and to the facticity of windigo cannibalism. The evidence adduced suggests limitations on the explanatory adequacy of the former while confirming the existence of the latter. Additionally, the documentary sources indicate that the complex is of probable prehistoric inception among Algonquians. The discussion concludes with an attempt to reconstruct the meanings in whose terms self-defined windigos would construe

their own circumstances. While Algonquian windigo ideology posits that cannibalism (among other factors) produces windigos, the thesis outlined here suggests that windigo ideology created cannibalism by convincing some individuals that they were predestined to it. Simultaneously such instances, together with windigo disorders resulting in cures and executions, re-created, validated, and modified the premises of windigo ideology and the structural categories that organized it.

The passing of the itinerant winter round and the inception of micro-urban reservation communities have been accompanied or preceded by the passing of windigo cannibalism and windigo executions. This historical transformation remains to be addressed; Christianity, Euro-Canadian judicial institutions, and the elimination of famine (in calorific if not nutritional terms) are certainly implicated. Only metaphorically, as with the transferred usages "violent person" or "murderer," does the windigo today acquire known human denotata. The windigo of the 1980s, as I have learned of it in Cree communities in northern Manitoba, is a monster of human but otherwise unknown antecedency, a spiritually empowered cannibal that dwells in the bush entirely outside the trapline camps and settlements upon which it continues intermittently to impinge.

Notes

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- 1 In order to facilitate further linguistic research and comparison, Cree and Ojibwa forms appear here in Bloomfield-derived orthographies currently in wide use by Algonquianists. The Cree forms are written with Wolfart's (1973) modifications of Bloomfield's (1930) Plains Cree orthography. Ojibwa forms are written following Bloomfield's (1957) orthography but with macrons substituted for double vowels to indicate length.

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