Frankfurt School Critical Theory, founded in the 1920s by a group of German-Jewish scholars, and contemporary Indigenous Critical Theory from across Turtle Island represent two diverse and distinct critical theoretical traditions. Despite their distinct contextual origins and ontological foundations, both schools grapple with experiences of genocide within totalizing systems of domination: settler colonialism, capitalism, and fascism.

This project explores the radical potential of a dialogue between these two traditions, analyzing their synergies and incommensurabilities to further enrich their respective models for anti-oppressive praxis. The most glaring barrier to such a conversation arises from the Eurocentrism of the Frankfurt School. Eurocentrism informs the universalizing thesis of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s 1947 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a text theorizing the relationship between human knowledge acquisition and the domination of nature.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, hope for liberation from totalizing domination rests upon a conceptual commitment to determinate negation. Determinate negation involves challenging and interrogating existing truths while also acknowledging the fallibility of one’s own conceptual tools. This ethic of rebellious modesty undermines the power behind claims to absolute knowledge and holds open the possibility for radical social change. Nothing is taken for granted and nothing is inevitable.1

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that all knowledge acquisition is driven by a desire to alleviate human fear in the face of nature’s powerful cyclical forces. But to know something requires a process of abstraction. Through language, humans divide the world into subject and object, man and nature, in order to gain a sense of control. This relationship of domination comes to define all relationships, including those between humans. The tendency towards totalizing relationships of oppression increases as humans forget that abstraction is a tool of survival and not a reflection of true or inevitable hierarchies.

The Nuu-chah-nulth worldview does not conceptualize the relationship between fear, knowledge, and nature as a power struggle. Umeek Atleo describes the *tsawalk* learning method as “careful seeking in the context of a fearful environment.” According to this practice, fear of nature’s spiritual essence is not something to be vanquished through domination, rather, it is a communicative experience through which sacred knowledge is gifted to aid humans in their struggle for survival. Practices of protocol and ceremony are carefully observed to ensure the interaction is consensual and reciprocal.2

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Consideration of intersubjective knowledge-seeking practices within the Nuu-chah-nulth worldview reveals that Adorno and Horkheimer’s thesis regarding knowledge as domination is specific to European epistemology and not universally applicable. What tactics for resistance are suggested by Adorno and Horkheimer? In spite of the authors’ Eurocentrism, are these tactics still relevant to Indigenous decolonizing struggles?3

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This poster places Adorno and Horkheimer’s thesis in conversation with the works of Indigenous scholars Umeek Atleo and Leanne Simpson to highlight the *Dialectic of Enlightenment’s* limits while also highlighting a promising parallel between the dialectical tactics of resistance offered by each tradition.

**References**