

JIMMIE DURHAM

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of Coherence**

Writings on Art and Cultural Politics

***A Certain Lack
of Coherence***

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Writings on Art and Cultural Politics

Jimmie Durham

Edited by
Jean Fisher

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Author's Note

Sometimes I think that remorse is the main element of my life; not for grand tragedies but for little everyday stupidities and unkindnesses. If only I could take back my words! If only I had spoken!

Certain pieces of writing have been substantially edited or excluded from this selection because they were written for specific situations which still cannot be discussed in a calm or coherent way.

And yet we have included a piece that is now somewhat of an embarrassment to me: *American Indian Culture: Traditionalism and Spiritualism in a Revolutionary Struggle*. Perhaps I should first explain a certain history of the times that may not be apparent. When I was living in Geneva I knew and worked with people from many of the African liberation movements whose countries were still colonies. Even though these people were as crazy and factional as we were, they took themselves and their struggles seriously in ways that someone coming from the US could hardly imagine. What they, and people from other Third World countries whose paths crossed mine, took from Marx and Lenin was different from the attitudes of academically-oriented people in First World countries. I returned to the US inspired by those people who knew that with dedication they could win something. (That the vocabulary in use then — 'winning', 'seizing power', 'by any means necessary' — is now being overhauled doesn't cancel what was begun in the 1960s and early '70s).

Many of the supporters of the American Indian Movement (AIM) were that kind of 'Marxist' who felt a need to dictate strategy and goals for us. But we felt that the US left was a potential ally. My paper was written mostly for those people, and written under the influence of my teachers from African and Latin American Indian organisations.

But the paper was a mistake. The FBI took it, doctored it, and distributed it to all the Tribal Councils to prove that AIM was 'infiltrated by communists'. Allen White Lightning and others said to me, "Well, what did you *think* would happen?" Even without the

FBI, the paper would have been divisive. I wrote it for white leftists, taking a strange kind of distance from Indian people. My only (weak) defence is that AIM had assigned me to work with those people, and perhaps I was ill-suited to the job. No one, however, instructed me to write the way I wrote.

The people who have made this book encourage me by imagining that I mean more than I think I do, and the following acknowledgements and thankyou are made in that context:

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Preface

In what seems like a curious introduction, the 'frontispiece' photograph in *Aratjara*,¹ a recent catalogue to an exhibition of 20th century art by the "First Australians" is of "Jimmy [sic] Durham" wearing the 'speech deprivation' mask he invented for his performance, *Veracruz/Virginia* (1992). Permission to use his image was not solicited from the artist, neither is there any explanation of the connection between him and the Australians, or why Jimmie Durham, essayist, sculptor, performance artist and poet, might be important to a debate on what one catalogue essay calls the "marginalisation of (contemporary) non-European, non-American art".

As we read through Jimmie's own essays and poems it becomes increasingly apparent that he cannot easily be incorporated into the West's 'discourse of the Other'. There is in his writing a fierce resistance to the reductive terms of all Eurocentrically-generated debates on cultural difference. He, as he insists, is not our 'Other': "You probably think we like having cars named after us. You probably think I am part of your rich heritage" (*Savage Attacks on White Women, as Usual*); and the American Indian nations, although politically and culturally oppressed, are far from a simple marginalisation:

Nothing could be more central to American reality than the relationships between Americans and American Indians, yet those relationships are of course the most invisible and the most lied about. The lies are not simply a denial; they constitute a new world, the world in which American culture is located. (*The Ground Has Been Covered*)

From the early appeals to the Indian nations for strength and

1 *Aratjara*: the Art of the First Australians, catalogue conceived by Bernhard Lüthi in collaboration with Gary Lee, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, and DuMont Buchverlag, Cologne, 1993.

unity of purpose, to the later analyses of Euro-American culture and its myths, Durham's writings trace the concerns of an activist whose advocacy is not for any already given political agenda but for an improvement in the state of human beingness itself through "critical intellectual discourse" and the pursuit of real knowledge and understanding:

Every time we do not raise the level of discourse we fall into the maze laid out by others to keep us divided, enclosed and saying only those things we are expected to say.²

The ground from which he works, both as a writer and as an artist, is Cherokee plain common sense: nothing mystifying or mystical, as he is always at pains to point out to those looking for exotic signs — not the 'magic crystals' of New Age-ism, but diamonds of thought so lucid and sharp that they penetrate almost before their meanings have been grasped.

Despite Durham's declared "embarrassment" at the essay *American Indian Culture: Traditionalism and Spiritualism in a Revolutionary Struggle*, written in 1974, it raises many of the issues that have only recently become part of mainstream debates on 'multiculturalism' and 'identity politics', and outlines those concerns which he continues to elaborate in different ways and from various perspectives throughout his writing and art. Central to these is the way the English language and the visual representations of dominant white society are used to manipulate history, the law and cultural identities — the alliance between the discourses of ethnic and cultural authenticity, colonialism and racism:

...the un-understanding...comes from the colonial vocabulary and the fact that all of the English language is infected by alienating concepts by the societies that speak it. (*American Indian Culture*)

For Durham, there is no essential category of human known as the 'American Indian' prior to its designation by the European: "None

2 Jimmie Durham, 'Artist's Disclaimer', 1991, an open letter not for publication circulated as a critical response to the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (Public Law 101-44, 1990) which legislates what can be considered as 'authentic' US Indian products, and, in effect, who can be entitled publicly to call themselves an 'authentic' US Indian, namely those who are certified members of a federal or state recognised 'tribe'. Notwithstanding the grief this causes to numerous Native people who for one reason or another are not so certified, it is a yet another example of the US government's policing of Native identities according to its own criteria.

of the words you call us by are words by which we call ourselves" (*Savage Attacks on White Women, as Usual*). The name 'Indian' is attached not to an already constituted subject with describable attributes, but to a subject fundamentally unknown and wilfully misrecognised by the European. Naming, then, is the very act by which the object 'Indian' is constituted. If, however, there is no essential connection between the people and the name, the traits describing 'Indians' are open to manipulation or invention; and if the 'Indian' so-called is a fiction, it follows that the colonialist power can act as if the people themselves do not exist.

The US has used romanticism more effectively to keep Indians oppressed than it has ever been used on any other people. The basis of that romanticism is of course the concept of the 'noble savage', but the refinements over the years have worked their way into how every non-Indian thinks about us, and how we think about ourselves. In the US there is a special vocabulary of English *deliberately* developed to maintain oppression of Indians. This vocabulary has connotations of 'primitiveness', backwardness, savagery, etc. (*American Indian Culture*)

What is at stake here is the definition of cultural 'authenticity', a concept originating in white notions of property alien to Native cultures: "Authenticity is a racist concept which functions to keep us enclosed in 'our' world (in our place) for the comfort of a dominant society."³ It is not, however, Jimmie Durham's intention to attempt to re-write 'official history' from the perspective of the colonised 'victim', a strategy which would continue to accept as valid the coloniser's own structure of thought. Rather, his aim is to de-stabilise the mythic narratives of Western dominant culture through 'savage' attacks on its aesthetic criteria, and by oblique interventions and *non sequiturs* designed to confuse the enemy and expose his intellectual methodology — binarism, logic and linear time, for instance — as a *reductio ad absurdum*.

What is, however, brought into play in Durham's writings is historical memory: the recounting of personal and collective stories in which the past is inextricably woven into the fabric of the present, and (in his artwork in particular) the present conceptualised as the 'evidence' in an imagined future — 'fictions' creating new combinations and juxtapositions of facts that present a different perspective and tell a different truth from the one to which we are accustomed. In the artist's writings 'evidence' — anthropological, art historical, photographic and so forth — becomes exposed as a miscellany of facts

3 'Artist's Disclaimer'.

collected, manipulated and 'interpreted' according to the agendas of those who control the means of information dissemination. In a recent installation (*Janus and His Double*, Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, 1992), the artist pursues the counter-attacks on 'authenticity' and the absurdity of dividing the world into 'opposites' which he raised earlier in the essay *The Search for Virginity*, through the voice of Shakespeare's fictitious Caliban:

...I have been gathering evidence about you (just to take a random example) for years, and can now prove that most of what you present to the public as your identity is at least as fictional as is that of any written savage.

Caliban, the 'noble savage' invented by the European as a redemption from what he perceived as his own lost innocence, knows the language of the coloniser better than he does himself. And so, it is the very distance between the real and its symbolisation that Durham recognises and exploits. Through his metaphoric torsions and sardonic wit, what is momentarily opened up is the space of the unaccountable remainder which always escapes the determining frames — or nominalisation — of language, and which signals our essential lack of continuity with the world. At the same time, however, it is precisely this space which opens the possibility of new intuitions of reality and renewed dialogue. Durham's words, whether harsh or humorous, are always invitations to further conversations:

It is necessary that, with great urgency, we all speak well and listen well. We, you and I, must remember everything. We must especially remember those things we never knew. (*A Certain Lack of Coherence*)

It is in this sphere of communication that we find a connection, not widely known in the art world, between Jimmie Durham and Australian 'aboriginal' peoples, amongst others. It is that, in his work as the founding director of the UN International Indian Treaty Council, Durham sought mutual support amongst people around the world still experiencing colonial domination. Like the 'First Australians', Durham's political reality structures his intellectual discourse in complex ways that cannot be reduced to iconography (the image of the author wearing the 'speech deprivation' mask is not to be mistaken for a *portrait*). As these selected writings make clear it is not the artist/writer as mute, nor is it some problematic of American Indian identity that his work addresses, but the deafness, myopia and hypocrisy that continue to inscribe the relations of power between the West and the rest of the world.

Jean Fisher

American Indian Culture Traditionalism and Spiritualism in a Revolutionary Struggle

Culture as a Way to Know the World

I would have liked to begin this paper with a quotation from Amilcar Cabral because of his wisdom and because it would immediately set the tone of being in the right 'camp'. I leave the quotation out because one of our most serious troubles in the United States today, whether we are Indian, white, black or whatever, is a tendency to attempt to escape our reality. We do this by substituting slogans and pronouncements for the more difficult revolutionary praxis of working, looking, thinking/working, looking/thinking (or, 'practice, criticism, theory'). The white left in particular has a tendency to take the words and concepts of revolutionary leaders from around the world *instead of* participating in the hammering-out of a true understanding of what is going on here, and how to use it.

That is especially true when we consider questions of culture in the US, either white culture or some other.

For example, a group of white leftists decides to hold a conference. They know, in an abstract way, that they have been robbed of their culture and that that culture is important in revolution. Therefore they set aside one or two evenings during the conference as 'cultural evenings'. Songs are sung and poems are read, but these 'cultural activities' are not integrated into the conference itself, instead they are isolated as special events. More important, and more to the point, no one really sees and analyses the ways in which the conference itself is a cultural event. It is the culture of the white society as a whole that dictates the structure of the conference. That culture also tells the conference participants *how* to participate (either by directly following what the whole of the society does at conferences, or by consciously re-acting to that, which can be only a partial reaction anyway

because the conference participants *are part* of that whole society). The reason people do not see the conference itself and its interactions as a cultural event *in itself* is because they have been robbed of their culture.

At the first level, the culture of the society is 'Western'. That is, most structures of social action are like those of any Western country, and are clearly unlike those of American Indians, Lapps, Masai, or even societies that have become 'Westernised' in many aspects, such as the black population in the US.

But at the second level, the people at that conference are culturally part of a society that has taken the Western tool of 'specialisation' and changed it to what Paulo Freire has called 'specialism' in his study of mass society. (The concept of mass society is not associated with the emergence of the masses in a historical process.) Freire describes this phenomenon in *Cultural Action for Freedom*:

Mass society appears in highly technological, complex societies. In order to function, these societies require specialities, which become 'specialisms', and rationality, which degenerates into myth making irrationalism.

Distinct from specialities, specialisms narrow the area of knowledge in such a way that the so-called 'specialists' become generally incapable of thinking. Because they have lost the vision of the whole of which their 'speciality' is only one dimension, they cannot even think correctly in the area of their specialisation.

In mass society, ways of thinking become as standardised as ways of dressing and tastes in food. People begin thinking and acting according to the prescriptions they receive daily from the communications media rather than in response to their dialectical relationships with the world. In mass societies, where everything is prefabricated and behaviour is almost automatised, people are lost because they do not have to 'risk themselves'. They do not have to think about even the smallest things; there is always some manual which says what to do in situation A or B. Rarely do people have to pause at a street corner to think which direction to follow. There's always an arrow which de-problematizes the situation. Though street signs are not evil in themselves, and are necessary in cosmopolitan cities, they are among thousands of directional signals in a technological society which, introjected by people, hinder their capacity for critical thinking.

Of course I am not accusing white leftists in the US of not being able to think critically. I am saying that Freire's description is a very good description of US society, and that white leftists are inevitably part of US society. Further, *all* human beings are cultural beings,

we cannot operate outside of society as 'natural animals'. *Our societies, our culture, define us, in large part, and our way of experiencing the world is through our culture.* Politics, economics, science and technology, language, etc, are all cultural phenomena, and finally, of course, political phenomena. Many progressive people in this country, both whites and blacks, are not critically conscious of that process, and *are* a part of that mass society in one degree or another.

So, when white people look critically at the Indian Movement (as they should), it should be with a critical consciousness that they are looking *through* their *own* culture, which is a particularly alienating one and therefore difficult to see through.

As if the problems mentioned above were not enough of a barrier to communication and analysis, there are still two more blocks. The first is racism, which cannot really be separated from the cultural problems I've been talking about. Racism is used so effectively and insidiously as a tool of oppression that some people think that it is some absolute of human nature, or at least some absolute of white human nature. Most white progressives will freely admit that they carry some racist attitudes (whereas most Indians, also infected with racism, will not), but will not take the trouble to commit themselves to identifying and eliminating those attitudes, partly because that can be done only by the kind of praxis that US culture makes so difficult. Those attitudes are especially obnoxious and destructive in white people who have the aggressiveness or self-confidence to be in leadership positions of one form or another.

Racism often takes the subtle forms of assuming Indian people to be just like white people, or *totally* different from white people, or other unspoken generalities which further blind the people to the realities of Indian culture. It is also the primary cause of the most hateful piece of miscommunication now going on between Indians and white progressives: 'political missionary-ism'. Particularly, by young white Marxists who have never been in real situations of struggle in a working-class movement, who in fact have seldom worked with anyone except fellow-students, and who come to us as though we were ignorant 'lumpen proletariat' in need of being 'taught', not only Marxism, but the realities of our own struggle. Thus you will hear many white people talking (when they think that no Indian is within ear-shot) about how Russell Means has 'grown', with the clear implication that his 'growth' has occurred because of the white 'revolutionaries'. These white people see themselves as our guides and at the same time as spectators to our struggle. They objectify us in ways that they would never objectify each other.

By the fact of their birth and of having been 'educated' into the intelligentsia (even when they have worked as mechanics for a year or two; because they are mobile — their 'educated' class privileges do not allow them to be locked into the oppression of 'being-a-mechanic-in-a-capitalist-society') these members of the ruling class do not see that their 'correct' vocabulary of liberation and Marxism does not alone make them revolutionaries. The form of our struggle is different. What we need to learn is how to use the tools of Marxist thought to be more effective in our revolutionary struggle. Non-Indians in the US *must* be *participants* in that process, not teachers.

The second block is the colonial tool that I call 'romanticism'. The US has used romanticism more effectively to keep Indians oppressed than it has ever been used on any other people. The basis of that romanticism is of course the concept of the 'Noble Savage', but the refinements over the years have worked their way into how *every* non-Indian thinks about us, and how we think about ourselves. In the US there is a special vocabulary of English *deliberately* developed to maintain oppression of Indians. This vocabulary has connotations of 'primitiveness', backwardness, savagery, etc, and affects the ways every Indian and non-Indian in the US thinks about Indians, whether or not people are conscious of them. This vocabulary has become so ingrained that the use of just one of the words conjures up the thought of Indians, and we have come to assume that these are 'Indian' words, or at least direct translations from an Indian language into English.

Who decided that the word 'chief', which has the connotation of meaning the head of a land or tribe, is the correct translation of the concept of the Creek Indian word 'Enhomvta'? Did white people decide that this was the correct word by studying the Creek political system? No. They decided because they wanted to show the Creek nation as a 'primitive' body of people and 'chief' carried this connotation. At first, colonists called Indian leaders 'kings', as in the example of King Phillip of the Wampanoag 'tribe'.

Compare the following two sentences describing the same event and the reasons for a colonial vocabulary may be clearer:

1. Today Archbishop Tatanka Iotanka, Minister of Interior Affairs of the present government of the nation of Lakota and the most respected religious leader of the Lakota people was assassinated by paid agents of the United States government.
2. Today Chief Sitting Bull, a medicine man of the Sioux Indian tribe, was killed by another Indian.

Of course, I am not suggesting that the word 'archbishop' would describe Sitting Bull's position correctly or adequately, but I am saying that it describes the Lakota concept for his position *just as well* as the English phrase 'medicine man' in the English of non-Indian people.

The romantic colonial vocabulary serves to dehumanise us, and make our affairs and political systems seem not quite as serious or advanced as those of other people. The English vocabulary used to describe us is designed to prove that we are inferior.

Here is a list of English words used in the romantic vocabulary with parallel English words in normal vocabulary. Neither 'chief', 'king', 'president' nor 'prime minister' is an exact translation of 'Enhomvta', but neither do we mean *exactly* the same concept when we speak of the presidents of the US, Switzerland, and East Germany. Except for the political connotations of the word, they are synonyms.

Tribes	Nation
Band	State or province
Medicine Man	Doctor, minister, psychiatrist, etc
Chief	President, prime minister, secretary general
War chief	General
Warrior, brave	Soldier
Squaw	Woman
Band of warriors	Army, regiment
Great council	Cabinet, parliament, central committee
Pow wow	Festival
Great Spirit	God, Allah, etc

Some words refer to concepts specific to the way Indians are spoken about: 'full-bloods', '1/4, 1/16, 1/64 Indian', 'mixed breed', etc. This is a kind of racism that is not used against any other people. And even when white society as a whole has used words like 'mulatto', white progressives have not. But today they do speak of 'full-blood' Indians and so on. It is no excuse to say that many Indian people themselves use those terms — many blacks in the South also used words like 'mulatto', 'yallah', etc, at one time and some still do now.

The 'racial degree' of blackness of black people has always been used in the sense of the less the better, but with Indians it is the more, the more valid. A 'true Indian' is a 'full-blood', a 'half-breed' is not a 'true Indian'. The ultimate result for Indians and blacks is the same oppression; the difference is that progressive white people still *willingly* pick up on this racism against Indians. The main reason is that those white people are caught up in the romanticism put out

by the US government, which works very hard to make the situations on the reservation fit racist stereotypes.

Mixed blood Indian children are given a particular kind of preferential treatment in the government or church schools (unless their parents are activists or traditionals, in which case the children are classed as full-bloods). They are brainwashed all of their lives, and then placed in positions of power by the US government.

This government strategy does not always work, and never worked very well, but the colonial language *acts as though it did*.

Names are another part of the romantic vocabulary. Tatanka Iotanka is translated into English — Sitting Bull — which has a 'not-real' connotation. Mao Tse Tung is not translated into English. Stalin is not translated into English. Nkrumah is not translated into English. Charles de Gaulle is not called The Gaul, nor is Beethoven called Beet Patch.

However, the romantic colonial vocabulary works a real double-dirty trick on Indians. First, it reinforces the racist, objectifying and non-real attitudes of non-Indians towards us. But we ourselves are taught English *directly* by the US government or by its agent, the churches. So we are taught this romantic vocabulary as though its concept were the same as those of vocabularies in our own language. For us, therefore, talking to each other, they do mean the same. If a group of French people were taught that in English 'horse manure' was the correct term for the object 'cream cheese', and that 'swimming in muddy water' was the correct phrase for the concept 'love your neighbour', they could communicate perfectly well within their group. But when they spoke to outsiders...!

We are in a similar position. Words in English that we have been taught mean certain concepts in our own language, do in fact mean those concepts to us. But when we speak to outsiders it often sounds as though we are all mystics or romantics, or naive, or primitive, or 'tribal'. That phenomenon re-reinforces the racial stereotype that non-Indians have about Indians, and further isolates us.

As we in our struggle break out of isolation, we also break that language barrier, usually *before* the non-Indians know what has happened. Today we have learned what 'tribes' *really* means so we refuse that definition. Non-Indians, including progressive whites, still use it. Tomorrow we will no longer speak of 'full-bloods'; whites may still use that racist terminology. Those who are truly committed to liberation, however, will use the advantage of their outside position to begin an understanding of what we mean by certain words and phrases, such as 'traditional', and so work in solidarity with us in the process

of coming back into the world. Those whose unconscious racism makes them decide that our specialised language makes us simple-minded or romantic or Noble Primitives will continue to enhance their own self-image by 'helping' us stupid Indians.

It is not an easy situation, nor is it completely one-sided. To add to the confusion there are many young Indians today who have been brought up in cities, sometimes in white foster homes, who have been denied their own culture and the education of their people. Romantic white society gives them their concept of what 'Indianness' is. Because these young people are so alienated, they are in many ways more oppressed than the rest of us, and so their zeal and desperation makes them our 'revolutionary vanguard' in many ways. They are the people most articulate and willing to talk to non-Indians. They are also more visible than the 'traditionals' on the reservations.

Because they are often in leadership positions and because what they say about our culture and politics fits the romantic stereotype, non-Indians sometimes take everything they say whole-cloth, and then either write off Indians as mystics or embrace Indians as fellow-mystics according to where they, the non-Indians, are politically.

All I have written so far should serve as a backdrop and framework for the main purpose of this paper.

The Founding Fathers of the United States equated capitalism with civilisation. They had to, given their mentality; to them civilisation meant *their* society, which was a capitalist society. Therefore, from the earliest times the wars against Indians were not only to take over land but also to squash the threatening example of Indian communism. Jefferson was not the only man of his time to advocate imposing a capitalist and possessive society on Indians as a way to civilise them. The 'bad example' was a real threat; the reason the Eastern Indian nations from Florida to New York State and from the Atlantic to Ohio and Louisiana are today so racially mixed is because indentured servants, landless poor whites and escaped black slaves chose our societies over the white society that oppressed them.

Beginning in the 1890s we have been 'red-baited' and branded as 'commies' in Congress (see the Congressional record) and in the executive boards of churches. That was a very strong weapon in the 1920s and 1930s, and in the Oklahoma area any Indian 'traditional' who was also an organiser was called a communist or even a 'Wobbly'.

So we have always defined our struggle not only as a struggle for land but also as a struggle to retain our cultural values. These values are 'communitistic' values. Our societies were and are

'communistic' societies. The US government has always understood that very well. It has not branded us all these years as communists because we tried to form labour unions or because we hung out with the IWW (International Workers of the World) or the Communist Party but because the US government correctly identified our political system. It did not make that a public issue because that would have been dangerous, and because it has been far more efficient to say that we are savages and primitives.

Marx used our societies as examples of what he meant by communism on two different occasions in his writings. He said that we are "Primitive Communists". The word 'primitive' means 'first', but people who have skimmed through Marx often decide, because of the connotations of the word 'primitive' which come from political manipulation, that Marx meant that we were backward or 'childlike' communists. Marx *was*, nonetheless, very Eurocentric, and he assumed that European history was the main body of humanity's history.

We do not need Marx's words to teach us how to live our lives in our own society. We do not need to go through an industrial revolution so that we can come out as communists on the other side.

We do need Marxism-Leninism as a method and system for knowing the human world as it is today and for knowing how most effectively to fight our oppressor. We do need to join forces with world Marxism-Leninism, because that is the liberation movement for the world. But we will not come into that world community as a 'primitive' younger brother.

Our struggle has always been not only to maintain our own lands and culture, but to fight the political system of capitalism itself. That is evident in all the speeches and addresses given by our leaders throughout US/Indian history. The struggle to maintain culture is in itself a revolutionary struggle. It is a dynamic and positive struggle, not a passive holding action. We speak of our traditions, and because the romanticism of non-Indians always speaks of us in the past tense (What did the Cherokees eat?, instead of What do the Cherokees eat?), it is assumed that we are speaking of *things* that we used to do, such as 'roaming the Plains' or making arrowheads. The traditions that we mean are not the exterior manifestations that are easily identified as 'Indian', not the 'artefacts' and objects of our culture, but what we call our 'vision' — the value system that makes our culture. In short, we mean our political system (but remember we have been taught a special vocabulary), not our well-made arrowheads.

When the Cherokee nation first came into contact with the settler regime we were impressed by its iron tools. We became the blacksmiths and knife-makers of the South soon after. (One of my great-great uncles forged Jim Bowie's 'Bowie knife'.) We didn't (and don't) stop to think whether or not iron-working was a valid 'Cherokee' or 'Indian' activity. Taking new ideas that are useful is a *very* Cherokee activity. It is a very Lakota activity, or Mohawk activity. We took glass beads, horses, wool blankets, wheat flour for fry-bread, etc, very early and immediately made them identifiably 'Indian' things. We are able to do that because of our cultural integrity and because our societies are dynamic and able to take in new ideas.

Since the 1840s, and especially recently, it is obviously a very 'Indian' thing to use the best and most modern rifles available to us. One of our valued traditions is to use the best possible weapons to fight our oppressor.

We define a 'traditional' Indian as one who maintains the whole body of his people's vision (political system), and that includes total resistance to colonisation, speaking his own language, etc. So our progressives are what look like to you our 'conservatives'. By that I mean that our 'traditionals' are the people who are struggling to conserve our cultural ways and values, as well as being leaders in our struggle against colonialists. The BIA and the neo-colonialist tribal leaders do in fact call them 'conservatives'; but being our real leaders they are in actual fact our 'progressives'. That is why AIM, unlike any other movement in the US, is not made up predominantly of one age-group or another.

Another of our valued traditions is to take weapons from the enemy. Thus, in the 1920s some 'benign' branch of the BIA decided that if properly controlled it would be a good thing if Indians sitting on barren reservations in Oklahoma were appeased and distracted by letting them hold a dance or two in the summer months. They reasoned that this would also give white people a chance to see 'real Indians' doing 'real Indian stuff'. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) decided that it would be easier and less dangerous if these affairs were inter-tribal. In those days the different Indian nations which had been forced into Oklahoma did not have much contact with each other, and were relative strangers to each other. Therefore the BIA decided that small groups from each tribe would find it harder to communicate or plan an 'uprising' than one nation or people, or two neighbouring nations. The BIA named these events 'pow wows', after the word 'P'houwah' which means 'elder' or 'medicine man' (the white trappers a century earlier made the mistaken translation).

To be able to sing together and dance together the Indians invented new dances and songs that did not require words in any one national language. The AIM 'song' is a pow wow song, but it should not be thought of as a contrivance because of that. It is a very real, valid and heartening cultural experience for us. The words are the 'chant' part — the chorus — common to most Indian singing.

We were not degraded and made to feel like tourist attractions by these pow wows. We used them to create unity among us. We used the English our oppressor taught us as the most available common language. In that language we exchanged information and ideas. Now the pow wows are 'our thing'. We hold them all over the country all summer long, and Indians from Maine meet with Indians from New Mexico to hear a political speech from an Indian from South Dakota. This century, pow wows have been our main tool towards forming ourselves into one confederation of people and reorganising our struggle. What was meant to alienate us we used, in our *traditional* way, to strengthen our will.

Some people get the idea that 'traditional' Indians want to go back to the 'good old days'. Especially, they imagine that because of our grave concern over the environment we are escapists who want to reject technology and progress. That is another part of the romantic stereotype. We have, and have always had, technology. We accept all technology that contributes to the well-being of our people, which *must* include the well-being of the Earth itself and all the life upon it; that acceptance is neither a new thing nor an 'accommodation': *it is one of our traditions*.

We know that the question of technology is really a question of who *controls* technology, but we feel that this has been over-simplified by some socialist countries. It seems to us that, on the one hand, many people accept the idea of 'advanced' technology as though it were truly a matter of human advancement in every case, which is not true; and on the other hand, that too many people accept all these 'advances' as inevitable, instead of as political/cultural phenomena.

We measure progress in terms of the well-being of human beings (not the well-being of society) so we will never accept that which capitalism calls progress. Capitalism is a cultural phenomenon, which arises from other cultural phenomena. We feel that nations and people which have to any degree been 'Westernised', through colonisation or whatever, have taken in to some degree the values of capitalism, and so accept some of the notions of 'progress' that capitalism has invented.

We know that technology and progress depend upon the political

system that controls them. But it may seem like we don't know this, because most of us will not use those words or other words acceptable to the larger society or to international (overseas) English speakers.

Something that few people realise is that our culture and our vision have not remained static during our five-hundred years of oppression. Indian nations which were once large (the pre-Columbian population of what is now the US, not counting Alaska, was 20 to 35 million) are now comparatively small and are 'inside' the *illegal* boundaries of a giant European settler regime. These nations have had to come together, and such factors make for important cultural changes. Before Columbus we were not 'warring tribes' as the history books have it, but neither did we always have a clear and motivating concept of an international 'brotherhood' of humanity. Many of us had a national chauvinism which was sometimes very destructive. Also, given that we are speaking of a large continent with many countries, naturally every one of those countries did not have a good political system. No one, of course, was or is perfect. Some nations in the Southeast had very ugly class systems; in other areas some nations had pretty strange 'consumer societies'. However, those aberrations were *distortions* of real values in a political (cultural) vision (concept) underlying all Indian societies, just as the Aztec sacrifices were horrible distortions of a common Indian concept of 'society cannot develop without sacrifice'.

Colonisation and our struggle for liberation accelerated a process of unification and clarification that had already begun (witness the Iroquois Confederacy and its vision). That political process of welding together, and refining and improving a unified concept of society on the Earth, is a cultural process. It is a process that is going on right now.

But it is a process, of course, that is going on internally and is seldom seen or understood from the outside. Because it is a process in a struggle for liberation, inside the most oppressive colonisation the world has ever seen, it is not a smooth, clear road towards an ideal. Remember that oppression is more than skin deep; it is not exterior to a person's inner life. It gives us confusion, self-loathing, and a natural urge to escape, which in some people takes the form of a 'mental' escape — into mysticism, alcoholism, suicide, reactionism. It does that to each of us to some degree at some time or another. Some of us, in our confusion, try to escape the oppression in ways that do not help our struggle but which are not often seen as escapism either by ourselves or by non-Indians.

Some of us, particularly Indians who have been cut off from their

own roots (the 'urban' Indians mentioned earlier), use guilt-trip tactics on non-Indian supporters. They can easily find valid reasons for verbally blasting white co-workers because those white people have racist attitudes which make such blasts easy and seemingly excusable. But the people who escape by doing that are taking an easy and 'self-satisfying' role instead of really struggling with racism, and they also get locked into attitudes that *can* serve to maintain our isolation; and non-Indians who simply react to those attitudes, by acceptance or belligerence, hinder our struggle.

It is a universal truth that human beings do not exist outside of their culture, their society. A biologically human animal is not fully human without, for example, language which is a cultural/political phenomenon. To speak of an alienated society is to speak of people robbed of their culture, *always* so that some political system can exploit them. That is what makes culture so important to liberation, and that is why it can never be considered a separate piece of human activity (as in the hypothetical conference mentioned earlier).

Again, usually without articulating it, Indian people understand this completely, so we place great importance on regaining every scrap, external and internal, of our culture that is lost or in danger of being lost. Amilcar Cabral calls this a revolutionary act, but we in the US should look critically at *our* unique situation. Given the romanticism and escapism so rampant in *every* people in the US, regaining or maintaining cultural integrity is not *necessarily* a revolutionary act. An Indian who sits and does beadwork, or conducts beadwork classes, or trades beadwork when he or she should be on the front line with a gun or organising his or her community, is performing a *counter-revolutionary act*. An Indian who escapes into a forest to live the 'real life of an Indian', away from the struggle, is performing a counter-revolutionary act. The same holds true for non-Indians. Blacks have learned that a dashiki is not of itself a revolutionary object. But we should not 'condemn' those people who in their confusion attempt these escapes. We should *understand* clearly what is going on, so that through our commitment to liberation we are supportive of the basic motivation beneath such acts. People go back and forth on such roads, just as some Indians who are truly committed to our liberation get drunk every couple of months. They are struggling.

Those white people who would 'teach' us Marxism should realise that we have come to understand these things because *we* struggle to break out of isolation. The fact that white people meet us and are in solidarity with our struggle is not because they came to us, but

because *our struggle* to regain our place in the world is effective and successful. The more *we* struggle the more we learn of the things in the world that we need to know, *because we* have broken our isolation.

We have made and will continue to make mistakes, as individuals and as a people. We are using those mistakes to further our struggle and to learn more.

Progressive non-Indians in the US *cannot* be either teachers or spectators in that process, but must stand with us in true solidarity, which means a commitment to clarity, Marxist criticism and analysis of actual situations. We are, by every criterion, colonised *nations of people*, whose culture is not Western. Blacks, Mexicans, Chicanos, and whites all have more in common with each other than any have with us.

Our culture and our political systems have many faults, and *had* many faults in pre-colonial times. We have never claimed to be perfect or to have the 'secret of life'. We *demand*, though, an end to romanticism, paternalism and racism. We must include in that a demand for an end to liberalism directed against us. We demand to be taken seriously as the people we are, by the world and especially by other peoples on this continent. We must demand criticism of ourselves.

American Indian Spiritualism

Our 'spiritualism' is a controversial issue right now. Marx said that religion is the opium of the people. We agree that for many, religion is a drug that exploits people for the State. That is why we have fought Christianity so vehemently. But we say that our own 'religion' is a force of liberation. Once again the 'un-understanding' (which is mutual between Indians and non-Indians and even between some Indians) comes from the colonial vocabulary and the fact that all of the English language is infected by alienating concepts by the societies that speak it. Actually, it is incorrect to say that we have religion or religions, or that we are religious people.

We may say that Western society is divided in non-connecting squares. Each square represents an area of human activity or knowledge:

HISTORY

SCIENCE

POLITICS

RELIGION

CULTURE or ART

ECONOMICS

These squares are further divided:

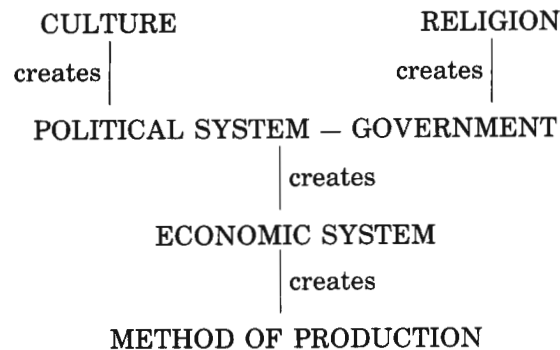
SCIENCE

Biology	Physics
Geology	Anthropology

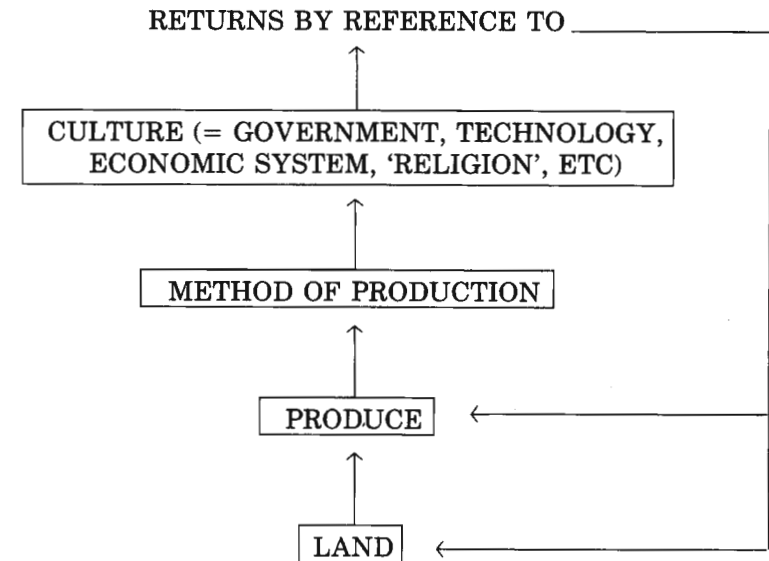
And so on. This is the basis of the 'specialism' that Paulo Freire speaks of. Such a system can make for clarity, I suppose, but what we see it make, in today's capitalist or socialist countries, is alienation. No person can get a grasp of a whole. He may know that eugenics, homiletics, biophysics, Keynesian economics, etc, exist as areas of human knowledge, and he may feel that they are beyond his comprehension as *concepts* and that they are not connected to his life or his speciality.

We describe our society as a circle, by which we mean that it is an integrated whole, and non-alienating. Before Columbus came, we had medical knowledge and practice *much* advanced compared to European medicine. We had more advanced systems of law and justice, and almost everything else. (That is not chauvinism; it is historical documented fact.) But all of our knowledge was comprehensible to, and in the hands of, the people. We had no 'medical profession' or priestly caste (of course there were some deviations in some of the nations), nor do we have them today. It was and is this wholeness that has made our societies so dynamic, so able to take changes. When new things come into our circle it expands. When new things come into Western society another square is added.

Even so we have no 'religious' concepts. Before I explain what we do have, let us look at the classical Marxist view of human society. The following diagram is a simplified version of Marx's analysis:



An analysis of our society, however, using the same diagram, comes out differently; not in any basic way but yet in a qualitative way. To begin with, our society, especially our 'religion' or 'spiritualism' is tied *directly* to the land itself. The method of production grows out of what is produced, and what is produced depends upon what the land yields in an ecological balance. Besides, there is no separation between culture, religion, economics or politics. An analysis of our society looks like this:



This is not a 'primitive' or simple societal system. It is one which we have been evolving for thousands of years, and critically for the past 250 years. The basis, then, of what is called our 'spiritualism' is the concept of Mother Earth. This is no more nor less than a formalised realisation that we are human beings, whose sustenance and creation comes from the earth. This is not counter to Marxism. From this basis, built into our culture is a critical consciousness that our methods of production coincide ecologically with what is being produced. For this reason, in our farming methods we developed an agricultural technology which has not yet been approached by Western civilisation. (The same holds true of our hunting methods in most cases.) So we maintain a critical consciousness and form our political systems by making sure that that relationship and the critical consciousness of it continue. We do this through our 'mythology', our festivals and celebrations, even by our social family

structure. We formalise it and ritualise it in a non-static way. The ramifications of this process are what is translated into English as our 'religion' or 'spiritualism'.

Moreover, there are two important differences between our 'religion' and Western religions. Firstly, ours is not escapist — it is totally opposite to escapism, in that it is in constant reference to the 'place' (specific piece of earth) where we live, the production of that place, and to our own political system formed therein. For example, the Cherokee turtle dance involves rattles made of turtle shells. This is not because we don't have anything else with which to make rattles, but because turtle shells are a *direct* and *literal* link to the concepts conveyed by the dance. The dance itself is not 'superstitious'; we are not asking a separate god or spirit to make something happen. We are, by the whole of the dance, attempting to 'tune ourselves in' to certain ongoing processes of our environment which we must know about in a critical and non-exploitative way if we are to maintain our lives in an acceptable fashion. We use the turtle, an animal of our land, as a direct symbol of certain concepts because we see turtles every day doing things that are to us like those concepts. Of course, there is a mythology (which, remember, does *not* mean something false) built around the turtle dance which involves many 'spiritual' beings. But we do not see those in the same way that the Christian church sees angels, Jesus, the holy spirit, etc — they do not 'save' or control us. (Once again, alienated young — or even old — Indians who are trying to regain what is lost will interpret and speak of such things so that Indian spiritualism sounds like some transmuted and exotic fundamentalist Christianity, and they will use it as an escape and ego-booster.)

The turtle dance ceremony is done on the earth, on the ground; which is to say that it is not a ritual in the usual sense of the word. The ceremony is a direct *connection* to the real things and processes of our world. Whereas Christianity and other Western religions deliberately put a distance between humans and their world, our ceremonies exist to take away that distance. We are more in the world than other peoples ('closer to nature' in the romantic idiom) because our system makes us more critically aware of the world. Does that make us mystics?

There are some recent developments which are sometimes good, sometimes bad. Today we often cannot obtain turtle shells so we use the tin cans in which our government surplus food comes. This is an example of our dynamism and willingness to use what is at hand. But at times, or in time, it can objectify and distance the ceremony

into a 'souvenir', and so turn it into a religion. Indians in cities will use a local YMCA hall in which to hold a dance, instead of dancing on the earth, so that they can maintain their culture. Again, that can be good, or it can make our dances lose their real meaning and importance and so serve to *lose* our culture.

The second difference is that our 'religion' is not in the hands of the State, partly because it cannot be separated from the rest of our activities, and partly because we have no 'State' distinct from the people.

In the system described above there is an overriding value that is also a main ingredient in our 'spiritualism'. We apply the same critical consciousness that I have been speaking about to a concept of what I will call the 'quality' of things: the quality of actions, changes, systems, and so on. We don't accept ideas of 'development' or 'economic growth' unless we can clearly see both the long-range and short-range benefits they will provide to *human beings*. Benefit to some abstract notion of 'society' or even 'the masses' is not within our framework of understanding. We might also call this value the 'spirit of things'. The concept enables us to choose. We accept telephones. We do not accept DDT or napalm.

Our colonisers interpret our 'spirituality' and 'religion' in ways that serve their interests, and these have no connection to our realities. Except — the US government and its tool the church are in charge of our 'formal' education. They teach many of our children their version of our spiritualism. The children who have no strong ties with traditional people who can counteract that romanticism *sometimes* come to accept it. Some of these children grow up to be those confused leaders I spoke of earlier. More confusion then sets in, and the real genius of our culture is seen as simple-minded escapism.

In reality, our 'spiritual' values fit very well into Marxist-Leninist thought, and can enhance and further it, just as did the PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independencia da Guiné e Cabo Verde), Nkrumah's pan-Africanism, and the Cuban revolutionaries. What is called our spiritualism and our religion can serve as a liberation force not only for us but for other people in the world.

I have not attempted to describe every aspect of our 'spiritualism', or to present it as some perfect system. We are not missionaries. But it is only natural that we have figured out some things over our long and unique history that other people have not.

Marxists use the term 'materialist' in one way and the US society as a whole uses the term in another way. Many people in the US and

Europe, for example, criticise 'modern society' for being 'too materialistic', by which they mean that it is a consumer society. Except that most Indians neither use nor define the word 'materialistic', we would say that such a society is extremely non-materialistic. US society abstracts. Objects are not seen as themselves, but are abstracted as symbols. A monetary and/or status value is the only value objects can have in that society. Thus a set of car wrenches are not valued because one can use them to build a car which will be valuable for getting from one place to another. The wrench set is valued because one uses them in the 'trade'. They are tools for making money at the 'trade' of working in the corporation's auto-plant. Money is valued as a tool for obtaining status and security in an alienating system that finally denies *any* status and security so that most people will keep reaching for it. The car is also used in the same way, and not as an object for getting from one place to another. Clothes are not valued because they are well-made to perform their function and are pleasing to look at, but for their status value. One is not *able* to consider clothes outside the fashion/identity aspect of status.

So objects, the *things* that make and sustain our lives (and even food is abstracted) are made to seem to not be objects. One is supposed to use them only to transcend them, and the ultimate result, the ultimate alienation, is that one is made to abstract the 'object' of one's own body, one's self. To transcend 'the flesh' is a Christian and American concept. Our goal is supposed to be to use television sets, cars, tools, food, clothes, houses, as a ladder to escape — to get to heaven. But the heaven is supposed to be right here, not on Earth but in an abstraction. It is supposed to be in a 'neighbourhood' or city, or state, or nation, which is not really conceived or defined as a geographical area of the Earth. It is only a 'political' area, an area of thought.

We would define and condemn that system as a 'spiritual' system in that it denies real materialism. It denies materialism so that it can exploit human beings. It denies the real places and things of human life.

Dissatisfied mystics in the US (whether they are Christians, yoga-freaks, or drug-freaks, etc) wind up using variations of that same system which they call materialistic.

Dissatisfied 'environmentalists' want to 'save' certain areas of the Earth for 'aesthetic' reasons not because those areas are good in themselves as part of the Earth that sustains life. We are supposed to *think* about those regions, we are not supposed to be *in* them. If

a person has saved enough money to be able to afford the status of a vacation, he can take his vacation in a national park. There he can hike, eat sandwiches, and aesthetically 'enjoy' the scenery. He is not allowed to be actually *in* that region; he is kind of hiking along on top of it. It is to be considered the same as a good painting or, finally, a good TV show, only in 3D.

This is also a 'spiritualism', and also denies the reality of things. Such systems deny people the *possibility* of understanding or knowing the reality of things. People gather more and more objects, but are not able to value them for what they are, nor for their intrinsic worth.

The concepts I am describing here are difficult to communicate because of limitations of the English language itself and the nature of our colonial English. It may seem contradictory to some people that a writer who is defending Indian traditionalism is also denying its 'spiritualism'. Someone might object, "What about the ghost dance?" OK!: the basic concept of the ghost dance phenomenon of the 1890s was *unity* of all Indians at a time when it seemed we would be totally destroyed. From our past population of millions we were, in the 1890s, reduced to a destitute and desperate 300,000 total population in the US. We knew that if anyone even came close to a weapon he or she would be killed by the colonial forces, yet we knew that we needed the hope and courage of unity to be able to survive at all. Did people really believe Wovoka, the founder of the ghost dance, when he said that the dance would roll back the invaders and that the buffalo would return? Personally, I take his words as prophetic metaphor, or parable. I don't know how each individual understood those words in Wovoka's time. I do know, however, that twenty years earlier many of those same people had looked upon Tatanka Iotanka as their spiritual leader. In the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Tatanka Iotanka, as spiritual leader, went to a special place and did ceremonies for the good of his people. But the people themselves did not sit under a tree and pray with Tatanka Iotanka; they went down and *wiped out* Custer's army. Nor did Tatanka Iotanka at any time say to them, "Let's go away and pray." He admonished everyone to organise and fight as hard as they could. *That* is one of our spiritual traditions.

Marxists do not have to feel embarrassed by our 'spiritualism', nor do they have to become liberals and say, "Well, the Indians seem to need it right now, so it can be accommodated." Our 'spiritualism', which is *not* spiritualism, will be an integral part of our Marxism. This will *not* necessitate anything like a 're-interpretation' of Marxism on our part, or any other liberal, reformist ideas. But it will mean

that Marxists in this country can no longer accept European Marxist thought as though it were holy dogma to be dropped down onto other peoples like a fishnet.

In our 'spiritual' system we have come to know that human beings, to be fully human, must be integrated into society. We've also found out that society is nothing without *personalised* human beings. Our culture denies the concept of 'masses' because it carries a connotation of depersonalisation. Our culture also denies the concept of an 'individualistic' society. 'Individual' carries a connotation of objectification of persons. A person is a person, not an 'individual'. One ant in an ant hill is an 'individual'. Human beings are persons, and that is *not* the same as 'individuals'.

This is an extremely important point. A person in US society who thinks of himself as, or wishes himself to be, an individual, will always be trying to prove/achieve his individualness. He will try desperately to be 'different' from others in his society (while making sure that his 'difference' is socially acceptable to his peer-group). What he is doing is volunteering to participate in his own alienation, his own victimisation. It seems to us that the concept of 'masses' is just the other side of that same coin.

It is our 'spiritualism' that allows us to know that we exist only as human persons, and that our only way to be human persons is through our society. "Our way of being human is to be Indian, and that is our *only* way." But we have no culture, no society, if it is not a society of persons. Our communism depends upon persons and our personhood depends upon our communism. We will not compromise on this concept; and there is no friction between this concept and Marxism.

Making Thoughts Match Actions

There are about a dozen American Indians in the US today who say they are Marxist-Leninists. There are quite a few more who are in Marxist study groups. But the very large majority are, to differing degrees, verbally 'anti-communist' whilst their actions are communistic. But we need to be able to use the tools of Marxism-Leninism if we are to see effectively and fight our enemy. I do not believe that we have time to 'let nature take its course', or to have that kind of liberal 'faith in the people' which means escaping one's own responsibility for leadership and action.

Disorganisation, lack of perspective and clarity, and everyone 'doing their own thing' are American phenomena which are destructive to our struggle. Lack of strategic unity plays right into the hands

of the enemy. A Marxist-Leninist analysis of the detailed realities of our situation, I believe, is the only way to combat such phenomena. The greatest weakness of the American Indian struggle is our inability to analyse properly the enemy's make-up, weapons and tactics, and to figure out how to use them against him. That weakness, of course, is a direct result of, and is part of, our oppression, just as alcoholism is part of our oppression. So it cannot be singled out and dealt with through 'special programmes'.

Progressive people, Indian or non-Indian, who take our struggle as theirs must have a commitment to see the particulars and take responsibility to engage themselves and others in a *battle* that will further changes. I have spoken repeatedly in this paper about 'real situations', 'details', and 'particular situations', because I am addressing what I have perceived as a serious weakness in the white American left.

A real situation: American Indians as a whole are suspicious of the English language, especially when white people speak it. Rightly so, because we have been deceived by that language. We are also suspicious of non-Indians or even Indians educated and articulate in the white society, who come to us with new plans and new answers. All of the new plans and answers over the past 200 years have been disastrous to us.

We are further suspicious of the specialised vocabulary associated with Marxism, socialism, communism. This is because we know of those things only by three media: the establishment press (not *just* the *New York Times*, but *also* the *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*); schools and churches (not *just* Centerville High and the First Methodist Church, but *also* the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school and the missionary church on the reservation); and the white leftist Marxist 'missionaries' that I criticised at the beginning of this paper.

These suspicions are well-founded, but they are a sizeable object to be overcome. I repeat, it is not for our few Marxists to overcome them; it is for all of us together to join the struggle that is *already* effecting changes — the struggle of the Indian people as a whole. And yet, neither am I willing to say that we 'play it cool' and so let the government continue its indoctrination unchallenged. I am not going to suggest facile 'solutions' to this problem because it does not make sense for one person to come up with solutions. We should commit ourselves to work, Indians and other Third World people in the US, and everyone whose goal is liberation, not as one nebulous mass nor as divided groups which cannot communicate with each other. Now is the time when we must begin the process of coming together as

the peoples we are. No one group of us can be the student or the teacher of revolution, only the *struggle* — in unity, clarity, and commitment — can teach.

1974

This paper is an edited version of the original which was written in 1974 as an internal study paper for the Euro-American members of the Native American Support Committee (NASC). The FBI altered parts of the paper and distributed their version of it in an attempt to discredit the author. It was re-circulated in its original form in 1977.

Mr Catlin and Mr Rockefeller Tame the Wilderness

When the Europeans first came to North America they found an untamed wilderness inhabited only by a few primitive but noble savages. Those savages, called Indians, lived in nature almost like animals. They melted away when confronted by civilisation, technology, and progress.

Many people in the United States would not find too much wrong with the above paragraph. The truth, I think, will surprise most people: When Columbus first landed in the 'New World' there were between twenty and thirty-five *million* people living in what is now the US (around one hundred million in the whole North American continent). Those people had been living there for at least 70,000 years, which is to say, longer than people have inhabited Western Europe. They were divided into nations, most of which had basically farming cultures which developed most of the foods that we eat today. The standard of living of the average American Indian was much higher and more advanced than that of the average European until well into the nineteenth century. For example, there were five different methods of chemical (herbal) birth-control for women; there were no bosses, jails or poor people, and no unemployment. Medicine was in general more highly developed than it was in Europe, as were agriculture and political systems.

But the myths which portray us as primitive savages were necessary for the purpose of making the European immigrants do the dirty work of 'Western Expansion' (colonisation and genocide) for the rich landowners and land speculators of US history. By the time the original thirteen colonies were formed, all of the arable land in them was owned by a tiny minority of landowners, so that new immigrants were forced to move further west. The land further west, however, belonged to other people — Indians.

Art, from 'high art' to illustrations in 'penny-dreadful' novels, was



George Catlin, *Prairie Meadows Burning*, 1832; oil on canvas, 11 x 14½ in.



Francis Blackbear Bosin, *Prairie Fire*, c 1975; oil on canvas

one of the major tools the bosses used to further the mythology they invented to fool the people into believing that the 'savage' Indians had no right to the land. That continues today in Hollywood films. The mythology is so well-developed that the essence of 'Americanism' is the concept of taming the wilderness and conquering the frontier, which means genocide to Indians. Who is served by such imperialistic dreams? The majority of those immigrants who were forced west did not benefit from the land they took. Their descendants do not benefit now. The good land and the resources are still in the hands of a small minority whose power rests partly in their ability to maintain the myths their forefathers invented — in their ability to fool people.

George Catlin is well-known as a portrayer of Indians. One of his paintings in Mr Rockefeller's bicentennial advertisement for the American myth shows a group of plains Indians fleeing a prairie fire. The clear message is that those poor Indians were enslaved to the whims of nature, unlike civilised folk. The subliminal message is that Europeans would sweep the continent and relentlessly drive all others out.

Most of Catlin's Indian paintings are portraits of Indian men looking stoical. He had the idea, as many did, that we were 'vanishing' and he wanted to record some of our noble savage faces. Thus he is vaguely known as a friend of the Indians. (As it turned out we didn't vanish and we're still fighting.) Imagine a German painter during the Third Reich painting the noble faces of condemned Jews for the edification and admiration of Europe!

But it is fitting that the Rockefellers have collected Catlin's work. The history of that family is also a history of oppression of Indians, and the Rockefellers need to keep up their own silly version of US history by every means possible. The first source of Rockefeller money is oil. The oil industry began in Oklahoma, the territory where many Indian nations were crowded onto barren tracts of land, and where poor white farmers, forced to move from the deep South by unbearable economic conditions, were once again placed in confrontation with Indians at the turn of this century. (In the 1920s and '30s they were forced further west again, into California.)

The oil companies stole land that legally and morally belonged to Indians. They did it by fraud, terror and murder, just as they are now doing it in New Mexico, South Dakota and Montana. Indian people never got one dime for their oil. We get poorer, Mr Rockefeller gets richer, and some artists continue to glorify that ugly history.

Collections of 'American Art' seldom show works by American Indians. The assumption is that we produce anthropological artefacts — art is made by white people. According to what 'art' means today

that is true, in that Indians do not use art as a consumer product or to enhance the status of a class of people.

The Kiowa artist Blackbear Bosin has repainted George Catlin's prairie fire scene from an Indian interpretation. In Bosin's painting the fire takes on real importance but is not shown as an uncontrollable force. Bosin portrays the Indian sense of wonder and admiration at the forces of nature. The humans are not helpless before it; neither are they the same as, nor isolated from, the other animals. The Indian riders are kin to the fire in the sky and kin to the antelope. The painting gives a sense of a terrible yet beautiful dance wherein even opposing forces can be tuned together by human action.

That sense of showing the order of seemingly un-ordered events, and using the tensions of those events, can be seen in all Indian art. In one 19th century Crow Indian painting, a successful rout of an invading army of the US government gives design and order to an outwardly chaotic scene. The Crow are victorious in that battle, which may be taken as prophecy, Mr Rockefeller.

1976

United Nations Conference on Indians

This September (1977) there will be a conference on American Indians (of North and South America) in the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. For the first time in the history of the United Nations, Indian people will be speaking about their own affairs to the UN, in the UN.

Indian leaders from the US, Canada, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Peru, Guatemala and other countries will speak before an audience of UN officials and representatives from other countries and from international organisations.

It is a very important conference to all Indian people, and what we do there can affect our own affairs for a long time. A lot of people have been asking questions about it, and we want as many people to participate as possible, so here are some of the questions and explanations.

What will this UN conference do for us?

We want to get the United Nations, and countries of the world, on our side on issues of treaty rights and sovereignty so that we can begin to negotiate with the US on a more equal basis. We want the United Nations to take official action against US colonisation and treaty-breaking. For the UN to do that, countries in the UN have to push for it, and they have to help us in other ways, such as financial and political support. But right now it is hard for countries to do any of those things because the US controls the world economy, and it has a lot of guns.

So the conference is a piece of a bigger strategy. We will bring documentation about our lives and the US activities against us. The conference committee will listen to us and publish a record of the meetings, including the facts that we bring to the conference. It will also come out with resolutions, which will be sent to all parts of the

United Nations and all members of the United Nations. Then countries and branches of the UN can start talking about and pushing those resolutions in the UN. The conference will start a ball rolling.

Who exactly is sponsoring it?

There are three ways to be connected to the United Nations; the first is membership. Membership is granted to countries that the UN recognises as independent countries. The second is observer status. The UN grants observer status to new countries, like Angola, which have applied for membership, and to liberation movements which look like they are winning something and/or which have the political backing from many countries. (AIM might apply for observer status in the future.) The third is consultative status. That is given to international organisations which can provide information to the UN about some part of the world or something that the UN might have to take action on.

The organisations that have consultative status are usually called by a shorthand name, 'NGOs', which just means non-governmental organisations with consultative status. There are about two thousand of these organisations, which are divided into committees and sub-committees.

At the Geneva headquarters of the UN the NGOs have the NGO Committee on Human Rights. This has a sub-committee called the Sub-committee on Racism and De-colonisation. It is this Sub-committee which is holding the conference.

Why did that Sub-committee decide to hold a conference on Indians?

Because we asked it to at its April 1976 meeting. Before we asked it to, we talked to many of the organisations that sit on the committee and got them on our side. That has been a part of our work at the UN for the past couple of years. (Things move slowly at the UN.)

Who is in charge?

The Sub-committee voted unanimously that the Treaty Council would have complete responsibility for co-ordinating the conference; finding the right Indian people to speak from all countries, getting together the documentation, and working out the agenda of the conference. We immediately set up a planning group of members of the Sub-committee. Then in the US and Canada we invited the Institute for the Development of Indian Law to work with us on every aspect of

the conference. We also invited the National Indian Youth Council to participate, and called together a task force of many Indian people — Russell Means, Clyde Bellecourt, John Trudell, Marie Sanchez, Madonna Gilbert, Pat Ballenger and many others — to start getting together the information for the documentation.

Who will participate in the conference?

The conference is going to be held at the UN in Geneva. We've heard that some folks have already bought plane tickets to Geneva. There can be no more than 25 to 35 Indian participants for the whole hemisphere itself. That is the rule the committee made at the outset for some very good reasons. First, we need to state our case with a clear voice. We couldn't do that with dozens of speakers. The hall we have reserved for the conference holds a maximum of three hundred people. We are negotiating for a larger hall but whether we get it or not, we don't want to fill up the place with ourselves — that would defeat the purpose. There are more than 250 members in the UN, and we want them all to send observers to the conference. We also want the NGO's to send observers.

It is much more important for Indian people to participate by helping get the documentation together than to try to show up in Geneva. To make the conference work we need people to be gathering information in three areas: 1) Legal Affairs. This includes all sorts of things, like every time the cops have hassled you or your family, or what effects the Indian Reorganization Act or PL 280* or treaty violations have on your reservation. 2) Economic Affairs. This includes information about natural resources on your res, BIA land leases, job and employment, factories and plants on your res. 3) Social Affairs. This includes education, health (including sterilisation), BIA regulations, etc. What we need to have documented is your own experience in all of those areas. If we can get that from a lot of people we will have the right stuff to back up our statements in the conference. If not, we are just making speeches. So please help us.

April 1977

* Public Law 280 was to give individual states jurisdiction over Indian reservations, especially with respect to arrest and criminal prosecution.

We Can Control Our Own Lands

The Treaty Council got a hate letter which was not signed. We have to think there is a reason why the author didn't sign the letter. Obviously, it was from someone who doesn't like the work the Treaty Council is doing. What this nameless letter writer said was that we are a bunch of lazy no-goods and that Indians should stop wanting welfare hand-outs and get jobs so we can save money for our better future. We, and most other Indian people, realise that these kinds of remarks are either racist or made without much thinking.

A few months ago, I heard a tribal chairman say: "Well, I don't know much about the Treaty but I know where the money comes from." Again, we have to think why he said that. Obviously, that particular chairman thinks that the money comes from the US Government when the truth is it comes from Indian resources and our land. Unfortunately, he does not know the Treaty issues and probably will not understand, at least for now, what the fight is about.

We have to ask: Why do some people, including some Indians, think that *dependence* on welfare and *independence*, for which we are fighting, are the same thing?

Here are some facts we ought to think about: most Indians today do not have jobs. On reservations, most Indians who do have jobs work for the US Government, either BIA jobs or some programme like CAP,* because that's all the work there is.

Every Indian wants to live a meaningful and productive life. That means real work at real jobs which will build our communities and our nations. We respect those people on reservations or in cities who work at whatever jobs they can find to support their families. But we condemn the US Government for forcing us into unemployment and into jobs which help keep us colonised.

* CAP was the Johnson administration's community help programme in the war on poverty, under the Office of Economic Opportunity.

We also respect those warriors who sacrifice their own personal and family needs to work for the sovereignty and liberation of our Nations, so that all Indians can lead productive lives according to the ancient and sacred visions of our people.

If we were free it would be that way. We could have ranches, farms, industry, develop resources, all in ways that would not pollute our land with poisons or our minds with competition. Clyde Warrior said it very well in 1967:

We are not free. We do not make choices. Our choices are made for us; for those of us who live on reservations these choices and decisions are made by federal administrators, bureaucrats and their yes-men, euphemistically called tribal governments. Those of us who live in non-reservation areas have our lives controlled by local white power elites. We have many rulers. They are called social workers, cops, school teachers, churches, etc, and now OEO (Office of Economic Opportunity) employees.

The local white power elites who protest the loudest against federal control are the very ones who would keep us poor in spirit and worldly goods in order to enhance their own personal and economic station in the world. We realise that to give the poor, the dispossessed, the Indians, complete freedom and responsibility is to let it become a reality not a much heard about dream and let the poor decide for once what is best for themselves.

Dependence will always mean poverty. *Independence* will mean working for real prosperity — not what the system tells us is prosperity — and that means the freedom to develop our own resources, ranches, farms, industry and jobs which are meaningful and productive in building up our communities and our Nations.

No one else can do that work for us.

June 1977

Development The People's Vision...

You can hear people talking on every reservation today about development. What does it mean? It seems to mean different things according to who is doing the talking. Almost everybody will agree that we had a pretty good life a couple of hundred years ago, and they will also agree that for this century we have suffered by being dependent on the US government. So people say development is the way to get out of that dependency and the poverty that it brings.

Up to that point everybody agrees, but then we have to start talking about realities.

Whenever a traditional Indian stands up in a tribal council meeting and starts talking about following our Indian ways someone else will say, "Well, we can't go back to four hundred years ago", as if the traditional Indian ways are impractical.

We think that Indian ways are the only practical ways for Indian people. What is practical about the way we have been forced to live in this century? Every year some part of the government comes up with new plans and programmes for the reservations, but they are never practical. Experience shows us that they never work, no matter how well done the 'studies' and the paperwork. It is the government and its bright ideas that got us into this dependency situation in the first place. The government has also convinced some people that the only two alternatives are going backwards 400 years or following government ideas.

But the people have a vision of what our lives could be like.

It is a true vision of freedom, so, of course, it is practical.

On Pine Ridge people have been talking and planning about development for a couple of years. First, they took stock of what the reservation has in the way of resources. The first resource they have is a group of committed people who want to work together. Then they did enough research to get a fair idea of the natural resources on their

reservation, and talked about which of those resources could be used for the people's needs without destroying and polluting the land.

They found that they had industrial gravel, iron, magnesium, natural gas, petroleum, coal (although strip-mining would not be allowed), possibly geothermal energy and hydroelectric energy.

But, of course, the people have no real control at this time, and no capital to begin using those resources. To let the corporations come in and take them at a rip-off price, and mess up the land in the process, would not be the answer. Under present conditions the people would never see the money anyway.

Besides, what is needed is some immediate development which the people could do right away.

Some things that are being planned and talked about concern community agricultural projects.

In and around the United Nations, scientists are now studying ecology-oriented, community-controlled development of 'natural' agriculture. That is, using the plants and animals that fit into the ecology of the area.

On Pine Ridge that would mean developing a base economy on raising buffalo and pheasants. That would be just like cattle and chickens, only cheaper, healthier and more environmentally sound. This would be coupled with community-controlled gardens and farms, basically to raise table vegetables (some of which could be canned and possibly sold), corn, buckwheat, and sunflowers. Wojapi used to be made with bone marrow, sunflower seeds and roots, and chokecherries. That dish provided much protein and all the necessary vitamins. The buffalo and pheasant could provide meat and eggs for use and sale.

Industry could be developed from that economic base. For example, some of the profits could go to starting a bone meal factory, a processing and rendering plant, a packing plant and a fertiliser plant. Then, with more profits from those plants the people could start a cannery, a moccasin and shoe factory, a buffalo robe and coat factory, even a hairpipe bone factory. At the same time, community crafts cooperatives could be developed and other community projects like auto-mechanic shops, tobacco shops, etc, all of which would serve the people while providing jobs and income.

Those plans could be carried out by the people themselves, using primarily the income from these projects to develop the next project.

Then, in a few years there would be enough income and organised communities so that the people themselves, instead of the corporations, could develop and use some of the natural resources. The

beginning of this plan today is a survival school and a community cattle project, and the Treaty Council at Pine Ridge. But the first step, of course, is organising the people to work together in the traditional way. If people get discouraged after a few months or 'fall off the wagon' that weakens the whole vision.

No real development can happen on any reservation unless it is community-controlled and involving all the people in the collective, cooperative way that worked so well for us for so many thousands of years.

That means political organising, because naturally the powers that be will fight against that kind of real development.

We can get international financial and political help for that kind of development, but only when the people are committed to working together on it, no matter what.

With that kind of development, we can be truly free, and dependent on no one but ourselves and what the earth provides.

January 1978

Trying to See Clearly

We always say that we should think positively and talk and write about the good things. I believe that, but I also believe that if we really want to win back our lands and freedom we have to see clearly, with the vision of warriors, everything that is going on. That is what our ancestors did when they fought the US Army to a standstill. They always thought strategically, and made sure their strategy did not leave out anything. Only fools do not learn from mistakes.

And we only learn from mistakes by talking and thinking about those mistakes. This is not being negative, it is just being determined — determined to win.

Of course, people who are just using our struggle for their own gain — a fat salary somewhere, a new car, or even just being known as a 'leader' — never want to learn from mistakes because they don't really want to win. Freedom for these people might make them into plain old folks instead of the big shots they think they are.

In an editorial just after the Geneva Conference I tried to say how the US is trying more than ever to confuse us and keep us disunited. A lot of times we play right into their hands without even thinking about it.

For example, in all the time we spent preparing for that conference and the years we spent building up our international network, very few people wanted to help. Instead they just complained that the New York office didn't stay in touch, as though a couple of people could stay constantly in touch with everybody in the Movement instead of vice versa.

But then after the conference everyone and his brother was jumping on the bandwagon. Now we have all sorts of people doing 'international work', some, like the two survival schools in Minneapolis/St. Paul, just to get money for their own programmes; others, like the Iroquois Confederacy, to get support for their own struggle at the expense of unity. And still others, like Celo Black Crow, just to be bigshots. Then nobody knows what each other is doing and we confuse

our international friends. We also show them that we are not unified, and lose support.

That, my friends, is not the way Custer was defeated. At National Congress of American Indian (NCAI) meetings, people always make jokes about Indian unity as though it could never happen. And you hear people say "we are our own worst enemy".

To me the US and the corporations that run it are our worst enemy, and we are not winning because we do not make the commitment as warriors to see clearly and then act for our people. We do not make that commitment because the US has very clever ways of confusing us and making sure we do *not* see clearly.

But if we face that problem straight on, we can stop it.

I want to talk about the Longest Walk from the point of view of trying to see clearly. Anyone who reads this newsletter may have noticed that we had two different articles about the Walk. The one that seemed not to support it was written by me.

I didn't support the Walk at first for two reasons: I thought the people who started it were just trying to make themselves important, which turned out to be pretty much true; and I thought it would take people's attention away from the real organising work that needs to be done on reservations just to fight some bills that had already been killed while ignoring really dangerous ones like the energy bill. That also turned out to be pretty much true.

Now, this is what I think we need to do:

1. Organise and unify ourselves on the community and reservation level. That should be around the issues of: a) People's control of their own reservation, government funds and programmes; b) Land and resources controlled by the people; c) Agricultural and economic development; and d) Commitment and discipline.
2. From that base, making a strong national organisation of the people, directly and continually accountable to the people. Not just of elders and traditional governments of warriors, or anyone else, but to *all* of the people under the leadership of the traditionals and warriors.
3. With a strong national organisation, where people do what the organisation needs them to do instead of doing whatever bright idea comes into their heads, we can fight oppression and other attacks more effectively.

4. International work from a position of strength, speaking to the world with one voice, about real demands and real issues that the international community can support.

5. Making strategic alliances with other people in this country, especially black, Chicano and white working people (even though that is not as easy as getting a few white liberals on your side). White working people are pretty racist a lot of times, but they have some power because working people are the ones who make the US run.

Some people seem content just to rock along or work in some local programme while forgetting the whole war, but I believe Russell Means when he says we have only the next few years to win or lose forever.

I can already hear some people say that in my five points I didn't even mention spiritualism. Well, I think I am probably as spiritual as those guys who go around spouting off about it all the time and not doing much work. That really bothered me about the Walk — what do they mean by a 'Spiritual Walk'? I think our religion is our business and not any business of non-Indian people. I don't think it helps 'promote understanding' or any such thing. It just gives useless hippies and other freaks a chance to cash in on our suffering.

No one ever heard Sitting Bull or Crazy Horse try to explain their religions to the whites, or make three hour speeches to non-Indians about spiritualism. Those guys just got it on, and that's what we have to do.

Maybe you don't agree with all of that, but what do you think then?

I just didn't see that in the Walk. People ignored organisation and when they reached out to non-Indians it was usually to freaks. They could have made alliances with coal miners, steel and auto workers, and farmers; instead they made alliances with hippies who just rip us off. They could have talked along the way about real issues; instead they just talked about their spiritualism and Cunningham, whose bill has been dead for months. I think some 'leaders' just used the Walk for their own ambitions and other people just jumped on the bandwagon. It's easier to demonstrate in Washington than it is to do solid work on the reservation.

Once I heard Phillip Deer talking about the Creek prophecy of people in redcoats leading our struggle. He said that that meant AIM — those red armbands. In other words, we are the people who will win our struggle, and prophecies are fulfilled only if *we* work. Movie

stars, hippies, liberals, or whatever, cannot do it. We must rely on ourselves, and that means seeing and thinking clearly, unity, organisation, commitment and discipline.

I'm sorry to be badmouthing, but I think it's time we really started looking at what we are doing.

I know that sooner or later we are going to win, but I think we can make it sooner instead of later and save a lot of suffering. There is no easy way, and no miracles, but at least we can plan and act with the clear vision of warriors for the long struggle ahead.

What did the Walk actually accomplish? Well, it got some publicity for our situation, and that is very good. But all that talk about spiritualism, and even the talk about the bills, confused the public at the same time. The Walk drained a lot of time and money that could have been better spent.

August 1978

American Indians and Carter's Human Rights Sermons

Some fairly astounding things are beginning to happen in the United Nations. The UN Human Rights Commission, with a long reputation for bureaucratic conservatism, has become progressive and active. It has stated clearly that for the United Nations human rights must be seen basically as the rights of peoples to self-determination. Highest on the agenda of the Human Rights Commission are the issues of South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Palestine. Just below those in priority are the issues of Chile and other repressive South American countries, and a good deal of time is taken up with considerations about the impact of economic and military aid to those right-wing dictatorships on the people and their human rights.

The US is beginning to feel distinctly uncomfortable around the Human Rights Commission, after its loud and hypocritical noise about human rights.

But in May of 1978 the UN Economic and Social Council authorised the Human Rights Commission, through its Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, to begin work on a new body of "principles for the protection of all persons under any form of detention or imprisonment".

Compared to most countries, the US has an extremely high prison population and a particularly high percentage of non-white prisoners. At the same time, as we all know, US prisons are over-crowded.

Let us look at just a few of the principles being proposed, and it will be clear what the US is up against:

Principle 1

All persons under any form of detention or imprisonment shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

Principle 2

Any form of detention or imprisonment and all measures affecting the human rights of a person under any form of detention or imprisonment shall be ordered by or be under the effective control of a judicial or other authority under the law whose status and tenure should afford the strongest possible guarantees of competence, impartiality and independence, hereinafter referred to as a "judicial or other authority".

Principle 3

1 These Principles shall be applied to all persons without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion or religious belief, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

2 Measures applied under the law and solely designed to protect the rights and special status of children, young or aged persons, pregnant women, nursing mothers and sick or handicapped persons shall not be deemed to be discriminatory, subject to review by a judicial or other authority.

Principle 4

No person under any form of detention imprisonment shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. No circumstance whatever may be invoked as a justification for torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Principle 5

If a detained or imprisoned person so requests, he shall as far as possible be kept in a place of detention reasonably near his usual place of residence, so as to facilitate visits from members of his family.

That first simple principle is continually violated by the US, as is so clearly shown by the hearings on the Texas prison system as only one of hundreds of examples.

Most readers are probably sufficiently aware of US prison conditions that I will not have to explain how the US is violating the other principles. What we should look at instead is how the US is trying to set up a smokescreen in defence.

The International Indian Treaty Council, of which I am the UN representative, is an organisation within the American Indian Movement (AIM). It has consultative status with the United Nations and so is able to address the various commissions of the UN and to present documentation.

Beginning in August of 1977 the Treaty Council has submitted information about US prisons to both the Human Rights Commission and its Sub-commission on Minorities.

Naturally, our primary concern is American Indians in prison. As we stated to the Human Rights Commission:

Indians in the US are the poorest sector of the population. Their arrest rate is three times higher than that of American blacks and ten times that of whites. American Indians are given longer sentences for the same crimes than either blacks or whites, and once in prison they are paroled less often than blacks or whites. Studies show that the situation has grown more severe since the Wounded Knee occupation in 1973. Indians in prison suffer more cultural deprivation and alienation than other prisoners...

But in that same statement we exposed to the UN the situation at the US penitentiary at Marion, Illinois. We used information provided by the Marion Brothers Collective in that instance, and have at other times brought up the situation of blacks and Chicanos in prison. The conditions are serious enough, and the times ripe enough, that we must stand together, and the Treaty Council is beginning to work with several black organisations around prisoners and UN strategies.

Getting back to the US smokescreen, in February/March of 1978 the UN Human Rights Commission had a full session in Geneva. The US had a seven member delegation, which had as its good friends during the session two army officers from Chile, the Israeli delegation, and other such upstanding supporters of human rights.

In our first statement during that meeting the Treaty Council said in part:

The US has obtained its continental territory primarily through treaty negotiations with American Indian nations. The fact that the US entered into treaty relations with the Indian nations is *de facto* recognition by the US that those nations are indeed nations, capable of acting as nations. The treaties themselves should be considered as part of the body of international law. The US itself upholds the treaties through its constitution and through Supreme Court decisions, but that is in

a strictly legal sense and is not carried out in practice. At no time has the US legally claimed as its territory the territory of the Indian nations as agreed upon in treaties. Instead it has unilaterally appointed its Bureau of Indian Affairs as the 'trustee' of Indian territories. Indian people have rejected that trust status imposed by an aggressor nation, and have sought redress in US courts and Congress. Indian nations approached the League of Nations in 1926 concerning that and other US violations of their rights, and first approached the United Nations in 1947. The effects of that illegal trust status upon the lives of Indian people has been and continues to be tragic. By conservative estimates anthropologists say that, before Columbus, there were some twelve million people living in what is now the continental US. Today the Indian population is down to one million, and the US government has, over the past five years, sterilised at least 30% of Indian women.

There are almost three hundred reservations in the US that are under the control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which claims to be the 'trustee' of Indian land. Under this trusteeship, most of our land is leased to white ranchers or to corporations, so that we do not have the use of it. For the past ten years we have been losing our remaining land at the rate of 45,000 acres a year. These conditions cause extreme poverty and alienation. More than 75% of all Indians in the United States suffer from malnutrition and related diseases. One in every three Indian infants die in the first six months after birth. The average life span of an Indian male is 44 years compared to the US national average of 67 years.

Most Indians in the US are unskilled labourers, and many work for less than one-half the legal minimum wage under government subsidised 'trainee' programmes. As soon as their 'training' is over they are fired and new 'trainees' are hired. Average education for Indian people is five years. Most schools on reservations are directly controlled by the US government or by the churches. In all cases, these schools are extremely sub-standard. In 1972 the average annual income of an American citizen was \$4000. In 1975 it was almost \$6000. But for Indians in the same country, the average annual income in 1972 was less than \$1,000, in other words, about 5 times less than the national average. In 1975 the Indian average annual income had not reached \$2,000. Indian unemployment ranges from an average of 70% to 90% in the winter months. This, of course, causes in its turn severe alienation and, frequently, alcoholism.

The poverty and unemployment of Indian people must be seen as a deliberate act on the part of the US government and the large corporations. For example, the Pine Ridge reservation is one of the

poorest and also one of the largest in the country, yet millions of dollars are made each year by white ranchers on the reservation to whom the government has leased 90% of the available land. The Indians themselves could be raising cattle on their own land, but the government does not allow it. Moreover, there is a gold mine on the land which is legally part of the reservation which has mined literally billions of dollars of gold over the years. The mine is 'owned' by the William Randolph Hearst Corporation, which has never paid a cent to the Sioux people (according to the Treaty of 1868, one half of the minerals mined goes to the people). Instead Indians who are serving time in prison are made to work in the mine.

Indian reservations are rich in natural resources, which are being stolen. According to a report in 1975 by the Federal Energy Administration, "over 2.7 billion dollars of oil and gas; 187 million dollars of coal; 349 million dollars of uranium have been produced from Indian lands". In recent years, over 434 million dollars of lead, zinc, phosphate, copper and limestone. Why are we not at least paid a fair price for these resources which are legally ours?

In many cases, such as the Crow and Cheyenne reservations in Montana, the coal is to be strip-mined even though the government has admitted that the lands cannot be restored afterward, because of the lack of adequate rainfall for reclamation. Where will the Cheyenne go when their land is destroyed by Standard Oil? The answer given by the US statistics in this paper is clear: the government intends for Indians to disappear through institutionalised and systematic genocide.

The mass removal of one nation's children from their homes and cultural heritage by another nation — to be reared in the homes of the second nation — is genocide, as defined by the United Nations Convention on Genocide. The US, which conspicuously did not endorse this convention, pursues a systematic policy of child stealing against Native American nations. This child stealing is carried out in mainly two ways: removing Native children from their homes and putting them up for adoption or in foster homes, and by placing them in white-run boarding schools removed from their communities. Surveys show that from 25-35% of all Indian children under 18 are removed from their homes; 85% of these children are placed in non-Indian homes.

There is a very real sense in which all Indian people in prison can be considered political prisoners in the United States. In few cases are they tried by a jury of their peers or according to their own laws and customs. Blatant racial discrimination is evident when one compares the percentages of other races and nationalities imprisoned,

length of sentences of non-Indians, availability of parole and other standards.

Since 1973, US government repression of Indian people and of organisations such as AIM has reached enormous proportions. The AIM has estimated that more than one thousand Indians have been killed by US forces in South Dakota alone.

The situation grows worse, yet the only response of the US government has been its statement about the so-called 'Indian Self-determination and Educational Assistance Act', which does nothing but further entrench the system of colonisation. No lands are returned under the act, and the US maintains its economically and militarily-enforced veto power over any decisions Indian people might take, and it maintains its illegal 'trusteeship'. Self-determination cannot be realised for Indian people by legislative acts on the part of the very government which is oppressing them. Self-determination and human rights for Indian people in the US could easily be achieved if the US would honour its treaty obligations.

Incredibly, the US delegation to the UN Human Rights Commission spoke later in response, saying that it agreed with what we had said but that at least these things can be spoken freely about in the US and that there were no travel restrictions on me or on other Americans. That is like saying that the tortured are free to scream.

Later, a member of the US delegation told me that if our statement had called for any action on the part of the UN they (the US) would have fought it. We are free to scream.

Still later, immediately after the US had made what must have been the most cynical and hypocritical statement in the history of the Human Rights Commission — extolling its own virtues, condemning communists, and claiming that the situation in Chile was improving — the Treaty Council made another statement which did call for action on the part of the US. This was the statement about Indian prisoners quoted earlier. It ended:

We believe that it would be an important advance in the area of human rights of prisoners for the US to provide detailed information of its prison policies and conditions to the UN Human Rights Commission.

That time there was no response from the United States at all. The next human rights meeting was a meeting of the Sub-commission on Minorities, where the principles for prisoners' rights were being deliberated.

The US contribution to that meeting was a paper about the

violations of human rights in Kampuchea (Cambodia). The introduction to the paper said in part: "We would hope the Government of Democratic Kampuchea would agree to an inquiry on its territory by a neutral, responsible body."

Would the US agree to a UN inquiry, on its territory, about US prison conditions? Absolutely not. But not only because of the massive atrocities and tragedy that such an inquiry would expose to the world.

The full story is more complex. In 1975, Peru hosted a Conference of Foreign Ministers of Non-Aligned States (at which a member of our organisation was present). It was at that conference that a plan for a 'New Economic Order' in the world was formally put forward. Since that time the New Economic Order has become one of the three major concerns of the UN, the other two being disarmament and Human Rights — an inseparable triad.

All Third World countries, socialist countries, and even some Western European Countries are pushing this New Economic Order, which is clearly anti-imperialist in nature. The US, being at present top dog of the imperialist countries, is fighting it tooth and nail.

The Carter administration's 'Human Rights Campaign' must be seen in that context. At every level of the US government, but especially around the UN, a new and more sophisticated cold war is being propagated, as a propagandistic aggression against economic changes in favour of self-determination. The Carter administration is saying that the peoples' aspirations for self-determination and true human rights are nothing but a plot by the terrible communists, who are always putting people in prison.

To expose the situation of prisons and prisoners in the US would be to expose the entire sordid structure of this country. Why are so many people in prison in the US? Who are they? They are primarily poor people, with an unjustifiably high percentage of non-white poor people.

Statistics will prove to the UN that the economic system of the US does not work for the people, and that it is maintained only by brutal repression. Statistics about Indians in prison will prove that the US, in response to losing some of its cheap Third World resources, is committing genocide against American Indians for the purpose of stealing their resources.

Sooner or later, Jimmy Carter's 'Human Rights' strategies must backfire, just as so many other imperialistic strategies must.

An Open Letter

on Recent Developments in the American Indian Movement/International Indian Treaty Council

In the summer of 1979 I resigned as Director of the International Indian Treaty Council. At the same time Paul Smith, editor of the *Treaty Council News* and head of the San Francisco office of the Treaty Council, also left his position. The reasons were political.

In this paper we want to explain those reasons, as a responsibility to Indian people and our allies. People have asked us for some sort of statement, and we apologise for hesitating so long. We looked for the best way to say things clearly and not to be needlessly disruptive. The first attempts we made were too long, and had too many details about personalities, which we thought was necessary since we did not want to make statements or charges without backing them up with facts and examples. Our hope is that this effort explains our reasons in a clear and factual way, without being too long and confusing. We cannot possibly write in an open letter every detail that may be important. We know we have left out many things in a ten-year history, but our purpose is only to make an initial statement. We hope this effort will help start a serious discussion on some of the questions we raise here.

People have asked us if by leaving the Treaty Council we have also left the American Indian Movement. We can only answer honestly that there is no AIM to leave. We feel that AIM/Treaty Council is heavily infiltrated by US government agents, and that the directions and policies of both organisations serve the interests of the government and the energy corporations instead of serving the interests of Indian people. We believe that the last part of that statement is true mostly because it is government agents who are the 'behind the scenes' leaders of the Movement at this time. But we also feel it is true partly due to political confusion among the regular membership of the Movement.

The divisiveness that had always been a problem increased dramatically in the spring of 1979. Facing personal and political attacks (including a red-baiting campaign) from most of the Movement's leadership, resignation was the only choice. This was especially unfortunate since the Treaty Council had, only a few months before, begun a process that would have considerably shaken the US. In February 1979, we took part in meetings of the United Nations Human Rights Commission as usual. But at that time we got a solid commitment from them that if we brought our case to the sub-committee meeting in August a resolution in our favour would result, and be carried into a resolution and study by the full committee the following February (1980). At that same meeting in 1979 several countries spoke on our behalf and called for action, including Cuba, Syria and others. For the first time, the US was forced to respond officially, not once, but three times to Indian charges in a meeting of the United Nations. But no one had even come close to achieving UN action or resolution on a matter inside the US. The US was so worried at the time that it sent Allard Lowenstein as a special envoy to refute our charges. By June, I was so isolated inside the Movement that my only choice was to leave. After I left, this entire effort fell apart.

One of the main failures of AIM was the inability of our leadership, from top to bottom, to face squarely our weaknesses and our failures. Every oppressed people fighting for liberation must overcome tremendous obstacles to build organisations that can advance the struggle. Those obstacles include both internal weaknesses, partly due to oppression itself, as well as direct repression and infiltration by government forces. In the US, we collectively face a political backwardness because of the strength of our enemy, that can only be overcome by a careful political analysis of our situation and an objective summation of our Movement's successes and failures.

This paper is an attempt to explain what went right and what went wrong with the American Indian Movement in the 1970s. Paul and I made our share of mistakes, of course. And we still feel that many people who continue to support AIM are committed, sincere fighters whose determination to make a better life for Indian people is beyond any question. Even though we profoundly disagree with their current direction, we respect their efforts. But the hard truths must be faced, by all of us, because only in this way can we overcome our weaknesses.

The problems that AIM/Treaty Council faced (and didn't face) we believe are similar to those that other organisations in other

movements have had to face. In AIM/Treaty Council, elements that stand in opposition to the most basic goals of the Movement have taken control. We hope that by explaining how this happened all progressive forces can learn from the experience.

The Indian Movement 1945-1969

The period from the Second World War to the present has two major characteristics for Indian people: firstly, on the reservations the federal government has steadily intensified its efforts to promote and entrench the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) 'tribal governments' (or governments which are almost the same thing and serve a similar purpose on those reservations which were able to resist the IRA). In the classic Third World model, this has set up a 'puppet' group of élites on reservations, nationwide. Until recently this group was completely subservient to the federal government simply because of the structure of the IRA, and even though some members have had integrity, others have been completely bought, while others still are so alienated that they do not know their own hearts.

As this group of puppets grew in size and power, the increasing majority of Indian people on reservations became poorer and more powerless. This caused a fight between what became known as the 'traditionals' (which is actually the majority led by the real pre-IRA leadership) against the minority élite, who are known by their government label, the 'progressives'.

The second characteristic is an increasing number of Indian people living away from the reservations, usually in cities and usually against their will. The IRA, child-snatching, and the growing poverty on reservations are the three main reasons for this. It has set up a group of militant young Indians who are in many ways alienated from their roots (and in many other ways not alienated) and yet who are less isolated from the rest of the world than the reservation Indians.

At every point Indian people have resisted in every way possible. Within the National Congress of American Indians (begun in 1948), which was until recently the government-sanctioned and supported organisation of the élite, there has been a constant battle between those with some integrity and those who were bought. The National Indian Youth Council, begun in 1961, was a result of the college educated, younger members of the élite resisting the old guard. At the same time, the majority back on the reservation were resisting every decision and every organisation of the élite, but in a necessarily fragmented way. The reservations themselves are set up for the purpose of fragmentation and isolation.

Beginning in 1948 the Iroquois Confederacy of New York State were able to resist both the IRA and its puppet élite to a large degree, and in the most organised way of any Indian group at that time. That was possible because they were Eastern Indians without a potentially viable economy, and therefore no real threat to the US. The US could afford to be tolerant of the Iroquois. For decades the Iroquois (that is, the Mohawk, Seneca, Tuscarora, Oneida and Cayuga) have been subject to a very thorough romanticism, as have other small groups of Indians, such as the Hopi in the south-west. This has had a serious effect on them because it is flattering and because they have no economic base for their own culture. Many of the Iroquois attitudes, then, come from other people's definitions, instead of their own definitions of themselves. These outside definitions, needless to say, come from the white bourgeoisie.

But the Iroquois have been brave and consistent in demanding Indian sovereignty. In the 1950s and '60s Iroquois traditionals travelled the US promoting traditional Indian culture (as they saw it) and urging people to resist the IRA. It is not by accident that Richard Oakes, an urban Iroquois, was the leader of the takeover of Alcatraz in 1968.

Akwesasne Notes Newspaper

In 1969, a white man (who gave himself the Indian name of 'Rarihokwats') established the newspaper *Akwesasne Notes*. Although this newspaper throughout its history has been mainly written, produced and read by white people who carried on the tradition of white romantics defining Indian culture, it still has been very influential among some urban Indians and in determining how the left and counterculture see the Indian struggle. A concept that still appears on its front page today is "A Journal for Native and Natural Peoples". We will return later to such ideas and see what they mean for the Indian struggle.

The Beginning of the American Indian Movement

The American Indian Movement had a much more substantial beginning. It was started in 1968 as a police-watch organisation in Minneapolis, modelled after those started by black people in Detroit and other cities just a few years earlier. Minneapolis is one of the few cities with a relatively large and concentrated population of Indians, mostly from the same nation. In other words, AIM began as a militant urban organisation for urban Indians. The people who

started it still had memories of a rather more just life on the reservations, and did not have any real economic position in urban society. Most of them had been radicalised in prison, and had received a much broader political education there and in the slums than they would have had on the reservations.

In 1971 AIM called a national conference to establish itself as a national organisation. The conference was attended mostly by urban Indians, and it was there that people such as Russell Means, Carter Camp and others who later became national leaders joined AIM. It was also there that Russell Means pointed out that a national Indian organisation could only be legitimised if it had a direct and democratic relationship to the grassroots people on the reservation, and making their demands and concerns the first priority of AIM. That started a debate, and several divisions in AIM that were never resolved or dealt with in a clear political way. Even though the debate took the form of personalities accusing personalities, political positions were represented. The original founders of AIM, the Minneapolis people, did not want AIM to make the reservations the priority for the Movement.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs Takeover and Wounded Knee Make AIM a Peoples Movement

The fact that AIM started in the cities was both good and necessary. The extreme isolation of reservations meant that only an organisation based in cities could have created a nationally organised framework that the reservation Indians could use and fill. This is what happened between 1971 and 1973. AIM organised a caravan that went to reservations across the country to win the support of Indians for a protest in Washington. This effort was very successful, and resulted in a position paper (The 20 Points) which argued for self-determination and treaty rights. When the caravan reached Washington, it was largely ignored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs which led to a takeover of the BIA for several days.

In 1973 the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organisation called on AIM to aid them in the now historic liberation of Wounded Knee. At that time more than two thousand Indians from most parts of the country held the village of Wounded Knee for 71 days against units of the US Army, federal marshalls and the FBI, as well as the 'Goon Squad' of the colonial puppets. That event had decisive importance for the Indian struggle. The Sioux waged armed struggle as a nation until 1890, and since then have been able to maintain to a large degree a land base and a cultural and national cohesion. The Sioux also have

one of the strongest treaties legally with the United States, and the people on the five reservations know their treaty rights and are determined to fight for them. In addition, Pine Ridge, where Wounded Knee is located, is the second largest reservation in the country, and is in the middle of a new energy development area which includes coal, uranium, natural gas, iron, and a large underground water table. It was politically important because the reservation people themselves started the ball rolling, and saw that it was important to get AIM involved to make it a national and international issue.

Wounded Knee won AIM the support of probably most Indians in the country, and established it as a genuine national organisation with a constituency, both on reservations and in cities. It also intensified the existing contradictions within AIM.

Russell Means and the Sioux of South Dakota became the most important part of the new AIM, even though they were not always the most organised, the most consistent or the most responsible. The old Minneapolis AIM leadership did not want to give up its control over the organisation. This constant division led to many well-known fights, splits and factions, without bringing any subsequent political clarity or resolutions. Outsiders were seldom able to see what the real political differences were.

Disorganisation and Repression

AIM never became an organisation. It was always a movement. It did not at any time have any real organisational structure, even though it always pretended to, with every 'leader' being a Field Director, Executive Director, National Chairman, and so forth. One became a national leader by getting together followers, media attention and money, and acting tough.

The federal government was able to take full advantage of the situation. On one hand they had agents inside the Movement who created or exaggerated existing factionalism and ill-feeling among the leadership, just as the government did with the Black Panthers and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. On the other hand they used severe repression against ordinary AIM supporters and activists throughout the country, which, after 1973, resulted in at least one of the national leaders almost always being in prison.

The case of Douglass Durham is a clear example of how the US took full advantage of AIM's lack of organisation. Durham was an FBI agent who became AIM's Director of Security by flattering the AIM leadership. Incredible as it may seem, Durham was not an Indian (and visibly so) and under his own name was a police officer in Iowa.

This fact was widely known in the Movement, and because of this he was suspected by many people of being an agent. Despite this, his ties to the leadership and the lack of organisation allowed him to set up AIM organisers around the country and give the government valuable information on the Movement's internal workings.

Funding, and the method of funding, played a considerable part in deepening the splits in AIM. Minneapolis AIM, still calling itself 'national AIM' was completely passive about anything outside its area. Yet it received almost all of the funding for its own programmes, which were and are local, and geared to urban Indian problems. Being a comparatively organised urban centre, and having a programme based on reforms that are possible within the present status quo, Minneapolis AIM seemed to outsiders, especially church people, to be the most responsible part of AIM and to be the 'national AIM' it claimed to be.

In the years of severe crisis, after Wounded Knee, the AIM/Treaty Council people on Pine Ridge were making almost superhuman efforts to maintain and to organise. They were able to set up a school, take over and run the BIA police force, organise communities and participate in the 'tribal' elections even to the extent that Russell Means was elected 'Tribal Chairman' of the reservation. (That was proved later in court, although at the time some of the ballot boxes were stolen and Dick Wilson declared himself re-elected.) All of this was done in the face of such terrorism that many of the AIM leaders were murdered by government forces for their efforts. Others are still in prison on frame-up charges.

It was particularly maddening, then, that Pine Ridge received almost no funding for any programmes for years. The National Council of Churches raised huge sums for almost every place except Pine Ridge, where it was most desperately needed. The bitterness that this situation caused was one more opening for the government and opportunists to exploit.

The International Indian Treaty Council

In 1974 the International Indian Treaty Council was formed under the auspices of the reservations, mainly in South Dakota, as part of AIM. Four thousand people attended the founding conference and made international outreach a high priority. The Treaty Council in effect broadened AIM by including many people who were afraid of AIM's 'radical' image. It was also able to concentrate on reservations in ways that 'national AIM' could not because of the urban/reservation split.

Because of the poor level of organisation and the lack of political development in AIM at its base, the international work became too large a part of the Movement's focus. For most of the time between 1974 and 1979, the New York office of the Treaty Council was the only functioning national office, and that made it necessary to deal with a range of problems that a national AIM office should have been dealing with. The UN work came to be seen by many people, even in national leadership, as a solution rather than one tactic. Some thought we were trying to take our treaty cases to the World Court, which would resolve them once and for all in our favour. Some thought we could in a short time win action on our behalf in the General Assembly. No matter how many times I tried to explain that the local work on reservations was the most important work, and that without it the international work was irrelevant, the message did not get across.

AIM's Base Declines

In 1974 and 1975 the support AIM formerly had on reservations was slowly being eroded. On Pine Ridge, work was going ahead on important community projects, but severe repression was taking its toll. In those years many Indians who were AIM supporters or activists were killed by government forces. When two FBI agents were killed in 1975 in a shootout with Indians, hundreds of FBI agents in combat fatigues armed with automatic weapons conducted house to house searches for two months, aided by helicopters and state and tribal police. The terrorism was effective.

There was also a national leadership that was spinning its wheels and increasingly out of touch with reservation people. AIM as a whole was on the defensive partly because of the trials resulting from Wounded Knee and other actions. Altogether there were more than 200 AIM people the Movement had to defend. The media attention all but disappeared after the most glamorous trial, that of Russell Means and Dennis Banks, was over in early 1974.

This entire country's Indian people have been struggling to make a strong national organisation with clear political goals. The history of AIM/Treaty Council is a history of struggle to break out from fragmented, powerless isolation with an organisation that could represent the majority of Indian people. The decline of AIM as a force and a drastic change in political direction coincided with the rise to power of individuals who were not Indians, who had no previous history of involvement in the progressive movements in the US, who advocated small, autonomous community-based organisations as opposed to the

national ones, and whose counter-cultural ideas were not in the best interests of Indian peoples. These individuals managed to infiltrate the Movement, and slowly push out the leadership through intrigue, divisive tactics and bribery. Nothing would make the US and the energy corporations happier than to see AIM become a small core of dislocated individuals, spiritually correct and politically irrelevant to the Indian people on reservations.

The Geneva Conference

Intrigues and political confusion were the hallmarks of the 1977 United Nations Conference on American Indians held in Geneva. On one hand, the conference was a huge success, since for the first time Indians directly addressed an international forum. Dozens of member states of the UN attended, as well as hundreds of international organisations. The event was headline news in Europe, although predictably it was not mentioned in the US press. On the other hand, it became another opening for opportunists to disrupt and take over. It was a time when all of AIM's chickens came home to roost.

I left the UN Conference before it had even officially started, because I was being pressured to make an initial African tour immediately after the conference, centred around Idi Amin, which I knew would be disastrous for our international work. My leaving naturally increased my isolation, but it was one of those situations where there is no satisfactory choice. It may seem now that we were all incredibly naive about international politics, which we were.

AIM has always been plagued by fakes, crooks, opportunists and alienated individuals, and the Geneva Conference was no exception. This made even more weak links. The lack of a viable base became clear when the process for choosing delegates for the Conference took place at the 1977 Treaty Conference. There was a strong push for a non-existent 'Council of Elders' to decide who should go, and also the idea that everyone who could raise money to travel to Geneva should go. Naturally, most of the reservation people who should have gone did not go. While most Indians did know about the conference, there was little direct involvement on the part of anyone outside the AIM circle (which was small and getting smaller) except the Iroquois and the Hopi.

This became even clearer two months after the Geneva Conference when AIM had a national meeting, its first in two years. It was extremely small, and showed the real strength of AIM at that time. Even though Geneva was successful in many ways, especially in Europe and at the UN, at home things were getting progressively

worse. Just after what should have been our strongest accomplishment so far, the Movement was unable to bring even fifty activists to a national meeting.

The Longest Walk

In 1977 there were eleven pieces of legislation introduced in Congress that proposed to strip Indians of various fishing and jurisdictional rights. The most draconian measure would abolish all treaty commitments and give Indians exactly the same rights and status under the law as anyone else in the United States. All of this was called 'backlash'. The reason it was called backlash is that the puppet organisations made believe that since the early '70s Indians had made major gains through the courts which now the states and the federal government were trying to reverse. The truth was that despite a few favourable court rulings, our land base was being eroded every year.

The Treaty Council's investigation into the bills showed that none of them had any real chance of passing. They did point out the fact that the remaining Indian land bases were marked for destruction by the energy companies, but the 'backlash' forces, which included the main government Indian organisations and some former AIM activists, chose a strategy that was directed at people in the US instead of organising in Indian communities.

The Walk eventually received wide support, which can be mainly attributed to the fact that Indian people find themselves in a desperate situation, and will support anything that seems in the slightest bit positive. AIM originally did not support the Walk, but came in at the end. Spiritualism of all kinds, including Buddhists and hippies, replaced any kind of politics or political demands.

AIM Today

After the Longest Walk came the final decline of AIM. For the first time since 1972 AIM was no longer at centre stage in the Indian world. Strange alliances were formed which were to get even stranger the following year.

South Dakota AIM, formerly the most militant part of AIM, put all of its efforts for several months into organising the Black Hills International Survival Gathering in the summer of 1980. The event showed just how confused and empty the politics of AIM had become, and how removed it was from the people on the reservations. Attended by more than 10,000 people, some of them Indians but mostly from the white counterculture, the Survival Gathering offered the view

of a strategic unity between landbased peoples. This meant forgetting about any sort of alliance between Indians, blacks and Chicanos to fight repression and build organisations for our mutual benefit. We were told to forget about the class differences in US society that Indian leaders from Tecumseh and Sitting Bull on have noted and talked about. Unbelievably, the Survival Gathering believed that the Indian struggle must unite with ranchers against corporations — the very same ranchers who most directly and immediately oppress Indian people.

What Next?

It is difficult for us to say what we think should happen next, or how. We do not feel that whatever is left of AIM/Treaty Council is capable of leading the Indian movement.

Maybe AIM can regroup in a more democratic and political way, and needless to say we hope that happens. But it seems unlikely. It may be that the historical setting for the AIM we knew has passed, and that it is time for something else to grow. The division between 'traditionals' and the government's 'progressives' is beginning to blur in both positive and negative ways.

We feel there must be a clear class analysis both within the American Indian world and in how we relate to the rest of this country. We feel that this is much more in line with the traditions of the Indian struggle in the past three centuries than the things that are now being said and done by Indian leaders.

We also feel that within that context, issues and problems need to be put forward in the most clear and sharp way possible. Basic work must begin in building a new organisation, controlled by the people and led by the people's demands, whether or not that new organisation is called AIM or something else.

We see ourselves and our future work as a part of that ongoing struggle.

December, 1980

The Minnows

*The minnows had built a little fire,
To keep warm at the bottom of the pond,
and huddled around it in a star-shaped circle.
At the surface tiny bubbles burst smokily.*

*Suddenly from all directions came sirens,
Swordfish, Sawfish, Snapping Turtles, and the school
was disrupted — outlawed.
"No underwater overcoats and no fires!"*

*The minnow leaders were exiled to Sardinia,
and order was restored. Stores of weapons were re-ordered,
Just in case.*

c. 1964

Object

*It must have been an odd object to begin with.
 Now the ghosts of its uses
 Whisper around my head, tickle the tips
 Of my fingers. Weeds
 Reclaim with quick silence the beams, pillars,
 Doorways. Places change, and a small object
 Stands defiant in its placelessness.
 Durable because it contains intensely meanings
 Which it can no longer pour out.*

1964

*Like a dead Comanche' pony
 It bites the dust.
 Its dry tongue dragging in the sand
 And its eyes staring holes in the sky.
 The sole is torn, worn from miles
 Of work.
 Who places these mateless, forlorn
 Shoes in deserts?
 Who throws single shoes from
 Windows of cars to deserted shoulders
 Of highways?
 In honour of history and its marches let us
 Have a closet museum of dropped and discarded
 Shoes.*

1964

Cutting Off Their Feet at Acoma Pueblo

*We were standing in line to get a foot cut off.
That was bad. Now, it's hard to say what was the hardest
part, but that standing in line waiting your turn,
listening to the whack! thunk! other guys screaming,
that was hard.*

*I remember standing there remembering all the times
when I was a boy running and running. But the guys
who broke the line and ran, they really got hacked up.*

*You tried to feel it before your turn, so you'd
be kinda prepared. You concentrated on the joint at your ankle,
imagining it separated from your foot. I
thought, first this big tendon, then the smaller tendons,
a little skin and muscle, all done.*

*But those Spaniards. The reason I cried was the
first blow of the axe just got me in the lower leg, broke
into the bone. I cried because it hurt really bad, but
mostly I thought it would never stop, it hurt so bad, and my foot
wasn't even chopped off yet.*

*It still hurts all the time. Slivers and chunks of
bone still left in there, so if you accidentally lay the
wrong way at night you get a really sharp pain, and then
you wake up and think about your foot.*

*They have a festival of the Conquest now in Santa Fe,
and they're always after me to come, but I never do.*

c. 1983

Artists *Must* Begin Helping Themselves

In one of Tuli Kupferberg's cartoons the first character says: "The Government has stopped supporting artists." The second character replies: "Now if only artists would stop supporting the Government."

According to Reagan's new brave new plans, business, or more respectfully 'the private sector', is supposed to 'take up the slack' in some rope or another that ties artists to financial support, even though this same private sector is also supposed to take up slack in every other area of human services in which the government is now slacking off.

Metaphors gratefully aside, it seems that there is a whole new industry springing up that intends to research and develop ways by which artists and arts organisations can gain support from business. Everywhere one turns it seems there is a new booklet, seminar or organisation to deal with this special issue.

Will we soon be asking ourselves if artists will stop supporting business? Perhaps the question is still too theoretical, seeing that artists have as yet received practically no aid from business. But, according to Richard Goldstein of the *Village Voice*, certain ideologues of the Sleazy Right in an alliance with some corporations, and even some 'art critics', are already making nefarious schemes to exploit the situation for their own master plans of what US society *should be*.

I am sure they will be temporarily successful on some level, but I am not convinced that they even represent the views of the majority of people in business; all businessmen couldn't be so stupidly right wing. We hope, of course, that even for them their moves further away from humanity will prove unproductive.

The real issues for artists are, as usual, much more practical. The issues, and the smaller questions they raise, were with us long before the Age of Reagan. In the first place, government support of the arts was never nearly adequate. Most artists just did not receive any sup-

port. As little as fifteen years ago, art teachers were advising their students that if they wanted to be artists they would have to take teaching jobs to support themselves. Where are the teaching jobs? There are practically none, and we see more and more artists going into business without admitting that it is business they are into; and, that it is governed by the competitive and chaotic rules of the marketplace. The simple business of selling our work and competing with each other for gallery space, prizes and grants has already made some of us business entrepreneurs little different from the most stereotypical businessman, with the important difference that we cannot make a living at it. A friend recently explained that she could not be adamantly against gentrification in housing because, as artists, we depend upon rich people to buy our art. "We are parasites of the rich", she said.

In some other article we might take up the question of what we give to the rich and what they give to us, but for now we should see that in reality most artists opt for what is usually called 'a career in the arts'. We become arts administrators (as though that was essentially different from business administrators), or more and more often we develop our own hustles; excuse me, I meant to say that we develop our own expertise in some service or programme. Artists today become career consultants, résumé writers, slide registerers, therapists, gallery owners, housing advocates, or we open shops that produce posters, painted T-shirts, whatever. Living in a glass house, as I do, I am not making a moral judgement about this phenomenon. I feel, instead, that collectively we need to make some social analyses of it in the context of what directions are available in the '80s.

We notice the tremendous amount of backbiting that demoralises us and keeps us from working effectively together. It is as though we are still too amateurish as business people, and our shark-like tendencies are not as easily concealed or organised as those same tendencies in the business world. Maybe we are just too clumsy at business at this point.

Lauren Raken, an artist, sociologist, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Foundation for Community of Artists (FCA), was recently lamenting the sad fact that artists cannot put aside our differences long enough to achieve some common goals, while the proponents of backwardness can make every rotten coalition they think they need. I said then that I thought it was mostly the habit of paranoia left over from the '60s; but, the more I think the more I believe it may be plain old economics. We are each afraid of losing

our turf. Those turfs mean some money in our pockets, no matter how we might complain of pressure, long hours, self-sacrifice, or use other ritualistic words which assure us that we are not in business.

Perhaps, however, there are two sides to the coin we are supposedly being offered. We all complain that the art world is too ingrown and without enough interaction between artists and the general public. Maybe it will prove easier to reach that public through corporations than it has been individually or through government support. Are corporations more evil or manipulative than the government itself has proven to be? The strings that might be attached to corporate support may prove to be less of a hindrance than those of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) or the New York State Council for the Arts (NYSCA) — if we can develop some clarity as to what we as artists are really looking for. At least there are many more members of the public who are interested in the arts working in corporations than in the bureaucracies of the government.

A few things are clear at this point; artists and arts organisations must make coalitions. We must make new and different deals with the business community, and we must get financial support from somewhere. We must also break out of isolation and stop seeing ourselves as patronised by the rich or by government agencies. I am not really delivering a sermon; many artists are already developing innovations along those lines.

The FCA is presently discussing artists' housing with Citibank and other corporations, and artists' employment as artists with corporations. We are rightfully nervous about these discussions. There is always the danger of becoming so business-like that one loses the original vision that motivates in the first place. And that's bad business.

August 1982

Shame

On October 26, 1982, Community Board #3 in New York voted to accept the bitterly fought-over Artist Home Ownership Program presented by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). Immediately after the vote cries of "Shame!" came from the minorities in the large audience.

The vote itself was a sad case of 'turf' politics, influenced by a divided board which was in part caused by an earlier fight over whether housing for senior citizens in Cooper Square would be for Jewish people only or representative of the neighbourhood. Board member Sharon Daniels, an ultra-conservative using pretentious liberal rhetoric, lead the forces on the board who saw gentrification as a viable plan for the Lower East Side.

The vote was more than a slap in the face to the many minority organisations, including 21 local Catholic churches, who spoke passionately and compassionately against the Artist Housing Project. It also served notice to the minority board members, who spoke against the project, that the Lower East Side is not for Puerto Ricans, Blacks or Dominicans.

But the shame extends beyond Community Board #3, where the spray painting is on the wall that an overhaul is due. It reaches to the artists themselves, where destructive lines are being drawn.

The artists who have bought into HPD's Artist Home Ownership Plan are all white, and well-to-do by my standards and by those of their possible neighbours on the Lower East Side. Their arguments in favour of the plan seem disingenuous at the least, and often arrogant and racist.

At a teach-in sponsored by Artists for Social Responsibility (ASR) one member of the artist housing group said that the neighbourhood was full of prostitutes and all sorts of garbage. While not denying an obvious truth, prostitutes also have a right to living space; and the garbage problem may be more due to a lack of city garbage pick-ups, and landlords not supplying proper receptacles, than it is to the

possibility that Puerto Ricans create more garbage mess than white artists under similar circumstances.

During the Community Board meeting several of the group members spoke, and their comments were depressingly instructive. One spokesman said that as soon as they were settled in they would definitely talk to the local community people. Another member of the artists' group stood up and said that she had lived in the Lower East Side for 18 years, and that she had seen the Puerto Ricans move in, and then the Dominicans. The implication was clearly that she had more right to live there than they. The Irish could have used a similar argument when the Jews moved into the area 100 years ago. (The Jews by the way were also accused of living with garbage.)

As the Puerto Rican and black protests grew louder in the face of that nonsense, another member of the artists' group yelled, "Why don't you go back where you came from?"

Yet more destructive than all of that is a phenomenon of the artists' group which can only be called 'red-baiting'. When Frank Barbaro was running for mayor, Ed Koch tried to smear him by insinuating that he accepted the support of the infamous New Alliance Party. That is a typical Koch way of avoiding the issues. It is a form of red-baiting that even progressives can indulge in when the time comes to dodge reality.

The afternoon before the board meeting, several of the artists' housing group contacted various members of the Foundation for Community of Artists (FCA) with definite proof that ASR, one of the groups organising against the HPD Artist Housing Plan, was a front for the New Alliance Party. I replied that if that was true, FCA and I would stay well away from them. But then as spokesperson for FCA, I was expected not to speak against the plan at the board meeting. The FCA has always been against the plan, as has Councilwoman Miriam Friedlander and literally dozens of well-respected, legitimate community groups. Their only real argument in favour of the plan was that Harry Helmsley had already bought up much of the property in the area so that gentrification was a *fait accompli*. This may or may not be true; however, it was beside the point; and minority artists in the area, as well as some strong community organisations, churches, local development corporations and our councilwoman, were determined to fight against the developers. In the face of this community opposition the artists involved in HPD were at the board meeting busily lobbying other artists to support the plan *only because* they believed that ASR was a front for the New Alliance Party. Not once did any member of the group address the real issues or even

address the hard fact that the community artists, artists in FCA and the organisation itself were against this project because it was against the best interests of the community. 'Red-baiting' has garnered some support from well-meaning people, but it is not the point and it is a vicious scare tactic.

A big block of the Artist Home Ownership Project has already gone to developers, the rest is to go to white artists of moderate income who do not have community support or involvement. The HPD has ramrodded this proposal through against the advice of most housing and artists' groups in the area. Maxine Griffith of HPD, who sat with the artists' group during the board meeting, is quoted as saying: "The problem of what can be done with the poor in America is not one that can be addressed by this office."

But if the Department of Housing Preservation and Development working in a poor neighbourhood like the Lower East Side cannot address the problem of the poor, what can it possibly address? Obviously, gentrification. Yet one member of the artists' group states that gentrification is a term for sociologists. This is the sort of obfuscatory language one expects from HPD, not artists.

The scene is familiar to me. My reservation is in Eastern Oklahoma; we suffered the land rush in the early years of this century. The white farmers who took our land assured us that it wasn't their fault, and that they also had to have some place to live. Our reservation is now four acres large, and the white farmers were moved to California during the Depression. Quaker Oats and Phillips Petroleum, now own all of Eastern Oklahoma, but I well remember the slander and excuses made by the white farmers. In their 'red-baiting' they called us "dirty red niggers" who couldn't use the land properly.

The artists' group claim that they are innocently caught in the middle, like the white settlers in Oklahoma. There is a grain of truth in that, except that they placed themselves in the middle, and could have chosen a different course at any time. They still can. Obfuscating the fact of gentrification is racism. These tactics are a course ultimately destructive for all artists.

Perhaps, given the desperate situation of artists today, lines will be drawn, even if the ultimate winners must be the 'developers' and speculators. But at least let us keep to some morality and some principle necessary for humans, and necessary, as one Puerto Rican woman said, for our art.

January 1983

The Constitution on the Cutting Room Floor

It is plainly anti-democratic for the government to be unresponsive to the public. However, the Office of Management and Budget has proposed new rules governing non-profit organisations which receive federal funds which may block free speech.

Organisations as diverse as the American Symphony Orchestra League and the Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organization Committee (NAPNOC) are actively opposing the Federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) proposed regulations for non-profit organisations.

In an unusual move, three different congressional sub-committees are conducting hearings on the regulations, proof to some, including Don Adams, co-director of NAPNOC, that the Administration's tactics of changing policy through changing regulations instead of through public and congressional debate, are not working.

NAPNOC has issued an information letter urging organisations to oppose the planning regulations, as has the Volunteer Lawyers for Arts (VLA) and several other non-profit groups. VLA mailed out over 800 copies of their letter and in an interview, Arlene Schuler, Director of the VLA, said that the responses so far have been many and very positive: "People are very scared by this sort of thing, but they are not just sitting around; many organizations are resolved to fight this even though it is difficult in the short time before the regulations are to go into effect."

We asked if VLA thought there might conceivably be some subtle reprisals against organisations that fought against the regulations too aggressively. Ms Schuler replied, "That is a justifiable concern but our constitutional rights may be at stake, and we cannot walk in that kind of fear or we will make no impact; we will not be able to effect any change."

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) also sees the

proposed regulations as a possible violation the right to free speech. Jeremiah Gutman, President of the New York ACLU, said, "The ACLU has taken a leading role in fighting these regulations". He said that the ACLU had taken a strong public stand early on and was willing to take legal action if necessary.

Even the *New York Times* has reported negatively about the regulations. Kathleen Teltich, who in more liberal days was the *Times* UN correspondent, wrote in an extensive article that, "There is no indication that the budget office and the parties involved (the non-profit organizations) are close to resolving basic differences."

There is speculation in Washington that the regulations will be 'edited' so as to be more acceptable to the mainstream non-profit organisations such as the American Arts Alliance and the American Symphony Orchestra League while remaining deleterious to smaller organisations.

Don Adams of NAPNOC said, "It is plainly anti-democratic for the government to be unresponsive to the public." He wondered why the government would seek to close off channels of information from organisations which have expertise useful for government decision making. Betty Chamberlain, head of the Artist Information Center, compared the situation to the McCarthy era. Reagan is using similar tactics of attempting to bypass congressional and public approval for sending more military aid to El Salvador, so the analogy to McCarthy does not seem hyperbolic.

April 1983

Creativity and the Social Process

In the '60s almost every critic and writer would write something like, "I don't want to re-open the debate about the purpose of art ...". By the '70s, almost no one discussed it at all, and the issue dropped out of sight while we began to concentrate on more 'practical' issues for artists.

Our perception of the purpose of our art, as we produce it, must be eminently practical. It must affect the kind of art we produce, what we try to do with it, and what we would like to do with it. It must affect the satisfaction or frustration that being artists has for us.

I think the purpose of art is to help people interpret their world so that they may be better able to change it in positive ways. That must be the purpose of all human activity, except those activities which are oppressive to the good of humanity. We understand cultural activities to be in general positive, and we understand external control of cultural activities to be insidiously oppressive. Humans seem to need a great variety of ways to perceive and interpret their world, including poetry, music, painting and sculpture. Art does not have to be more or less than it is in order to fulfil its purpose. Painting doesn't need to become advertising, it doesn't need to impose the artist's or the committee's messages on the public. It only needs to be integrated into the public life in situations that involve praxis — the mutual give-and-take that produces real change.

Our society teaches us that the purpose of art for the artist is to gain approval (rewards). The rules for getting rewards are very strict and limited. The highest rewards go to those white male artists whose art speaks to other art, but I believe that art should speak to other parts of life and *those* parts should speak to art.

In one of my more famous theories about sculpture (famous, that is, among the voices inside my head; it has never been made public except in some bars), I explain that what a sculptor does is change objects. We take a stone or pieces of metal or plastic and rearrange them to make some order, or non-order, that satisfies us in some way.

After Duchamp, this re-arranging can often be simply a matter of placing an object in a different way or in a different place than we would normally expect to see it, or by consecrating it with a signature. The amount of matter in the universe stays the same, at least on the level at which a sculptor may use matter; and all of the possible shapes already exist, at least in a Jungian or Platonic sense; so that the 'creation' is not a category of concern for the sculptor. From this perspective we could substitute, 'he created a new piece' for 'she changed another object'. The implied question would always be, "Why did she change that object, and what does that have to do with me?"

Creativity in art is now a kitchen cliché accepted at all levels of discussion about art. The 'creative process' is a given topic in almost all writing and talking about art. 'He is very creative', is a commonly used compliment for anyone who is even the slightest bit innovative in any field, and without question as to the sense or value of the phrase. It may be that creativity is a false issue that keeps us from looking at the important realities of artistic production. Why is creativity so pervasive a concept today? To me, obviously, humans do not create things or creativity does not mean what our consensual understanding says it means. It implies an impossible total control of some bit of the universe by an individual person, and a god-like (in a very Western concept of what a god might be) importance to the work and product of that individual. The artist 'creates' something, and may therefore impose it individualistically upon the world; or, if the world is not pleased with the 'creation', it feels free (if vaguely uneasy) to reject it. The situation is pathetically like that of those alienated people we see on New York City streets, talking to themselves. They are really talking to the public around them, but experiences in their lives have robbed them of the human necessity of dialogue. The more they feel the loss the more they are unable to discover the ability of dialogue. Therefore, they talk more loudly, more to themselves. They get our attention, but not in any way that satisfies anyone. The difference for the artist is that our society has a social contract which states that the 'creations' of artists are art, which has an exalted place in the contract. That art itself is absolutely meaningless within our social contract doesn't matter. What matters is that 'art' is an important part of a mythology of culture which underpins the social contract. Art and creativity are metaphors in that mythology, and mean something quite different from their literal meanings.

The freer a society the less it uses its basic mythology (common to all human societies) for manipulation and control. Our mythology

tells us that 'the purpose of art is aesthetic edification for those "cultured" enough to appreciate it'. Art has then lost its proper role in society — lost its voice like the alienated person on the street. It is dangerous to say that the purpose of art is communication; it conjures up images of art being used for propaganda, or bad 'message' art which in itself denies the true importance of art. But surely it is true that the role of art in society is to communicate.

If humans are different from other animals it is not because of our rationality but because of the social dialogue that the rationality produces. Humans do not live strictly within nature; we deliberately separate ourselves from nature by our social structures. We do not achieve this, as is so commonly misunderstood, by means of our physical structure and technologies — those only show how much within nature we are. It is the *social* structure; the social dialogue, that makes us human. The Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire has written:

To be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world. It is to experience that world as an objective reality, independent of oneself, capable of being known. Humanity's separateness from and openness to the world distinguishes it as a being of *relationships*. The normal role of human beings in and with the world is not passive. Because they are not limited to the natural (biological) sphere, humans can intervene in reality to change it. Inheriting acquired experience, changing, integrating themselves into their contexts — humans enter into the domain which is exclusively theirs — that of history and of culture. Throughout history humans have attempted to overcome the factors which make them accommodate or adjust, in a struggle — constantly threatened by oppression — to obtain their full humanity.*

According to Ashley Montague, Ritchie Calder and others, it is this very social cooperation towards liberation that is the driving force of the evolution of humans away from other primates. In other words, biology re-iterates what Freire said sociologically.

The role of art and of artists, then, must be seen in that context. As a part of human culture, which has the purpose of human liberation, art must have the purpose of critical social interpretation. It must be part of the social dialogue, and not separated by theories of aesthetics or by middle-class edification.

Of course, this can be done with differing degrees of 'purity' or 'impurity' without any import, just as poetry can twist or use

* *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, [1967], Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, London, England, 1974, pp 3-5.

language in all sorts of strange ways to purposeful effect or it can use language in the most traditionally 'pure' ways.

What is more important than the style of art, although I believe one affects the other, is our societal ability to place art and artists within the social context — the context of liberation. We cannot see art as 'creations' of holy men, to be imposed upon or rejected by some elite part of society which 'appreciates' art.

When I was a child I started making my own toys at an early age. The toys involved a very complex fantasy life, and any object I could handle was under the constant threat of being transformed into playing a role in that private world. I think I did that because as a child I was not in control of any part of my real environment, and most of that environment was highly unsatisfactory. I made my own society in which I had an important part. Something in my make-up caused me to build that society with material objects which I would change one way or another; I just had a 'bent' towards relating to objects and shapes. I suspect that this is the case history of many sculptors, and that people in all walks of life did something similar as children, choosing their methods, and later their fields, by whatever was their natural inclination.

But as we grow up we are expected to translate this natural tendency to be a critical subject in the work, coupled with whatever are our natural talents, into action in the real world. We are expected to integrate our child-worlds with the real world. (Although in this society we are more often expected to give up the largest portion of our child-world and be 'mature'.) In the human consensus we are not expected to adapt passively to the society we grow into. Freire says that the ability to adapt is a trait of other animals, "exhibited by a human, it is symptomatic of his dehumanization".

The deadening problem for artists is the poisonous myths that our society perpetrates about their social role. We are expected to 'create' *instead of* participate. The importance of art is nullified while art is placed on a silly pedestal. This is historically a recent and minority view about the purpose of art.

In a conference recently I heard an artist say that her goal was to be a famous artist, to have her work in the collections of major museums and so forth. I believe that this role is *dictated* to us by our society. It is exactly like getting good grades or parental approval for one's talent, which is an empty substitute for having it placed usefully into the praxis of human understanding and liberation. But it is the *only* option this society gives an artist, at the same time ensuring that it is an economic necessity. How can we possibly aspire to

it, or imagine that it will be satisfying? To live in luxury on an island off Florida and have your work caged in 'major' museums is not satisfying. To have one's work accepted and used by a free society and to participate in that society *as an artist*, to have society interact in the *process* of one's work must be satisfying. I will add that to accept passively or cynically that a given society is not changeable, or to use talents and art as an escape is not only ultimately unsatisfying, it is a sign of inhumanity.

June 1983

Three Books Tenuously Connected

I

Dore Ashton recently said that Lucy Lippard is one of the most interesting critics around these days because she has a direction and a vision with integrity. It is possible to disagree vehemently with Lippard over some idea or some individual artist and still want to read her articles and learn something. For me, that is true of few other art critics; I can think of Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg and Amy Goldin, although I must admit that I don't read much art criticism. There are critics, such as John Perrault, that I always enjoy reading and others that I know will always make me mad or bored. Lucy Lippard is a controversial figure about whom we find ourselves in heated discussions. Her mind doesn't seem to work in expected ways.

Her new book, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*,¹ concerns non-linear connections between prehistoric art, particularly the large stoneworks scattered throughout Europe, and a grouping of contemporary artists such as Mary Beth Edelson and Robert Smithson. My mind could never have put Edelson and Smithson together, and my first impression of *Overlay* was that the connections were objectionable to me. Prehistoric earth- and stoneworks are always integrated into their environments and were obviously done collectively by their communities. The first time I visited a prehistoric stone structure in France I felt I was on holy ground, partly because the structure was so powerful within the landscape rather than against it, and partly because there was a strong feeling of being touched by a community of people who lived perhaps thirty-thousand years ago. The place is still a reference point in my mind whenever I need to feel some familial ties with white people.

But Smithson's work has always seemed (macho-ly) anti-environment

and anti-community to me, as does the work of Christo and others of his ilk. Christo's recent wrapped islands in Florida were completed over the objections of all of Florida's environmental groups. His response was that the piece caused more discussion about the environment, like, I suppose, bombs cause discussion about disarmament. Smithson's spiral jetty has muddied the water in the spiral's centre. Lippard includes many artists in her book, and many of whom I don't like. Having said that I will herewith conclude my nasty comments about fellow-artists.

Overlay is chock-full of photos, which eventually force you to make the connections that are there. Lippard's point is not that there is a tradition common to neolithic peoples and contemporary artists, but that there is a tradition lacking, for which many contemporary artists feel a need, and for which they search through ritual, performance, Jungian shapes and archetypal symbols. She writes,

This book...is an exercise in breaking away from conventional ways of looking at the visual arts. My subject is not prehistoric images *in* contemporary art, but prehistoric images *and* contemporary art.

Another point central for Lippard is that so many contemporary artists, in looking for myths with which to connect their work to themes important to society, have broken away from classical sources and "reductive purism" and an "art-for-art's sake emphasis".

She has looked very carefully at all sides and potential dangers of relating our art to mythic themes and to social issues. Besides giving us a special history of a somewhat under-documented area of contemporary art, Lucy Lippard's book gives us a great number of ideas that are important.

II

You may have already read this book by Andre Emmerich, *Art Before Columbus*,² which was first printed in 1963. The new paperback edition makes it more accessible and it is a seminal work that should be read again, maybe this summer.

Andre Emmerich's erudition, and obvious respect and compassion for peoples such as the Aztecs who have a reputation worse than they deserve, give his book a special place among those on pre-Columbian art that have been published since 1963. Emmerich wants us to put pre-Columbian art in the context of world art history at exactly that

1 Pantheon Books, New York, 1983.

2 Simon & Schuster, New York, 1983.

level whereupon we place the art of ancient Greece or Egypt. Sadly, much pre-Columbian art is still in museums of ethnology or natural history, so that the classical American idea of art as proceeding from the Greeks to the Romans to the Italians to the French to New York is continually reinforced. The historical traditions in which Rufino Tamayo or Juan Sanchez place themselves are not seen as important 'mainstream' traditions of art, and therefore the artists' contributions to art can be denied.

But, for me, Emmerich works so hard to present pre-Columbian art as real art that some of the best is left out. What I love about Aztec art is the ferocity and anguish. I love the skulls and the terribly passive statues of priests with human skin robes. The stone sculpture of the Aztec rain god is for me the most powerful piece of sculpture from any culture. Emmerich omits most of this messy work and I suspect that it still seems very alien and inscrutable to most people in Western culture.

Emmerich writes of the Aztecs as having been a 'tribe', and his use of the word is correct, but a problem arises because our use of it is incorrect. The word comes from the three groups — tribes — of Etruscans who founded Rome. Those three groups spoke the same language; likewise, the Aztecs spoke the same language, Nahuatl, as most of the people around them; they were not a separate people. In the US we are taught to think of the Sioux as one tribe and the Ojibwa as another — but there are people who speak entirely different languages and have different histories. The relations among the Nahuatl speaking people are more like those among different ancient Greek city-states than they are between any two 'tribes' of Indians north of the Rio Grande. Emmerich is not clear enough about this situation.

It is important for us to begin looking at pre-Columbian social history as a point of human history instead of exotic anthropology, a point with which Emmerich agrees.

III

A Polish critic has written that if we admit the concept of 'folk art' we must necessarily admit that its counterpart would be 'gentry art', instead of 'fine art'. This critic (whose name is unavailable to me because I read his work in Poland a few years ago and am not good at Polish names) challenged the generally held, if sometimes unconsciously, notion that art is created by the upper class, including fine art school-trained upper class artists. The idea within that notion is that art trickles down to the lower classes, getting more and more

vulgar as it travels downward. This would mean (to put it in its most ridiculous simplification) that, for example, the peasant art of Italy, would actually be an unsophisticated copy of a copy of a Tintoretto or a Botticelli.

The work presented in Selden Rodman's new book, *Artists in Tune with Their World*,³ which is a fairly broad collection from all over the Americas, disproves the elitist 'trickle-down' theory of art very well, but I am not sure from reading the book how Rodman himself feels about it. He chooses artists who are often the least representative of their peoples' art. Rodman's artists have usually achieved some critical success, even if sometimes after their death. Many of the artists he has selected are those whom he has had a hand in 'discovering'. Many, such as William Edmondson, are currently in well-advertised exhibitions. Rodman seems to have a slight corner on the market of Edmondson's work. I suppose this is no different to what the art magazines do, and it certainly doesn't detract much from a very readable and valuable book. Quite a few of the artists represented here will be well-known to you, if only by reading ads and auction house catalogues.

Selden Rodman has written many books about folk art and popular art in the Americas. He has brought to light in the US much good art from Brazil, Mexico, Haiti and other countries, and even helped develop the Centre d'art in Haiti. *Artists in Tune with Their World* is a short overview of some of the most important popular artists from practically every country in the hemisphere, and the photographs are delightful. For Rodman the distinction between folk art and popular art is that a folk artist has not set out to be an artist. The distinction between popular art and whatever kind of artists we are is that a popular artist has not necessarily been formally educated as an artist and does his artwork primarily for the people around him. (Almost all of Rodman's artists are male, so I feel OK with the masculine pronoun.)

He has such admiration for these popular artists that it becomes open contempt for us effete New York sophisticates. Looking at the photos I tend to agree with him, even though I feel guilty afterwards. There is such vitality and *chutzpah* in these artists' work. He includes virtually every well-known popular artist, and writes of them and their lives with solidarity. The section on Ralph Fasanella, for instance, puts his work in the context of his labour organising. Rodman is faithful to his title in showing us a glimpse of the world of

3 Simon & Schuster, New York, 1983.

each artist, which is a feat in itself given the artists and countries represented.

From the US he shows us, among others, Henry Church, Clara Williamson, William Edmondson, Horace Pippin and Morris Hirschfield. He also includes several American Indians: Morrisseau, whose work represented in the book is outstanding, and Fritz Scholder, whose work is out of place. Scholder is not Indian in any real sense, as he admits, and is a highly educated artist who takes Francis Bacon as his mentor. To include him in a book on popular artists is misguided romanticism at best.

Selden Rodman's politics is strange. He compares the intense creativity of Haitian folk and popular artists, where political and personal repression are rampant, to what he sees as a lack of creativity in artists in Puerto Rico, which he sees as a free enclave.

In Spanish Puerto Rico, where there was always a measure of personal freedom, and where today political freedom is complete, a way had to be found to join the Latin American weeping wall. To be free was bad enough, but to be prosperous was treason. Puerto Ricans are still not sure who they are. The island's only folk art, the diminutive santos once carved by aged jibaros, are not considered worthy of mention...

Such a cavalier attitude towards Puerto Rico would be simply stupid if there were a grain of truth in it, but every piece of the statement is false. According to UN studies and resolutions, there is no political freedom in Puerto Rico; there is US repression instead, and that corresponds with my own impression after many visits. The people are not in the least prosperous or free, and yet the folk and popular arts appear to be alive and well. There is now a brilliant surge of popular artists in Puerto Rico, and of Puerto Rican artists living here, including some well-known subway artists.

Political blindness of the sort just cited hurts the book in many places. In his introduction, Rodman states,

Unbridled freedom for the individual produced Wagners, Joyces, Picassos, but it also nourished Hitlers and Stalins, whose egos fed on exploitation and war. Was that kind of social chaos too high a price for...*Guernica*?

Rodman obviously dreams of a Golden Age that never existed anywhere. But the energy of the artists shows through anyway, so that leafing through the book is like taking a good dose of caffeine.

Popular artists seem to derive much of their energy from the fact

that they have more freedom of expression and more egoism than the rest of us. In New York if one painter makes an orange squiggle soon everyone must make orange squiggles or run the risk of being out-of-it. We have a well-defined framework within which we must try to fit our own visions. A popular artist, because he is not formally trained, yet, stands away from folk art, and is free to re-invent his world every morning.

July 1983

Interview with a 10,000 Year Old Artist

"Things were different in the old days", says Og Mg Erk.

Og Mg Erk is perhaps the oldest living artist, but is still producing new work and still has that creative fire. We sat in Og's cluttered studio in Manhattan's Lower East Side, amid literally millions of paintings and sculptures that Og has produced in the last 10,000 years. I began the interview head on:

Art & Artists: Og, how old are you, precisely?

Og Mg Erk: Well, I believe I was born on January 6, 8003 BC; but of course we had no birth certificates in those days, and we didn't know it was BC. We called it BT — Before Tomorrow.

A & A: How did you become an artist?

Og: As others have pointed out, there wasn't much to do in those days. You could be a critic, an animal chaser, an artist, or a co-ordinator. And of course there was prostitution.

A & A: But wasn't that just for women?

Og: Oh no, there were many more male prostitutes than female. It was a very high-salaried job. But anyway, I got my first break in the form of a grant from NEA's Minority Arts Program. NEA is the Neanderthal Endowment for the Arts.

A & A: Minority Arts Program?

Og: Sure. I was the first Cro Magnon, you know.

A & A: What was it like being an artist back then?

Og: Things were different in the old days. In the first place, there were only six artists in the entire world. On the other hand, finding a place to show was a real problem; there were no galleries or at least

none that you would want to show in. I had my first solo show in Altamira, and I was so naive I let the dealer rip me off really bad.

A & A: How were artists paid in those days?

Og: In greenbacks, if you were lucky; I usually got paid in shiny pebbles. Greenbacks were the skins of little green frogs, so they were more valuable. Dealers would take 50% of all sales, sometimes they would charge you for the publicity and the reception. At Altamira I had to pay for thirty buckets of elderberry wine, plus the little roots that were served as hors d'oeuvres, and the dealer lied to me about what the work actually sold for.

A & A: This is a two-part question; how would you describe your work, and what do you think of modern art?

Og: I guess I'd say I am a traditionalist. I work in the classical style that has proven value over the centuries. I like some of the modern painters, Titian, for example. But they need more discipline, and a sense of quality of lasting values. Political work, that is, those paintings that are pushing some ideology of the moment such as Christianity, cannot possibly hold up after the fad is over. As a traditionalist I also question the use of all of this new material and media. I'm very suspicious of oil paint, especially when it is applied to this flimsy cloth they all love to use, stretched over even flimsier sticks. I don't think oil on canvas has been around long enough to be proven yet. What's wrong with painting on a good, solid cave wall, or a tough buffalo hide? All of the experiments with new media show a poverty of ideas.

But this guy Keith Haring, his work might last, down in those subway stations. It reminds me of a guy I knew at Lascaux.

A & A: What would you say has been your biggest problem as an artist?

Og: Family life, definitely. You know I've had a hundred kids, and my husband thinks that women should stay in the cave.

November/December 1983

Thinking About NYSCA

(But First, a Few Words about El Salvador)

There is a basic immorality about the way we live in the United States which is never mentioned by Jerry Falwell or Ronald Reagan. It is that the US consumes the majority of the world's natural resources, including human labour, to maintain our standard of living. For the most part, we do this by theft, however subtle our means — our con games. And to ensure efficient thievery we support some of history's most repressive governments, right now, particularly in Latin America. The military in El Salvador is causing suffering to a degree that we cannot even comprehend, all so that we in the US may continue to use the resources of El Salvador without proper payment.

You and I are not to blame for that. You and I are responsible for very little of what goes on in the world, but we are responsible for our own integrity; our actions or passivity when our government creates a situation such as we now see in El Salvador. We must respond as artists; we must use the 'weapons' we have.

Recently, several of us at the FCA were privileged to hear the President of the University of El Salvador speak, with bravery, about the military take-over and shut down of the University, which included the murder and imprisonment of both students and teachers. How are we in the US to imagine a military take-over of a university? It doesn't happen here. It happens there because our government set it up and paid for it. But as Miguel Angel Parada said to us, we are a part of that same intellectual community to which belong those El Salvadorean students and teachers. We are involved.

Sr. Parada said that, "The only weapon the University has against the military guns is reason... Our defense is ideas, and they cannot break that defense." I was reminded of one example that Amy Goldin used in the early years of the Vietnam War. She said that some things are indestructible no matter the repression against them. If the military is against photosynthesis it can decide to destroy every leaf and blade of grass, but photosynthesis will still exist.

For me that has always meant, not that we can sit back with the assurance of ultimate victory, but that we must continue to protest the useless destruction; that we must use our art, our poetry, our ideas. Through the Artists Call, which sponsored Sr. Parada's trip, we can unite in some effective actions against our government's murder, against the attempted murder of Reason itself, through our art.

NYSCA

Up until recently, when I joined the FCA staff and was forced to deal with the New York State Council on the Arts, I had what I think may be a typical artist's mistrust of agencies and government bureaucracies, which made me suspicious of NYSCA without any incriminating evidence. Many of us, perhaps, feel that a state arts council is necessarily a monolithic bureaucracy that we must stay away from or approach grudgingly. I do not intend to defend NYSCA or to write the pros or cons of its merits. What I am wondering is, why, since we are the artists of New York State, do we not assume that NYSCA is *our* arts council — that we are automatically a part of the New York State Council on the Arts, with attendant privileges and responsibilities? (I have not checked with NYSCA to see if they would like us to consider ourselves as part of the organisation.) Maybe if we look at the strange case of NYSCA through our own situations its real position will come clearer.

In the first place, those of us who live in New York City do not see ourselves as part of New York State. Most of us are here because the Relatively Large Apple is still the world's art Capitol, and if one wants a reputation or to be of influence in the art world, it still has to be done here. We are in for a bite of the apple, and usually see the rest of New York State as even denser sticks than the sticks we may have come from. In general, we seem to be more sympathetic to Texas or Atlanta than to fellow artists in New York State. We also develop a kind of provincialism wherein we are afraid to have any connection with some supposed regionalism or provincialism embodied in art communities around New York State. We feel, I think, that we are the important artists, and because we are in New York NYSCA owes us much more support than anyone else.

At the same time, organised efforts from visual artists to push for NYSCA budget increases are seldom seen. We take instead the attitude that NYSCA is conspiratorially tight with its money.

NYSCA, then, is in the position of being an Arts Council in a large state which has within it the country's largest city and kind of art

Capitol, almost as two enemies occupying adjacent territories. (We in the City are the West Bank, but Albany has the Philistines.) In that situation, NYSCA gets a cut in funds every year — in that it doesn't get an increase even though inflation gallops. NYSCA's first responsibility, like it or not, must be to please or at least pacify the legislature and the Governor's office so that it can operate at all. It has two opposing secondary responsibilities, therefore, of being the Arts Council for the only art Capitol there is and for a state that desperately needs more cultural activities. That is a set of functions which I would not wish on anyone.

NYSCA, I think, tries hard and with some degree of creativity to juggle those oddly shaped spheres. Its new programme of matching grants to counties for local arts activities is very laudable, even though it specifically excludes the counties of New York City which, in NYSCA's words, "are already supported by the City". You and I may feel that the City has been less than kind to us, but when we compare DCA's budget to the NYSCA grant to Herkimer County (\$1,200) we must concede the point.

If we want more, and more kinds, of support from NYSCA, we must press our state government, and I think we must press in solidarity with fellow artists around the state.

In the past year I have been continually surprised at the number of dedicated and even visionary people at NYSCA. It is time for us to join forces.

November/December 1983

A Shaman Hits the Island

Santiago Bose has been in New York City only a few months, so he is still checking out the territory. "Will I get deported for saying that?" he asks, after talking about the substantial rumour that Filipino dictator Marcos has given money to Reagan's election campaign. But then he laughs as though he knows even more secrets, including, probably, how to make an Immigration Service 'green card' from banana leaves.

He knows his way around well enough not to need New York to give him an artist's license. He has shown in Beijing, Tokyo, The Hague, Manila, San Francisco and other places, including mountain villages in the Philippines. "New York is not the center of art; my heart is the center of art. The artist's heart is the center." A New York artist could not get away with saying such a thing. From Santiago it sounds just right.

He likes the anarchy here, particularly in the East Village art scene, where he presently has a window installation at Zone, on Avenue B.

It's true there is an 'East Village look' to most of the art, and many of the galleries seem interchangeable, but that's only about seventy-five percent of the stuff, so there is about another twenty-five percent that is good. There is so much going on in the East Village. There are all kinds of public art — unauthorized public art like graffiti and window installations. It is a situation that can filter the good art from the bad in a way that you couldn't find in a more established area. I think it is basically a healthy phenomenon.

Santiago likes to work with material at hand, with subjective themes from whatever is his situation at the moment. His window installation at Zone looks like anarchy at first, made of mud and large timbers from the vacant lot across the street from the gallery, and an old photograph, also from the vacant lot, because the photo was taken the same year he was born. He has also used neon in the piece,

because he is currently working with a guy who does neon signs. The piece has all sorts of echoes, like not yet being completely in place, or emergence, development, and possibly homesickness for some more tropical place. Maybe transformation. Or you pass by the window and you stop and think, now what's this guy up to?

I like all of these window galleries. They give art a 24-hour exposure, and it's an exposure to a public that does not normally see art. Most people don't go to galleries. In New York they already have a visual overload, and they don't think they want to see anything more. Anyway, people are intimidated by galleries. If you are not accustomed to the art world you don't know what will happen if you go into a gallery. Some poor guy starts to go in, and he's afraid they're going to ask him to buy something.

In the Asian American Arts Festival at Henry Street Settlement, Santiago Bose is showing work that he made in the Philippines using indigenous materials. He has made paper from mulberry, banana and eucalyptus leaves, bound with pine sap, and any other materials available, with a completely contemporary look. Yet in Manila, a few years back, he showed a painting he had done in New York while on a six-month fellowship in 1980. The painting is called *Thinking of my Brother While Waiting for a Subway Train*, and is done in acrylic. "I try not to limit myself in terms of medium or style", he said in an interview. "In the US people are too concerned with style. If next year the style is classical romanticism then hundreds of artists will paint that way. I think a good artist must tie his own responsibility to his art, to his responsibility to his people. That is really an inseparable set."

In that context we asked him what he thought of the Asian American Art exhibit. "Of course that kind of show is very hard to curate; it is not cohesive. It is a collection from so many places. It is putting whole continents together. But there are important common elements, and the show as a phenomenon is very important."

We asked Santiago the same question in connection with the show that *Art & Artists* had asked of Fred Houn: Does he feel that shows specialising in the works of a particular minority group tend to 'ghetto-ise' the artists?

No. It is not really an issue at all. Shows like this enable artists to put their work forward, which is always difficult for minority artists. If the individual work has integrity, it will be able to transcend any tendency toward isolation. Of course, it is easy for an artist to get stuck in one place or another but that is always a danger for any artist.

For me, I am a little hesitant to go knocking on gallery doors right now with my slides in my hand and my eyes looking properly respectful. They see so many artists come through their doors each day that they get mean. But say I begin with one hundred points of self-confidence; each visit with a gallery owner knocks off ten points, so pretty soon I have no self-confidence. I am de-energized. So that would affect my work badly. It really is demeaning, too. I have had exhibits all over the world but some New York gallery owners treat you in the most patronising way. Imagine how that must affect younger artists. Are the gallery owners here so arrogant because they sell art in the center of the art world? But our hearts are the real center.

In Baguio City in the Philippines the military installed a huge radar tower on a mountain top. On the adjacent mountain top, Santiago Bose built his own huge anti-radar tower from bamboo, vines and leaves. The first thing he asked me when we met was, "Do you know where I can get bamboo in New York?" He is not in the least intimidated by modern monsters or power systems.

The significant art now and in the near future — the next wave — will come from the minorities because the edge is there. White artists have no real fight with the state *as artists*. Picasso already won that fight. Naturally, the museums and the tastemakers are still promoting the art that is viable in their economic system. But it is a controlled market, and it is already of the past.

The power of writing history must be given to the people, then we will have a more objective view. Our own Filipino struggle is universal; it is a vital part of humanity's struggle in this period. It is not as though the US were at the center and the Philippines were off in some distant periphery from that center. But these are hard times. Often when Filipinos come here and become US citizens, they turn their backs on their own ways, and try as quickly as possible to absorb the American Way. But what is American Culture? It is just a commercial idea. So people get messed up in their heads. There is no quality to their lives. A minority artist here must be aware of that, must deal with it, and be aware of his own politics. Someone says, "I'm an artist, I have no politics", so I say, "Then you have no business being an artist". Our gift is a gift we must share with people.

Basquiat is now called the first urban primitive; what the hell does that mean? Where is the correspondence in his work? What is he representing to the art public about his own people? What is he representing to his people? Someone like Van Gogh: when you read his letters you see that he was always involved in some political situation.

I ask myself why so many Filipinos who come here succumb to all

this crap. Maybe it is their way of repaying themselves for all the stress. But it just makes more stress. On weekends they have parties, eat Filipino foods, Monday morning go back to senseless work so that next weekend, another party, more Filipino food. How to handle that stress? It is the artists' responsibility. Now, Basquiat; isn't it the same for his people? So what if you make a lot of money? What can greed really do for you? Why is this country supporting all of the killing Marcos is doing? Just for money. Greed.

An artist potentially has tremendous power. During the Nixon years, John Lennon was more popular than Nixon. Back home in the Philippines people go to a political rally, and they hear so many long speeches about terrible happenings that they get tired and they start feeling bad. But just one good song will give everyone courage. People need the same thing with visual images.

Santiago has studied architecture, art and advertising, and has a solid base in all of our visual systems, in the signs and symbolisms that clutter up these times. In 1979 he designed and made sets for *Apocalypse Now*, which was shot in the Philippines, and has worked extensively with the Igorat people in the mountains, making sophisticated murals and installations which involve the people.

He probably has plans for Manhattan. He may even be part of an international art conspiracy. If you see him on the street or at an opening, do not give him any bamboo.

November/December 1985

Who's on First First?

The history of the 'East Village' art scene has already been published in several recent books and some of us had not even figured out whether or not it was a real scene. Maybe the recent spate of writing does not mean that the East Village is now history. Maybe it is like writing your autobiography so that you will become famous, or to stake a claim.

Kenkeleba Gallery

Kenkeleba Gallery has been on the Lower East Side since 1974, first on the Bowery and then, beginning in 1979, on Second Street between Avenues B and C. It has provided initial support to artists who are now relatively established, such as Faith Ringgold, David Hammons and Tyrone Mitchell. An opening at Kenkeleba will often be attended by hundreds of people, and the press coverage has been pretty good. So, we have to ask, how come Kenkeleba doesn't get mentioned in all the histories and guides to East Village art? "Because we're black", says Corrinne Jennings, in a tone of voice that conveys humour, resignation and indignation all at once. But she also explains that until recently Kenkeleba's neighbourhood was the DMZ, the real centre aisle of the drug supermarket, which, according to many, was tolerated by the police as a way to drive people out of the area so that it could become the speculators' East Village Art Scene.

Kenkeleba is run by Corrinne and Joe Overstreet, a painter who has a reputation for being irascible, if not downright cantankerous. Leo Castelli, Ivan Karp, Gracie Mansion and all the guys at Nature Morte Gallery may also be known as cantankerous, but that's OK. Maybe it just seems kind of 'uppity' for a black, and maybe Joe Overstreet is judged more harshly for that.

But Overstreet's cantankerousness comes from a militancy based on real commitment and lone experience. Both he and Corrinne have a commitment to cultural and racial equality that is specific and not theoretical. During the Artists' Call Against US Intervention in

Central America, all of the midtown and SoHo galleries had stringent conditions for their involvement and were treated with great understanding by the Artists' Call committee. Kenkeleba also had stringent conditions for their involvement; Joe insisted that they be allowed to address racism in the US, and that the artist receive a portion of the money from any work that was sold. The arguments caused some ill feelings that possibly could have been avoided, and probably would have been with other players.

A similar set of arguments arose between Kenkeleba and the organisers of Art Against Apartheid last year, and similarly ended with bad feelings on both sides.

Joe Overstreet has a strong personality and a strong belief in his ideas — a self reliance that is necessary for any artist who is not white — and that has served him well.

Yet artists who have shown at Kenkeleba have been free to experiment and follow their own ideas. Corrinne describes the gallery as a kind of laboratory for artists. It is quite a good laboratory because the space is huge. If you need an entire room to develop a theme you've got it, and maybe work-space in the basement, maybe some materials thrown in. The artists who show there represent the real multi-racial make-up of the New York art world better than any other space in the city. There are no tokens, and the work of an American Indian or Chinese artist is not treated as a symbol for something or to make someone else's point.

There is an immediacy at Kenkeleba that is always evident and never trendy; sometimes the openings feel more like parties and, as in the example of the 'Carnival' show last season, spill out into the street with music and dancing. The involvement in the neighbourhood is integral to the gallery's concept. Besides doing five or six shows a year, Kenkeleba has always run educational programmes for local children, with funding or without, and has an artist-in-residency programme. They have a well-used slide registry, good documentation of past shows, and the beginnings of a permanent collection.

Corrinne Jennings and Joe Overstreet work too hard and have too much fun to allow themselves to be put on the defensive. But still, we have to ask, how come they don't get more credit?

Henry Street Settlement

On the other hand, Henry Street Settlement has been settled in the Lower East Side for the past ninety years, and they do not get the credit they deserve either. But Henry Street, even further south and east than Kenkeleba, is not 'East Village' by even the most

expansionist standards. They do have an arts programme that serves all of the Lower East Side, including the East Village, and their gallery is also like a laboratory where artists can experiment and develop with a public. Because of Henry Street's reputation, that public extends far beyond the Lower East Side. Over the years Henry Street Settlement has redefined the nature and purpose of a settlement house; they stage plays by Amiri Baraka and Samm-Art Williams, host exhibitions curated by Romare Bearden and Juan Sanchez, and still remain firmly rooted in the neighbourhood. More than bringing the world to the Lower East Side in the usual patronising ways of social work, Henry Street recognises the Lower East Side's real place in the world.

In the past few years artists including Ida Applebroog, Joyce Kozloff, Mary Beth Edelson, Nancy Spero, Faith Ringgold, May Stevens, Sue Coe, Leon Golub, Catalina Parra, Benny Andrews and Rudolph Baranik have all shown at Henry Street. Not bad for a neighbourhood gallery. That is mostly due to the work of Susan Fleminger, the eclectic and unflappable director of the gallery and the visual arts component of Henry Street's Arts for Living Center. She has made the gallery a real cutting edge for visual arts in New York. Many artists have had their work shown first at Henry Street. Ms Fleminger points out that a gallery which must make concessions to the commercial art world could not serve the functions that Henry Street does. The absence of commercialism and competition also make a good environment for artists to work with each other, so that group shows in other spaces are generated. Ms Fleminger says, "We have had many successes because we take chances".

Last year an exhibition of photography of the Lower East Side travelled to eighteen different places, and shows at Henry Street have themes which relate to the neighbourhood. Since 1977 the gallery has expanded its space and has increasingly worked with other arts organisations, such as the Jamaica Arts Center and Kenkeleba Gallery.

Despite constant financial problems, there is also an artist-in-residence programme which involves four to six artists a year, and many programmes for artists to work part-time in local schools. At present, Henry Street employs about twenty artists in public school programmes. There are also classes at the settlement which are seen as part of the gallery's operation. Students can watch the artists-in-residence at work. Susan Fleminger's concept of the gallery is that it is a place to facilitate. Usually, shows are curated by artists, either those in the artist-in-residence programmes, or others who have ideas,

or by organisations. But this season she has initiated a series of shows curated by people who are not artists. She likes changes.

In the 85/86 season, Henry Street's Arts for Living Center will select women and minority curators including Gylbert Coker, Sy Rubin and Esther Brumberg, (for a show called 'The Edge of the City'), Robin Holder and Judy Blum, among others. Currently (October 11 through November 24), the Alliance for Asian American Arts and Culture is collaborating with Henry Street on an exhibition called 'Roots to Reality: Asian America in Transition', a multi-discipline show which is, in fact, the First Annual Asian American Visual and Performing Arts Event.

This seems to be a perfect collaboration. Henry Street has excellent facilities for music, film and the performing arts, as well as a large, open gallery space. Moreover, it has a long history of involvement with Asian American communities in a way that breaks down isolation while fostering confidence in heritage. That coincides nicely with the motivations of Fred Houn, one of the principle organisers of the event.

Mr Houn is a composer and musician who moved to New York four years ago from Boston because, "New York is the place to be if you want to work effectively as an artist". He and others first began the Alliance about three years ago, partly in response to the New York State Council for the Arts' plans to phase out special funding to minority arts groups.

At that time there was much discussion within NYSCA over the concern that special funding tended to further isolate minority artists. We asked Fred Houn how he felt about the idea that special attention in general to any group of minority artists tended to act as an isolation. "I disagree totally. The deepest source for an artist is his heritage, which includes his community. Without that strong base the art becomes weak and imitative." He said that one of the main reasons for the Festival, and for the formation of the Alliance itself, was to "resist the present trend towards 'white out'. We want to encourage new work that explores our own identities, and to help artists get rewards, financial and otherwise, for that kind of work."

What is most obvious in all of the visual arts of this Festival is a complex dialogue and a challenge between current developments in 'mainstream' art and the traditions of the individual artists, similar in feeling to new art from Cuba and Latin America.

November/December 1985

Related Events, Practically

Although the American Indian Movement (AIM) was officially founded in 1968, it began at its first national conference in 1971. It was there that Russell Means became involved. He stood up in the audience of Indians from all over the country and said that if there were to be a truly national American Indian Movement its base and direction would have to come from the traditional people out on the reservations, a revolutionary idea that had previously been voiced only by the unheard traditional people.

A few months after that conference the expanded American Indian Movement made history with the take-over of the Washington headquarters of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the liberation of thousands of pages of documents which would have been damning to the Bureau and the federal government if the press and the public had taken Indian affairs seriously.

Larry Rosing, editor of this 'look back in anger' anniversary supplement, asked me if I would write something about those days and what has happened since. The problem is, I wasn't there. I spent practically every evening of 1971 in the Landolt Tavern in Geneva, Switzerland, drinking Beaujolais (at about thirty cents a glass) at the same table where V.I. Lenin had drunk Beaujolais some years earlier. My friends and I — they were French, Spanish, Bolivian, Peruvian, Zimbabwean, South African, Algerian — spoke often about Mr Lenin and his colleagues. We also talked about art, but in a way that Americans do not talk about art: with passion and innocence, with never a thought about 'careers' or about money. We seldom mentioned famous artists, we did not go to openings much, nor ever once a conference or panel discussion. We put our art work in galleries, the international agencies of Geneva, and on the streets indiscriminately.

I had come to Geneva in 1969 from Texas, without ever having been to New York. In Texas I had been an artist since 1953, showing work at whatever galleries were available and selling enough to get by without having to work too hard on construction sites or ranches.

My only intention in Europe was to escape the US. Aside from what I perceived as a hopeless situation for Indian politics in the Sixties, it seemed to me that it was impossible to be an artist in the US or at least in Texas. It seemed to me that people wanted entertainment and decoration.

I arrived in Geneva twenty-nine years old without ever having attended high school, much less art school. It was relatively easy to break into the Geneva 'art scene', save that staying in Geneva required a regular job (producing and selling pieces of sculpture was not considered a regular job) or being in school. I enrolled in the tuition-free Ecole des Beaux Arts. For the next four years I had one class and one teacher. My gallery gave me two shows a year and a farm in France. Jesus, I had a sweet life.

The American Indian Movement grew and became more and more effective, in response to a situation on the reservations that was becoming steadily worse under Nixon. In 1973 the village of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation was occupied and declared a liberated zone by the people of Pine Ridge and the American Indian Movement. La Donna Harris, a Comanche who was at the time married to Senator Fred Harris, said to the press that 99 percent of all Indians supported the liberation of Wounded Knee and the American Indian Movement. By that time I was already part of AIM and was doing support work in Europe. I returned to the US and spent the next year in South Dakota. From then until 1979 when I left full-time work in AIM, I gave practically no thought to art, except late at night when I would sometimes paint furtively, and carve little things for the kids and other friends.

You have been such good and patient readers so far that I must reassure you, after a few more disconnections, we really will reach a point from all this. But first I must reminisce just a little bit more; consider it pieces of evidence.

I came to New York in 1975 to open AIM's United Nations office. I had never heard of SoHo before, and when I finally did, my perception was that it was only some pretentious rip-off of London's Soho, and that it was probably a shopping district. In 1976 the anti-catalogue committee of the Artworkers' Coalition asked me to contribute a piece on Rockefeller, Indian art and American art history. In the process I attended several meetings in SoHo. I did not know that I was in SoHo or even that those giant spaces were called lofts. I had not yet been to either a gallery or a museum in New York, and did not go to either until 1980. Some time in late 1976 or early 1977 a friend invited me to the Performing Garage. I asked him why it

was in such a strange part of town and received forthwith a lucid explanation of SoHo. (I had not the slightest idea where Houston Street was.)

The one gallery I had visited soon after I arrived in the city was run by a Tuscarora named Lloyd Oxendine. He showed contemporary experimental Indian art, but soon closed up shop and went to Europe. The art was too weird for New York buyers. I remember especially one piece: a horse skull painted blue inside a black box decorated with rifle shells. Recently I ran into Lloyd again and asked him whatever happened to the artist who had done that piece. "Drunk, I guess, or dead."

The late Sixties and early Seventies saw the emergence of many Indian artists who tried to place themselves securely within their peoples' traditions and be contemporary and part of the larger art scene at the same time. The militancy and pride of the American Indian Movement was the primary cause for that phenomenon. But by that time the works of Fritz Scholder and R.C. Gorman were already selling at high prices, and any Indian artists who wanted the least financial reward had to do work that was similar to theirs or to that of Morrisseau or Brocoupe.

For more than fifteen years there has been a 'healthy' market for American Indian art. It is a closed market that has little to do with the larger art market, and even less with contemporary art criticism and theory. It is more of a glorified tourist trade, and many Indian artists, following Scholder's lead, found the most efficacious ways to cash in on it, in our time-honoured tradition of dancing for the tourists. The lucrateness of this market has kept many Indian artists from developing, has helped keep us locked out of the art world, and has separated us from our own people; it has proved to be a trick bag that rewards our worst efforts.

Benny Andrews, in his article, 'Back in 1971 When Things Were Hot and Heavy', talks about the efforts of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition to break open the Whitney and other museums. American Indians have never formed such a coalition, have never stormed the museums.

One reason for this is that there is, for the most part, a class division between our artists and our plain ol' people. In the Seventies, and today, I feel that I can say, without having done an actual survey, that many Indian artists do not strongly identify with the struggles of the Indians on reservations, or with the rage against the absolutely mind-boggling racism against Indian people today. Aside from those of us who had been self-taught, 'un-educated' artists, I never saw an Indian artist in or supporting the American Indian Movement. Between 1973 and 1976, more than two hundred members of AIM

were murdered in South Dakota. An Indian inmate, Johnny Hill, was the only person convicted for the massacre in Attica prison. The Indian artists who were selling (or who hoped to sell) had little connection to those goings-on, except that the more Indian affairs got in the media, the more buyers paid for Indian art. A few artists did some pretty brilliant and experimental work but were passed over.

Perhaps from the outside, seeing the Gormans and Scholders all over the place, people thought that Indians were doing okay in the art world, and maybe that we were just naturally spacey and wimpy. At any rate, the black artists did not take up our case, the women artists did not take up our case, and for many reasons we were unable to make our own case. I must admit that in the Seventies the entire structure of American art seemed to me a complete *non sequitur*. If someone had told us in AIM that some folks were challenging the art-and-culture systems of the US it would not have seemed the least important.

But the excitement I feel retrospectively about the Artworker's Coalition comes from the fact that it took on the entire system. Amazingly, it took art seriously. That must be why Larry Rosing won't give up his running history in this artists' newspaper year after year, despite the frustration of fewer people willing to state honest opinions for fear of losing their jobs, and less substance included in articles about the present.

Among younger artists in New York today, and I imagine in other parts of the country, there is much intolerance and perhaps partly-deserved ridicule about the constant harping that comes from those of us who are now, at great surprise to ourselves, the old fogies of the art world, much, I imagine, like the impatience I feel when I read statements by Motherwell or Rothko, or 'lesser' artists of that generation.

Histories of older generations are more than amusement to us only if they are not histories but continuing efforts. It is part of the nature of US culture that we are disjointed, that we discard histories; and each generation is supposed to 'find its own voice', like inventing a new language (postmodernism, neo-expressionism, etc) without a concept of what language might be used for.

It is clear, then, why in 1971 so many progressive people in the arts were focusing on art histories and education, and equally clear why that is always threatening to some administrators and to those always-present folks who, for one reason or another, feel a need to control our collective perceptions.

January/February 1986

Our Strongest Bond

Indians of the Americas have maintained a common dream: our long hope to be left in peace on our own lands, without barriers to our participation in every aspect of world and human affairs. That dream is not particularly exotic in human history, yet it has been treated as the most far-fetched concept by nearly every country in the Americas. The United States in particular has reacted to the articulation and manifestation of that dream as though it were un-American.

It has become clear, despite great differences in language and culture, that we Indians of the Americas feel more of a kinship with each other than we do with non-Indian citizens of our countries. But our strongest bond is the understanding that we are separate peoples.

We Cherokees could not be other than we are if we wanted to be. It is not to us a question of some 'tribalism' that we might some day discard; nor is it a question of a kind of nationalism, which would place us in an even more isolated and adversarial position than now. The Mapuches of Chile demand to be sovereign in their own territory, fully participant citizens and part of a continental confederation of Indian nations. That same stubborn lack of *Realpolitik* is true for the Otomi of Mexico, the Sioux of the United States and the Cree of Canada.

We share a lack of trust not only in governments but in any Indian programmes set forth by governments and in any change in governments, a suspicion derived from almost 500 years of bitter experiences. The most notable exception to that phenomenon, in concrete terms and Indian perceptions, was the situation in Chile during the time of Allende. But the Mapuche of Chile have since suffered the repression of the Pinochet regime far more acutely than the rest of the population, and have today one of the most serious and pressing situations. Probably only Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador and the United States have cases of greater urgency. Yet it is Nicaragua upon which world attention is focused, as in Russell Means' article, 'The Real Freedom Fighters in Nicaragua', of March 11.

The International Indian Treaty Council, an organisation meant

to be a voice in international forums for Indian peoples, and the American Indian Movement began having sporadic conversations with the Sandinistas long before Somoza was overthrown. Once the Sandinistas had established themselves, we asked for their policy towards Indian populations. We were told by Ernesto Cardenal of the ruling junta that the policy was to facilitate communications between all of the Indian populations and give them time, perhaps years, to develop their own programmes and policies, with the government providing only such assistance as may be requested. In its simplicity and integrity, that sounded to us like an Indian solution. We were amazed.

But it was a honeymoon that was quickly disrupted by Contra attacks against the government. The Sandinistas reacted clumsily, with an excess of zeal and revolutionary self-righteousness to the complicity of some Miskito Indians in these attacks. (Indian populations are not exempt from humanity's propensity to generate reactionaries and crooks.)

It was not long before Miskito individuals arrived in the United States and began approaching Indian organisations. When an Indian from anywhere tells us that he is being oppressed, our reaction is belief and solidarity; when an Indian who cooperates with his government approaches us, our reaction is, justifiably, suspicion.

There is now a body of evidence in the case of Nicaragua and the Miskito Indians that shows exaggeration, distortion and lies; duplicity developed to show the Sandinistas in the worst possible light by people with secret agendas and ulterior motives. It may be true that the Sandinistas are, in part, victims of their own attitudes toward Indians; certainly they are not exempt from the racial stereotypes so common in the Americas. Yet they are the first government to engage in talks with indigenous peoples.

So we have to ask: whose purpose is being served by the destruction of the talks between the Sandinistas and the Miskito Indians? It has divided the Miskitos among themselves and against other Indians in Nicaragua. It has divided Indians here in the United States at a time when President Reagan's Indian policies demand our unity.

In the time-honoured traditions developed by Cortez and Andrew Jackson, Indian peoples' long hope and sorrow have been used against us. As the indigenous mountain peoples of Southeast Asia were used by the CIA to further American designs in that part of the world, so also the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua are being used and divided to that end. If anyone truly wants to see justice done for the Miskito Indians, then the first priority must be an end to the US involvement in Nicaragua.

March 1986

1886/Haymarket/Prairie Grasses

*We heard the chainsaws at dawn.
By noon the sound of their teeth
Scream emotionless monotonous scream,
More solid than the sun,
Had bitten into our nerves,
And in the evening, silence without birds,
Heavily missing the rustle of small animals.*

*The sun fell beyond the bared hills.
Fallen trees tried to whisper one last breath.
Next morning the chainsaws began once more, closer.
That summer every day was chainsaws,
And some of the guys got jobs ripping down our own trees.*

*In the town close by and on the railroad
The white men struck for higher wages.
Reds, they were called, and we saw some of them
As we brought dead trees dead without honour
To the railroad depot. But we did not strike.*

*Tecumseh went over to the camp of Crazy Horse.
He crossed Illinois and went into Minnesota to visit
Where Abraham Lincoln had hung those Indian men
Who had killed an army commander and stuffed prairie grass
Down his throat.
They had asked for food for their children,
And the commander said, "Let them eat grass."*

*Abraham emancipated them from their hunger.
He sacrificed our fathers for justice,
And Tecumseh stopped there and burned some grass at the spot.
He crossed South Dakota, into the Black Hills under
The shadow of Mt. Rushmore, and stopped at the camp of
Crazy Horse.*

*In 1886 Geronimo and Nana and the other Apaches were fighting
Their last battle. Geronimo wanted to sit and smoke
With Crazy Horse and Tecumseh. He knew that Tres Manos,
Wearing his father's hand around his neck, would be there,
And Ocela the Black Drink Singer, and Black Hawk.*

*The buffalo spoke to God out of a whirlwind, saying,
Where were you when we made the prairie grasses,
And sent our daughter to the sons of men,
That they might praise us,
And all the wolves and stars sang together?*

It is hay, and we can sell it.

*These are the true words of Sitting Bull:
"I have been to Chicago, and I have seen orphans,
Children who suffer because no one claims to own them,
And the whites have one law for the rich,
Another law for the poor.
How can we do battle against such as these?"*

*Tecumseh said, Crazy Horse, Let us go to the Haymarket,
Where they are going to fight it out.
There at the end of the prairie
Will they fight over the hay?
Will they recognise us?
Will the dying children call out to us?*

*When the bullets hit them
They will dance with us the Ghost Dance.*

c. 1983

That Girl from Rosebud with No Feet

*How am I going to begin?
They were walking along.
Phyllis Young told me that in the winter of 1984
It got a hundred degrees below zero
In South Dakota, with the wind-chill factor.*

*These two girls ran away from the St. Francis
Missionary School on the Rosebud Reservation
in the winter of 1919.*

*They were walking along, trying to get home.
They wanted to go home, and one girl died
From the cold. The other girl got frozen feet,
So when the missionaries found her they cut
Off her feet.*

Interruption

*We interrupt this poem to repeat a story
Ruth Reynolds told just last night.
She said that when she was growing up in
South Dakota white people used to trade land
From Indians for an overcoat. When the overcoats
Wore out the Indians would come to the land
Owners for new coats, saying, "My overcoat
Wore out but the land has not worn out."
She also said that in those days she and the other
White folks would hold square dances. That reminds me
That in 1923 Eagle Elk was arrested on the Rosebud Reservation
For attempting to conduct a Sioux ceremony.*

*Now, back to the girl with no feet.
I guess she stayed in school after that.
Anyway, the savage and subversive round dances
Of the Sioux had been outlawed.*

So that's all I have to say right now.

Oh No! It's Part Two!

*Wherein the poet assumes a different voice
And self-consciously criticises his lack of poetics.*

*But first, another interruption: In 1921 two boys
Escaped St. Francis Missionary School. One died
From the cold. What is wrong with these
Stupid Indians?*

*Why doesn't Mr. Durham use some subtlety
Or some metaphor? The bare facts do not
Make a poem. Let's have the two girls
Walking along chanting. Let's begin with
A chant or a description of frost hard
As knives.*

*You could have the two boys following
The same path, in the footsteps of the girl
With no more footsteps. You could use the
Rhythm of walking. This poem stumbles.*

c. 1983

I Want You To Hear These Words About Jo Ann Yellowbird (Ars Poetica)

*From what kind of yellow bird comes the name Yellowbird?
It must mean Kunh gwo, the sacred Yellowhammer.*

*Ka (But now), no more dreaming or explaining;
Jo Ann Yellowbird took rat poison and died.*

*A chorus was provided a year before in
A pamphlet concerning related events:*

STOP THE GENOCIDE OF INDIAN PEOPLE

*"Jo Ann Yellowbird, an activist in
the American Indian Movement, was seven months
pregnant when she was kicked in the stomach
by a police officer. Two weeks later her
baby Zintkalazi was born dead. Jo Ann
has filed suit against the officer who killed her
and the authorities who refused her medical treatment."*

*And to show that I am a sophisticated poet and
Not a pamphleteer, I quote from the Vocabulary
Of a Lakota Primer printed to educate those children
Of the Pine Ridge who have not been kicked to death:*

*Billy Boy said
I like the sheriff
Overtake by night*

*Billy eya
canakaa wustuca lake
a han he ju*

starve
 pneumonia
 wash your face
 your face is dirty
 comb your hair
 wash your clothes
 Supervisor
 always take a bath
 be silent!
 My eye hurts
 Commissioner of Indian Affairs
 earth
 plow
 160 acres
 shovel
 allotment
 My chest hurts
 I have none
 Heaven
 the Pope
 Church
 Your ears are dirty
 my ears ache
 wrong procedure
 cut your hair

aki ran
 caru na pere
 ete glu ja ja
 ete nu sapa
 glak ca yo
 ha klu ja ja pi
 Igmu wa pa se
 ye han nu wan po
 inila yanka yo
 ista mayazan
 Ta kal Tunkashile ya pi
 maka
 maka iyublic
 maka i yu ta pi sope la
 ma ki pap te
 makove owapi
 maku mayazan
 manice
 Marpiya
 Oyublaye
 Owacekiye
 nure ni sape
 nure opa mayazan
 oga sni
 pehin gla sla yo

c. 1983

Lewis and Clark

*Lewis and Clark and Lewis's wife and Clark's girlfriend
 And Lewis's hired man and Seward and Carson and Boone*

*Got on a raft and a boat and a wagon and a trail
 And a horse and a kick to discover Nebraska*

*And Wyoming and Kentucky and Oregon and Montana,
 To see what makes them tick and exactly*

*Where they might be located and situated and
 Established and faring without Lewis and Clark.*

*Clark thought it was a lark and Lewis
 Knew his bark canoe could do thirty miles a day
 And marked each tree along the way
 So they wouldn't get lost.*

*Cost over-runs stopped the party short in St. Louis, and
 Clark blew his top and Seward said what folly so Pocohontas
 loaned
 Them thirty-eight million dollars and Carson said
 It was a boon to all mankind and Clark felt jolly.*

*Lewis's wife and Clark's girlfriend wondered why
 She did it and Boone said when we get to Carson City
 Alaska where she got the money.*

*Pocohontas was funny; she'd do anything
 For her money and wouldn't even try to collect
 The money because woman's work is never dun.*

*Lewis and Clark and all their friends started
On the trail again to win the West and pass
The test of man's will over nature and adversity and
The wilderness and the unknown and manifest
Their destiny.*

*But they got lost and Hiawatha directed them
And the Boston pops in the 1812 overture and
The Rocky Mountain overpass and Donner's Pass
And the northwest passage.*

*When Lewis and Clark and the women and their Indian friends
And the other explorers reached Seattle they sat a little
While to tattle of the battles with the Kwakiutls
And the fierce Cheyenne and the shy Mandan and
Passed the bottle from hand to hand.*

*They got so drunk they couldn't stand
And panned for gold and stole some land
And felt real grand.*

*But Lewis fell into quicksand and Clark and Lewis's wife
And Clark's girlfriend and Lewis' hired man and Seward
And Carson and Boone were devoured by a bear
And a wolf and a mountain lion and a killer whale
And their Indian friends didn't know what to do.*

1984

Ni' Go Tlunh a Doh Ka

The six American Indian artists in this show all have a militant sense of responsibility toward our own people that is absolute, although the methods and styles of transmitting that militancy are very different. We are also committed artists, and intend to address the world, the art world and art itself on the highest possible level of seriousness and importance. We are not selling souvenirs on a more sophisticated level. We are not seeking approval.

In New York I am often asked the question, "Do you consider yourself an Indian artist or simply an artist?". The implication is that the work of an Indian artist is more restricted, narrow, and perhaps even less serious, while that of an artist is more universal, more sophisticated, and conceivably of lasting importance. Oddly, it is only the art of white men that ever achieves such cultureless, cosmic universality.

My answer to that arrogantly misinformed question is similar to what the other five artists say; I am a traditional Cherokee artist. My work is not less universal than some other. I demand that it be approached with the expectation of universal responses. We want to be participants in all of art's discourses. We expect that those discourses will allow more voices. To be an American Indian artist is quite possibly to be more sophisticated and universal than many white artists can manage, for what should be obvious reasons. But often people approach American Indian art with ulterior motives. I suspect, cynically maybe, that some people enjoy a *frisson* of the exotic mixed with a safely distanced guilt, plus the comfort expected from a familiar landscape.

Jean LaMarr has said that her art speaks for itself and has no explanation beyond what is there. We, and most artists, agree with that reasoning, but to talk about the contexts in which our work moves seems a necessity. It would be impossible, and I think immoral, to attempt to discuss American Indian art sensibly without making central the realities of our lives. One of these realities is the racism

manifested as romantic stereotypes by which North Americans may deny other political realities such as enforced poverty and alienation, and constant land loss. It is because of such stereotypes that people often expect American Indian art to concern itself with only the most comforting subject matter. If one goes to an exhibition of Latin American art, there is the expectation that political realities will be taken up constantly by the artists. But American Indian art is supposed to transcend that in mystical ways, or perhaps sometimes now, to present the case in such a way that the American people can be entertained by our sorrows.

There is an unspoken demand that we do not exist ourselves in this world, this terrible week!, except as nostalgic echoes of our ancestors — the 'real' Indians.

In Oklahoma City, Richard Ray (Whitman) is asked the question, "Are you a traditional Indian artist?", and that question has modern implications specific to Southwest regionalism, which places American Indian painting and sculpture in the context of the styles developed this century at the two Indian art schools in Santa Fe. Richard has explained that he was raised 'in the country', among his Yuchi people, and attends all the Yuchi ceremonies. He did in fact attend art school in Santa Fe, but reflects on the phenomenon of a set of traditions developed in schools that are not actually traditional within our own societies, but stem from various imposed styles (the so-called traditional 'flat style' of painting, for example). It is a phenomenon that gives art a burden of tradition without real value for us. The marketplace puts value on recognisably 'Indian' art such that age or usefulness within Indian society does not matter. But it is useful to discuss what American Indian traditions actually are.

There is a nefarious tendency to consider material manifestations as traditions. If we accept such absurd criteria, then horses among the Plains Indians and Indian beadwork must be seen as untraditional. Traditions exist and are guarded by Indian communities. One of the most important of these is dynamism. Constant change — adaptability, the inclusion of new ways and new material — is a tradition that our artists have particularly celebrated and have used to move and strengthen our societies. That was most obvious in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Every object, every material brought in from Europe was taken and transformed with great energy. A rifle in the hands of a soldier was not the same as a rifle that had undergone Duchampian changes in the hands of a defender, which often included changes in form by the employment of feathers, leather and beadwork. We six feel that by participating in whatever modern dialogues are pertinent we are maintaining this tradition.

There is, however, a traditional aesthetic so well-known and so distinctly of this hemisphere that it can be traced from pre-Columbian times to the more recent past. There is an American Indian aesthetic. It has neither declined nor gone out of use. But this century the art market has rewarded mostly those Indian artists who have produced art using Indian subject matter within the boundaries of an imposed European aesthetic. But even the slow expansion of those boundaries has taken courage and discipline on the part of many artists. The basic problem began with the century, when Indian students were told that their peoples' art was essentially 'applied art' (and crafts), and so not quite as 'high' as the white folks' oil painting on canvas. We were taught that we had to develop a new aesthetic that would encompass painting on canvas squares. We must hold in mind, though, that US art from 1900 through the Twenties and Thirties was more conservative (intellectually and aesthetically) than that of most European countries, so what we were taught in those days was as if from long-outdated textbooks.

Painting on canvas and the art market are no longer part of a system that is alien to us or even to our most traditional communities. Our societies are flexible enough to allow entry of such systems without losing any purity. I believe this is an important point. White society tends to think that it has ownership over certain systems and phenomena, and is often protective of the 'purity' of us primitive folk. For example, many non-Indians are surprised that the Cherokees have been state-of-the-art-blacksmiths for more than 200 years, and that 150 years ago Cherokee knives made of high-carbon steel were as much in demand as Saracen blades once were in Spain. The quality of the work and the designs were so superior that James Bowie, the famous frontier slave trader, bought two of our knives from a Cherokee blacksmith named Jimmy Black(smith), and promptly named them Bowie knives. The technology quickly became traditional Cherokee.

I believe that the acts and perceptions of combining, of making constant connections on many levels, are the driving motivation of our aesthetic. There is a mistaken idea that our traditional art is religious, that art objects were made for 'magical' purposes. The mistake comes from the European way of seeing. We do not have religions in the European sense; we do not have words in our own languages for 'religion', 'to worship', or 'to pray'. What is called our 'religion' is much more practical and down-to-earth, less removed from life by hierarchy, and not officially controlled by institutions. Mostly, our 'gods' are *real*: animals, the sun and the moon, the elements. It

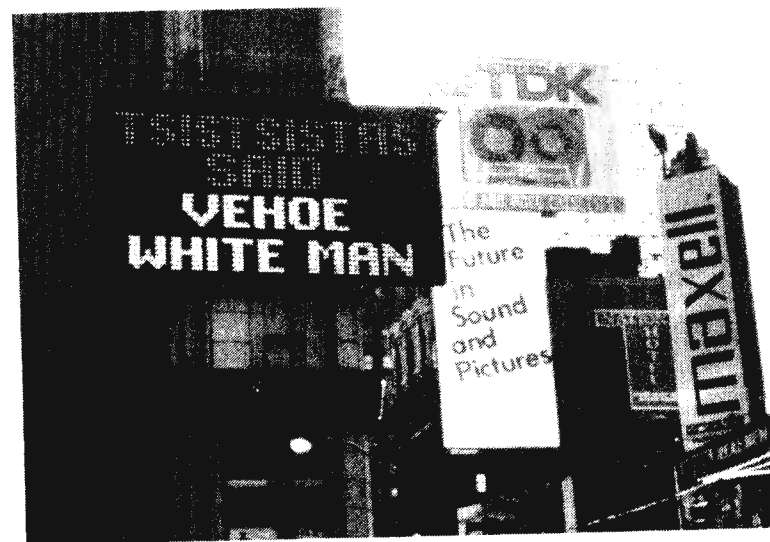
is a 'religious' system whose practice is to allow us complex participation in the life of the earth. We need to be in conversation with everything, to dance serious dances with everything. So it is a system that attempts to break down separations, and therefore is an integral part of all other systems and activities. European culture has evolved into one of separations, of classifications and of hierarchies. I do not mean to imply that one culture is totally positive and the other totally negative, just that they are truly different. With that remarkable difference we find ourselves invaded by European culture. That directly involves artistic work with political work: two necessities that are inextricably bound to each other.

When we do works on paper we cannot forget the paper-making process, the fact of the trees on our land. What symbolic combinations can we make with each work of art? What semiological vocabularies can we expose? Languages speak through objects. A whisky bottle has as valid an artistic use as any other object. Of course, one listens to the conversations of the bottle when considering aesthetic purposes. It would be something like a sin to trick the bottle into lying: a matter of intercepting the universal dialogue so necessary to our survival. One can use the bottle to *play* tricks, or to tell jokes, or to make any unexpected combinations, but we would not force it into false positions.

This part of our aesthetic gives our work a political edge, although maybe none of us showing here would call himself or herself a 'political' artist as the term is conventionally used. As American Indian visual artists who must attempt to address the world through languages of objects, combinations, images and form, signs and symbols, we have a real job to subvert and correct that constant stream of misinformation generated by the media, advertising, and the myth-making process that seems to come from everywhere. There is a framework of unreality that begins with the cigar store Indian and continues in the new TV commercials to sell Dodge automobiles (or Pontiacs, or Cherokee Chiefs); or magazine ads for IBM and General Dynamics Corporation.

Both the weakness and the definition of modernism is that art only addresses other art. But Indian artists address other art intrinsically from both a political and an aesthetic point of view.

The art world spends much time discussing the purpose of art. In our world, art can have as many purposes as a community might have for it. Recently, Thomas Lawson, an artist and critic, said that basically the role of an Indian artist was to interpret for society, and that the role of a white artist was to be the conscience of his or her



Edgar Heap of Birds, *In Our Language*, 1982; Computer Light Project, Spectacolor Inc., Times Square, NY. (Photo: E. Heap of Birds).

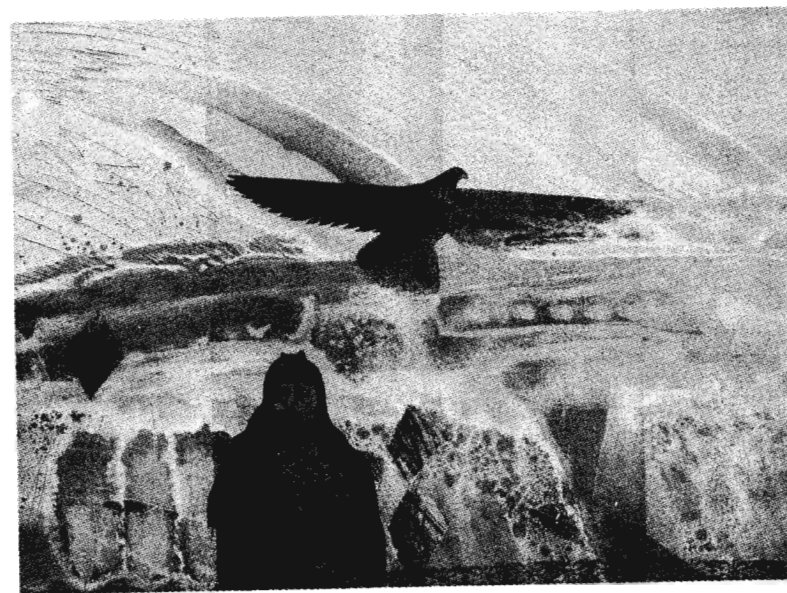
society. Jean LaMarr has in fact said that she sees her role as interpreting Indian society to white society, which is not exactly what Lawson meant but is indicative of one of the many roles that we feel we must fulfil. Lawson makes the common assumption that an Indian artist deals only with the Indian world. Once out, in New York City for example, we are expected to become deculturalised 'artists'. There is no similar expectation for the white artist. Then there is the assumption that interpretation does not include conscience. As I have tried to show, in our aesthetic that is exactly what it *must* include, in a complex tapestry of metaphor and real prairie grass. But we do not feel that artists are the exclusive keepers of conscience for society; that is a responsibility shared by all members of society. The idea of artist-as-conscience seems romantically, and falsely, shamanistic. The real question is one of non-Indians accepting the validity of American Indian art as part of the human dialogue instead of appropriating our styles in the most superficial way.

There is a distinct Indian aesthetic which challenges and interfaces with that of the European. We believe that the process is important to US society and that it reaches to the most profound

motivations of American culture. Edgar Heap of Birds is one of our leading artists in this context. The work he is doing now, although it is not his only direction, is deliberately "without format or framework". He uses words, clichés, the graphics and semiology of printed matter, to talk about those media phenomena and the multitude of attitudes behind them. You look at 'art' but you face a rifle with feathers informing the barrel. Of the six artists, his is the most recognisably 'postmodern'. I asked him the New York question, "Does he think of himself as an artist or as an Indian artist?" He replied that he is Elk Clan, Cheyenne Arapaho, a member of the warrior society, and that artwork is a modern weapon. Edgar is acutely aware of the uses US society has for its mythology about American Indians. The cowboys, the conquering of the 'frontier', the taming of the 'wilderness' (upon which millions of people lived), and the idea that America is a 'land of immigrants' who must continually fight off surrounding savages — are all part of a philosophy by which the US perceives itself and by which it functions in the world. (It is the myth that makes the US tick — like a bomb). Edgar Heap of Birds says he is in search of messages for America. The search itself is part of his artwork.

His ways of moving in the art world are also part of his artwork. He participates in exhibitions and in other areas that are deliberately unexpected. I first heard his name after walking along Times Square and being astounded to see that the giant computerised electronic billboard was carrying a Cheyenne message to Manhattan. I am sure he has been in shows in which the curator, unconsciously perhaps, wanted to include a token Indian artist to round out the programme. But Edgar is a warrior artist and his work does not allow itself to be tokenised. Edgar organises and curates exhibitions of American Indian art as a strategy, and is most supportive of other Indian artists, all as part of his total work as an artist, and as a member of a Cheyenne Warrior Society. His work is as invasive as the drawings Indian prisoners used to make in Army ledger books. As one of our most sophisticated and mobile artists, he says that he is encouraged when he finds old arrowheads in the fields back home. "They are still sharp, still dangerous."

Jean LaMarr's work is as different from Edgar Heap of Birds' as can be contained within a single exhibition. She is of the Pit River people (Susanville, California), who have been in the forefront of the struggle for Indian rights for the past twenty years, actively fighting for their land and for fishing rights. Her colour etchings are very accessible and give the impression she has done them for her own



Jean LaMarr, *Sarah Winnemucca No 3*, 1986; screenprint/monotype, 22 x 30in.

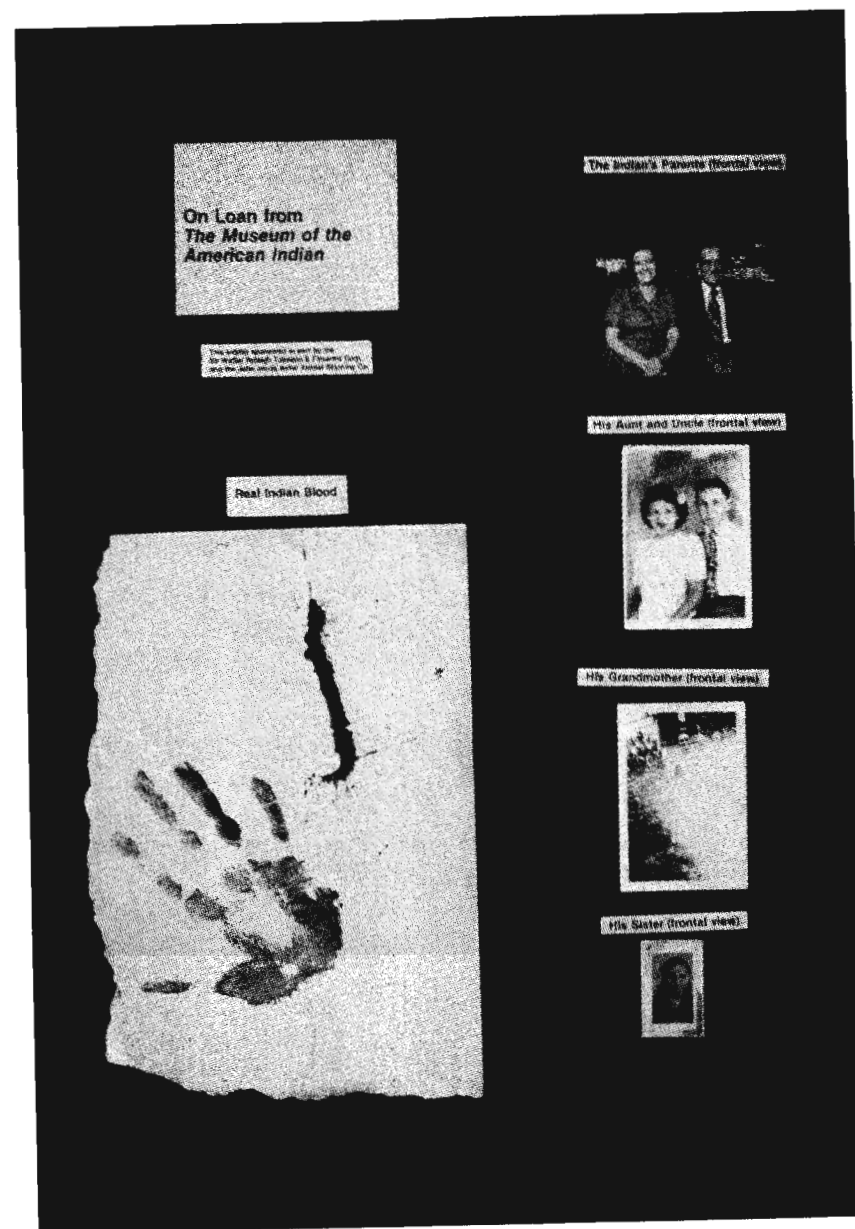
people. They are pictures that tell stories, like a serialised *winter count*, but are on handmade paper instead of buffalo hide. Some, like *They're Going to Dump It Where?* are like elaborate cartoons done by a traditional community's wise woman. Seeing her work is like talking to a person from an Indian community not visited before but hearing stories and problems similar to those already known from other reservations. Jean LaMarr has said that her work is about healing and interpretation. It is contemporary history in a tradition thousands of years old. She says that as artists we have an important role, a responsibility, in our communities. Her statement, that we must interpret *information* to non-Indians, should be heard as coming from within her community. She feels perfectly at home with two sets of aesthetics. Although her work is done with obvious craft and a celebration of materials and processes, it does not directly address or challenge the art world and its avant-garde. The work has a bigger and more serious audience.

Richard Ray (Whitman) takes photographs of Indians. He remembers Edward Curtis and the lies he sold that are still



Richard Ray (Whitman), *Real not Red*, 1985; acrylic on b/w photograph, 10 x 8 in

best-sellers. Richard Ray began working as a painter, but as the bus to Santa Fe pulled through Oklahoma City he saw the urban 'street chiefs' for the first time and the images stayed with him. He did not want to paint them, to 'portray' them. He wanted to bear witness with them and learn strength from what he calls their resistance. His photographs remind me of what Leonard Crow Dog once said to a federal judge, "We are the evidence of the Western Hemisphere".



Jimmie Durham, *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian* (detail), 1985; mixed media.

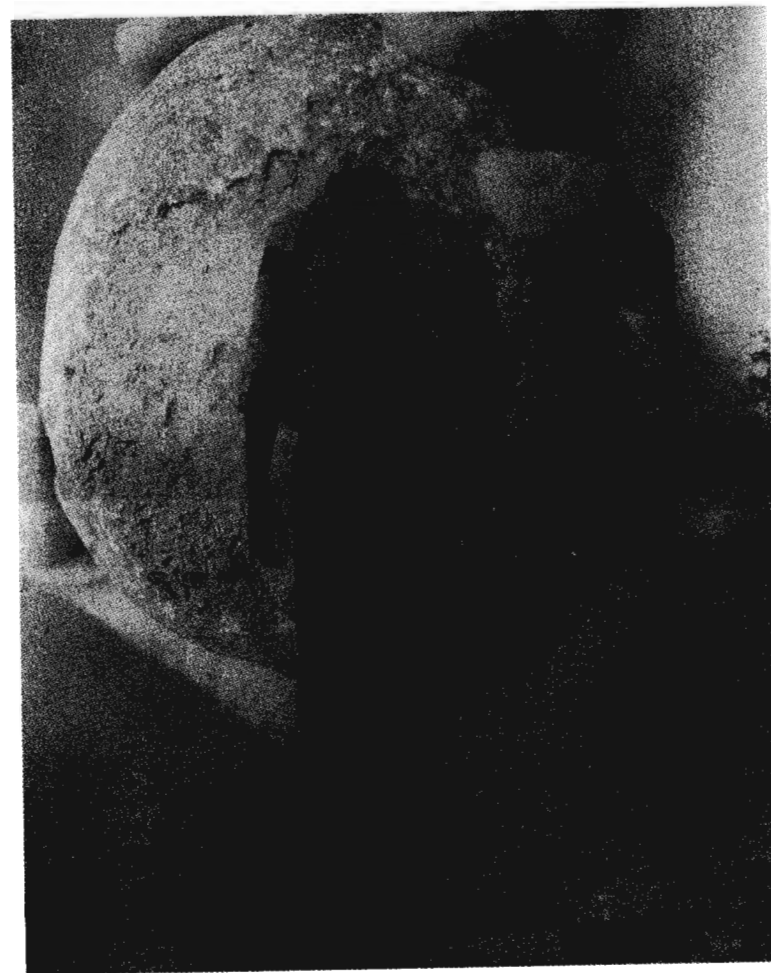
How Richard Ray uses his camera comes from within the traditions of Indian art; like LaMarr's work, his photographs are evocative of the *winter count* paintings, which represent specific people's situations. He says, and it is obvious in his work, that he has a great respect for the street chiefs and has known some of them for years. "They use no masks, they are not hiding anything to get by, like so many of us do. I respect their turned-off-ness. They are not at all defeated, and some of them have been fighting since the First World War." Because of the nature of photography and our responses to it, I think it is no exaggeration to say that Richard Ray's work, and others similar to it, must certainly bring to an abrupt halt, among artists with integrity, what Edgar Heap of Birds calls "gazing back at the buffaloes".

Until recently, Richard Ray avoided that small circle of galleries, shows, and museums of American Indian art. He does not want to be artificially bracketed. This is a dilemma we all face. Like Richard Ray, and probably others, I work in as many fields of art as I am able. We are both poets, which is common among Indian artists. I often do performance pieces and installations, some of which have sculptural elements. From my family I learned wood and bone carving, but was informed in the Sixties that this had nothing to do with art. I began working with bones and animal skulls when I was a teenager. The series of sculptures using car parts as future Indian artefacts comes from the sense I got while growing up on the edges of small towns of the messages and voices contained in town dumps or old barns. Whatever people are trying to hide, discard or ignore, I want to reclaim. I feel a desperation about the dead animals, but I know they can speak.

Jolene Rickard is from an illustrious family in the Iroquois Confederacy, which itself has a unique modern history. Because of her specific history she is able to move back and forth from the traditional Longhouse sector to the more accommodating 'progressive' sector. She has said that she makes her work strictly for her own people and does not care how anyone else sees or interprets it. That does not make the rest of us voyeurs, however, because she does show her work publicly.

She is sensitive to the stereotypes that often infect us as Indians; how we see ourselves through other people's definitions of us. Her use of the camera image is kin to the most simple and direct talk in an Indian kitchen or in the Longhouse. They are images of trust and pride in who her people are right now. The image of a pick-up truck in a backyard in New York State is site-specific. Taken to

Oklahoma, where the pick-up has become as traditional as a forty-niner,* the connotations would be completely different. The simplicity of her photos has a profundity that is understated to make itself better heard. Her current work, combining photo images and handmade paper, has become more deliberate and in some ways more accessible to outsiders. But in the history of the conversations contained in her

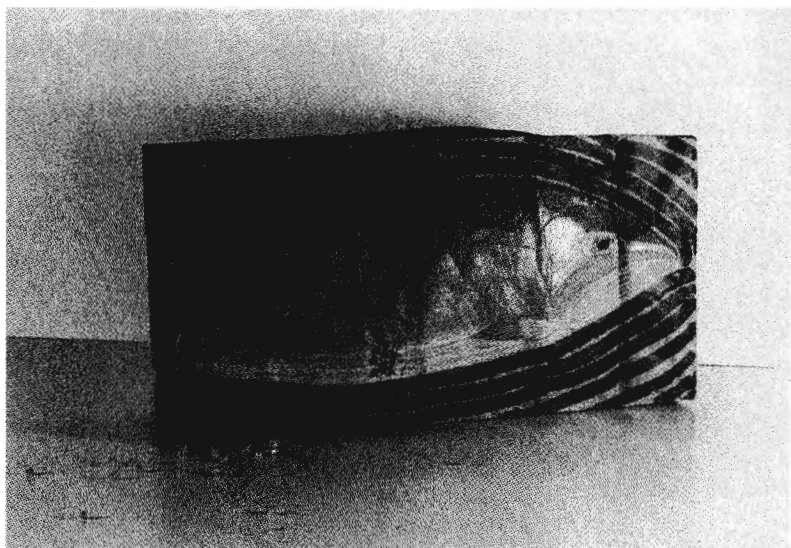


Jolene Rickard, *Lyle and the Stone — Lakota Trail*, 1985; b/w photograph, 18.5 x 12.5in.

* A 'forty-niner' is a pow wow party song composed and sung in English.

work, these images are like new concepts which begin with "and furthermore..."

Finally, we come to Peter Jemison, whose paper bags have become quietly famous. I asked him, "What do you think Indian artists do?" He replied that he finds it may not be intellectually approachable. He



Peter Jemison, *Cattaraugus Coho*, 1985; acrylic on paper bag, 20 x 15 x 40.5in.
(Photo: Jolene Rickard)

says that our own way of thinking is direct, not obscure: "The most obvious damned stuff you can think of." His paper bags, though, may be the most intellectually approachable work in this exhibition, by reason of the complexity of their language and statements. They are very funny and full of irony, but they are not jokes, they are not really playing tricks. Peter Jemison approaches each bag as itself and his method really *is* simple and direct. He says that as American Indian artists we are not fully evolved. "We are still coming to terms with all the daily contradictions of our lives." Maybe that feeling gives his work the quality of tentative power that is kind of haunting.

This exhibition should be seen as one of a very small number which have begun to happen wherein American Indian art is shown with the expectation of serious dialogue. The title, *Ni' Go Tlunh A Doh Ka* (We Are Always Turning Around on Purpose), is different

in each language, but embodies the idea that our long-shared past is intellectually valid for us and we will continue to make new combinations and connections.

1986

Savage Attacks on White Women, As Usual

Handwritten text in a script, likely representing a Native American language, with some words underlined and a small drawing of a person at the top left.

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Yotito tlen melahuac:

Wasicus, huinas! Goliga, gatlé ya ale gelia. Tsi osda igunh hne hi. Kingefuy sapa tla aca quiquixtiliz, ahalena i. Ag'sihwa sgo, Do he? Tla doyaquanta i tsi sunh sidgwu, nitso tanunh na. Yigiusta tinadunh ganunh nunh. Nitsa l'stahné tictemohuizque inin xenola nain fey, ka.

Al stig'wasicus, to dagedoli, atlilo stoht. Di dasquallunh ni! Cuache tla namechpanoz!

Fr. Tomas to the Council of the Indies:

On the mainland they eat human flesh. They are more given to sodomy than any other nation. There is no justice among them. They go naked. They are stupid and silly. They have no respect for truth, save when it is to their advantage. They are unstable. They have no knowledge of what foresight means. They are ungrateful... They are brutal. There is no deference among them on the part of the young for the old. They are incapable of learning. Punishments have no effect on them. They eat fleas, spiders, and worms raw, whenever they find them. They exercise none of the human arts or industries. The older they get the worse they become. I may therefore affirm that God has never created a race more full of vice and composed without the least mixture of kindness or culture. The Indians are more stupid than asses, and refuse to improve in anything.

David de Vries, (a Dutch colonist in Manhattan, 1643) in his diary:

I heard a great shrieking, and I ran to the ramparts of the fort. Saw nothing but firing, and heard the shrieks of the savages murdered in their sleep. When it was day the soldiers returned to the fort, having massacred eighty Indians, and considering that they had done a deed of Roman valour. Infants were torn from their mothers' breasts and hacked to pieces in the presence of the parents, and the pieces were thrown into the fire and in the water, and other sucklings, being bound to small boards, were cut, stuck, pierced, and miserably massacred in a manner to move a heart of stone. Some were thrown into the river, and when the fathers and mothers endeavoured to save them, the soldiers would not let them come on land, but made both parties and children drown.

Street Voices:

"Those fuckin' Indians sold this place for 21 bucks."
"Yeah, we should give it back to them."

"Even the Indians wouldn't take it now. Maybe they weren't so dumb after all."

"They didn't really live here; it was just a hunting ground."

"You're really an Indian? Jesus, what are you doing here? How come you're not out West somewhere? You ever do any that high steel work?"

"Man, you guys really got fucked over, huh?"

Inner Voices:

Most Indians drink too much, and there's too much violence, but at least there's always a removal or something; some poor Indian families being evicted from their sacred land. Suffering Indians are good. High entertainment value that never goes stale. Fighting Indians are good only if you know they are going to lose out at the end of the movie. And then, they shouldn't fight too much. They should make a deal with Jimmy Stewart and declare peace, and then get betrayed by General Richard Widmark.

Confession:

It is true, and now I can admit it openly, that when I was younger I was a cowboy for awhile. But I don't believe I really had, or have now, cowboy tendencies. I did not really enjoy it, and I only did it for the money.

This other cowboy I knew said, "You're an Indian and a cowboy? Be careful you don't kill yourself".

Preachments:

You think cowboys and Indians go together. When you hear the word 'cowboy' you think 'Indian'. You probably think we are married, or something. The cowboy is the husband and the Indian is the exasperatingly dumb but lovable wife.

I know you think we are part of your rich cultural heritage. Every time some Indian does tricks for the public you bring your kids along. You say, "We know so little about you, I want my kids to know more. They're fascinated, anyway. Kevin here did a project for school last year about what Indians ate. Did you grow up on a reservation? Do you speak an Indian language?"

You think children and Indians go together, don't you?

Pensées:

Who is the best Indian princess? Debra Paget was pretty sexy, but a little too solemn. Audrey Hepburn? Yuck. Too skinny and too hyper.

Indians are more stoic. Donna Reed. That's it. She was so pretty on that buffalo robe, with her feet tucked under her and her deerskin blouse opened just enough, and her little headband.

Your grandmother was a Cherokee princess? Amazing. Mine too!

For my money Burt Lancaster was the best Indian chief. Somebody told me that Jeff Chandler really was Indian, but that can't be true because he got to be an Indian chief, and he got to win a little bit. Charles Bronson: now there was an Apache renegade if I ever saw one. Did you know that Jay Silverheels' real name was Tony Curtis? Jamake Highwater's real name was Jay Marks, and when he was a kid he couldn't decide if he wanted to be a pirate or an Indian. Which reminds me, the Pittsburgh Pirates defeated the Cleveland Indians 80-11, and the Washington Redskins beat the Atlanta Braves 2-0.

You probably think we like having cars named after us. You probably think I am part of your rich cultural heritage.

Your Response:

Real Indians are not at all belligerent. They are very kind and gentle.

A Serious Question:

What is the difference between a pioneer and a Voortrekker? What is the difference between you and a white South African?

I Answer for You:

Oh, you try to understand! You think it's a shame! And you have a turquoise ring and you just bought a magic Cherokee crystal from that guy — roo in Soho and you loved all those suffering Indians in *Broken Rainbow*!

Let's See, What Else?

Let's see, what else? You are stupid and silly and you eat spiders raw. At least I am absolutely certain that you would eat spiders barbecued if there were a proper marketing scheme for your peer group.

In August 1987 a bunch of white folks went to Central Park (to the stylish part of the park, of course) to celebrate some sort of harmonic convergence supposedly foretold in Mayan prophecies. They just assumed somehow it was going to centre on them, like everything else does. They never once thought that if there were such a world re-alignment it would be all over for their little situations.

Whenever you folks think about the world, you assume yourselves to be not only the centre but the standard also, which makes it a little difficult to carry on a conversation with you.

But if an attempt is made, the other party must pretend a goodwill that could not possibly exist. I am not about to enter into that pretence.

First we must consider the language barrier; from the initial encounters between American Indians and Europeans a vocabulary developed that is specific to speaking about Indians, especially in the English language. That vocabulary has no correspondence to words or concepts in our languages and, more importantly, it has no base in our reality. It was developed through racism and pre-conceived notions. More, it is by now so thoroughly the cartography of our thought about Indians that it is almost impossible not to use it, or not to consider that those words are, even though English, 'Indian' words. Words such as 'chief', 'tribe', and 'band' had etymological histories within European contexts.

People ask, Which do you prefer, 'Indian' or 'Native American'? Neither is acceptable, nor is any version of the word 'Cherokee'. Which would you rather be called, 'Wasicu', 'European', or 'Limey'? If you are English you might prefer to be called some version of the word 'English'. The Cherokee word for Cherokee is Ani Yunh Wiya. If translated literally it might mean 'The People', as so many other Indian nations call themselves. None of the words by which you call us are words by which we call ourselves. Consider the import of such a phenomenon upon your knowledge of what you call your country.

By now, of course, some New Age folks have learned to say Dene or Lakota instead of Navajo or Sioux, but usually that bit of knowledge is used in a game of one-upmanship against someone else. Like you say, 'knowledge is power'.

Now then, have we reached a further point? If so, I want to assume the attitude of Vittorio, the cruel Apache who showed no mercy. I am afraid, however, that you will not suffer; that you will instead be entertained by Indian tricks more novel than you expected. If you have been all of your life entertained by our sorrows on TV, you may well be entertained by my anger.

There is an obscenity particularly acute now because it has been so exposed and because of who, for the most part, is committing it. White women seem to be the majority of the perpetrators. The obscenity involves taking bits of Indian culture (or some marketeer's version of Indian culture) into a nouvelle grab-bag 'life style' that is kind of hippie/yuppie. You get turquoise, crystals, maybe some

peyote and some mystical wisdom rehashed from Carlos Castaneda, without having to give up restaurant row on Columbus Avenue. A case of liberated parasites.

Frantz Fanon proposed a hypothetical situation concerning a group of German youths during the Nazi regime who become fascinated with Jewish culture and retreat to the Black Forest to study Jewish books and wisdom, without ever lifting a finger to fight the Holocaust. He asked if we would not think of those youths as monstrous. But the parasites have a ready answer now. They say that they are fighting in a 'spiritual' way.

I cannot analyse why so many women are involved in that set-up, but I know it is mean and ugly. It means that they have bought their second class niche in the white man's system, while pretending to move in a completely different system. Instead of what should be a natural solidarity with us they offer an up-dated version of 'the man's' thievery. It is unpleasant to see oppressed people get over by oppressing other people on the boss's behalf.

Finally, I Address Matters at Hand

This is supposed to be an essay for an exhibition of American Indian art. But we began planning the exhibition with the idea that we would not be tourist attractions, and we also wanted the catalogue to be more than a tourists' guidebook. We want to figure out how *not* to entertain you, yet still engage you in discussions about what is really the centre of your reality, although an always invisible centre.

One artist is not in the show because he wanted it to centre on an exposé of the situations in Oklahoma. Others of us objected not because those issues do not urgently need challenging, but because we thought New Yorkers would not feel them a challenge. We thought you would be perfectly willing self-righteously to hate Oklahoma, without seeing any connection to your own lives.

It is a constant problem: how to challenge arrogant people who feel themselves to be the least arrogant of peoples, and who intend to remain unchallengeable. As Indian artists we work on that problem because we are Indians in the present situation, but also because we are artists. In our cultures things are not so compartmentalised as in yours, so that it seems perversely unnatural that art should deal only with art.

Those Dead Guys for a Hundred Years

..."

I want you to hear these words. Now I am speaking to you about our lives.

That is the way we begin speeches in Cherokee, and then we say what we would like to see happen, with a simple statement that begins with "I want", as in "I want us to go to Washington and tell them just what's going on down here". The way white people exhort in their speeches — such as "we should..." or "we must..." — sounds to us not only arrogant but devious. Is this guy trying to hide from us his thoughts? Then why speak? (They often speak only for the purpose of hiding their thoughts).

I want us to have an Eloheh Ga ghusdunh di at Dhotsua's old Ghadjia in Goingsnake District, because it is now 1984, exactly one hundred years since the Allotment Act when our first new century of trouble began, and also when Dhotsua started the Nighthawk and told us that the US government had no power to allot Cherokee land. "We follow the Bright Path of the One Who Allots each plant and animal and Cherokee and whites to their proper places."

Dhotsua died fighting. Before him, before 1884, hundreds of brave Otashtys and Beloved Women died fighting. They walked a straight path and they won our lives for us, and I have to tell you that when I ride this New York subway I practically hate them. How the hell did they do it? Could they always find the money for the Con Edison bill or did they eat in the dark?

Sequoyah invented writing, marched on Washington, became the Uku of Arkansas and Texas, and then split for Mexico to make a treaty with Santana. "He was never known to make a foolish move."

But I did, and my brother did, and Larry Red Shirt sure did.

Now here is what happened that makes me call for the combined fires of the Council of Everything, and why I also ask my uncles to

prepare for me an Ado dhlunh hi so di so that I can change myself: in 1984 I became forty-four years old, which is the average life span for an Indian man.

Is it a good thing to write about one's own troubles and worries? Paul Smith, a Comanche guy with a weird history, said, "In this century the story of any Indian is a typical Indian story, no matter how different". Which means to me that in this allotted century of lives in dispersed parcels we are still the people, with a common thread.

I remember Greg Zephier with his bad heart joking about turning forty-four, and how we all laughed. But last year my brother died a month before his forty-fifth birthday. He was working as a farm labourer in Louisiana and just conked out. It was very hard for me, because we had been on the outs with each other for a few years. Just that month I had finally figured out some things about him and figured out that I really liked him. It was in my mind to come home in November, and he and I would go fishing and I would explain to him how I liked him.

He was not happy that year he died; everything was going wrong. But he liked being outside all the time, and he told me how he liked seeing a wild pig in the fields once in a while. The guy who owned the farm or one of his sons would sometimes shoot the pigs and would roast them up. My brother was not invited and they never offered him a pig to take home. I am glad about that, because I can imagine my brother trying to lift a dead pig into the trunk of his car all by himself, or trying to clean it all by himself way over there in Louisiana.

My first memory of him is also my first memory of my father. We were in a creek back home, swimming and running around. None of us had any clothes on, and my mother was also there but I think she had on her dress. My father made a little millwheel in the creek with sticks and magnolia leaves. It really worked.

When we were little we were very thin and not growing well. I had had rickets and my brother had something or other. But we were happy, with our sisters and dozens of cousins, and our parents, aunts and uncles, great aunts and great uncles, and two grandparents, and yellow jackets coming up out of the ground to sting us, and diamond-back turtles. My brother and I were like twins and went everywhere with our arms around each other's shoulders. We slept in the same bed until I left home. As teenagers we often had the same girlfriends. When we were twelve or so we had to go to the doctor because we were not developing right. Some hormone trouble. We had to dissolve bitter yellow pills under our tongues, and he would spit his out, so he stayed little and thin until he was about eighteen. People would

call him Midget. In the family we called him Geronimo because he was so wild and because he admired Geronimo so much. He used to tell people that he was part Apache. I would say, "Me, too!"; and he would say, "No, you're not, you're part coon". Once he told some people that I was a dog, but that was only because we were hunting ducks without a license and he was protecting me.

He was my best teacher when we were little because I was selfish and did not like anybody. He was generous and liked everybody, so he would interpret their mysterious actions to me and also ran interference between me and my mother. Once I tried to kill him with a hoe and almost succeeded, which scared us both. My brother was especially kind to me the rest of the day because he knew how I must have been feeling, to almost kill my brother. So we developed some secret bird whistles to signal each other in school if we got into trouble.

In the third grade I pulled a knife on another kid and the teacher took my knife away. The next day, after a family meeting over supper, my brother went as an official delegate from our family of woodcarvers and told the teacher that I had to have my knife back. She gave me and the knife into his custody.

Just a couple of months before he died he told my mother that he had always been afraid of everything, and that was why his life was so bad.

My father is called Son in his family because he is the oldest. He had three brothers and three sisters. One sister died young and the brother next to him died next, at forty-four. My father really took it hard, and I thought I understood. Only I wanted to say, "Your sons and daughters and grandchildren are with you". When he would look at me it was like partway he was seeing a stranger, even an intruder, and partway seeing his brother instead of me. I did not understand until my brother died. For us, history is always personal. (I remember the Trail of Tears and Sequoyah's efforts as though I had been there.) History is directly involved with our families and our generations; tied with sacred white cotton string to the sweet and intense memories of our brother or sister is the desperate and intense hope of each generation to change this history.

I knew all along that in my parents' generation, as in their parents' generation and in mine so far, the history which began in 1884 has been bad for Cherokee people. It was bad before. What period in human history could be worse than 1784-1884 for the Cherokees? In the 1680s we were first invaded by European armies and settlers, so 1684 to 1784 was pretty bad, all right. Two epidemics of smallpox in that time, each wiping out fully half of the population.

But I could not know with my heart what the hope and desperation means to each of us for our own individual lives when the history wastes and lays down in stupid sugar cane fields our own brothers.

You think that they have finally killed you, because part of your life is the plans for redemption, and you cannot do it without all those people, especially brothers, who will give you the courage of their own returning to the battle.

A great Otashty Wahya has fallen dead in the sugar cane fields. An average Cherokee guy died at the average Indian male life span.

And I am forty-four in 1984, the close of a century, so either way I think about dying. Something is wrong with my stomach and my guts — they don't work. There is something painfully wrong with my throat, behind my Adam's apple. I don't want to go to the doctor because either he will tell me things I do not want to hear, or he will say, "It is nothing that cannot be fixed up for a few hundred dollars", which I don't have.

In 1972 I joined the American Indian Movement and for the next eight years gave my life to it. Then it kind of fell apart and left me feeling bad. Then last year my brother died, and this year I turned forty-four with some "physical problems", as the doctor says.

So, this is why I want my uncles to give me the ceremony of Ado dhlunh hi so di. I need a change. I need to be changed like the old men change Tsola. But those uncles, my grandmother's brothers, are all dead, and also my grandfather's brothers.

My uncle Jesse was in those old days about nine feet tall. He was extremely thin and wore overalls with a blue serge coat and a John B. Stetson hat, along with whatever shoes he had — sometimes hightop black tennis shoes. He did not always wear shoes. Uncle Jesse's eyes were fierce black but he was very kind. He gave my brother and me whisky and told us about women. His shotgun was part of his eyes. He made sweat-lodges and taught us to go hungry and to use tobacco. For ceremonies he said you could use Camels but no other cigarettes. Camels could be changed into Tsola, medicine tobacco, and when we went fishing we had to spit tobacco juice into the water and on the bait as an offering. He and Tom and Doc were crazy old guys. They were not alcoholic, I guess, but pretty drunk.

Doc had something to do with my grandfather's death, long before I was born, and people did not speak to him. They said he had been drunk. But my father took me to see him where he lived back in the woods.

This year 1984, is the last of a century that has been different from those before it, which means that next year something even

weirder will probably start up. Does anyone know where we have been since the Allotment Act? Now this is how the last hundred years was different: the Allotment Act was the first time they made a legislation affecting all Indians — the first time they completely ignored the treaties and acted as though we were some subminority to be legislated. In their hateful system, then, it was only natural that the first piece of legislation should say that we had to own land privately instead of communally, that we, in other words, had to begin being someone other than ourselves. The mere concept of parcels of owned land is an insult to Cherokees. Spiritually, it is like, what if we were in power and we told the whites, "This guy Jesus was a stupid, filthy no-good and you have to get rid of all those churches and Bibles, and you Jews have to obey our laws and un-obey your own laws". Talking about it is impossible; in our own language the possessive pronouns can only be used for things that you can physically give to another person, such as, 'my woodcarving', 'my basket'.

Communally, and that means physically, that piece of legislation broke us up. Once they got the idea, though, they really kept piling it on. This has been the century of legislation: 1924, 1934, 1954, etc. So we all got confused. Do we have the right to be ourselves without US permission, in spite of US death-and-poison spells?

Hna quu huh? It did something else, too, na? 1884 invented Indians. Before, we were strictly Cherokees or Sioux or Apaches. When they legislated that we were all 'Indians' and homeless, they lumped us all together, and this century has seen us trying to pull all those fingers into a fist.

They are not as smart as they think they are. Aren't they like the bear who got beaten up by a mouse? We know very well that if you put death-words on someone's corn, that kernel could wind up in your own soup. They put death-words on us but we are the corn they cannot swallow.

This is the century where we began to be Indians, as well as Cherokees or whatever. I have never believed that for a minute, no matter how much I say it, or listen to other guys' speeches. My brother never once believed that we would all pull together into a fist. Larry Red Shirt didn't believe it.

Of course, we know our sorrows and we know our fears better than we know our families. The betrayals and little dishonesties are bushels of kernels of poison corn, but do we know where we are going?

Now I want to say things you may have heard me preach about before, but the words are not empty. I know your brother died last year, or your daughter. It has never been truer than now that your daughter is my daughter, my brother is your brother.

I am not trying to get you to join my movement. I want an Eloheh Ga ghusdunh di where everyone shows up. Because Charlene La Pointe just showed me that those battered Sioux women in that shelter she runs on the Rosebud Reservation are my sisters turning to face an old century, then turning to face a new one, and Donna Thunder Hawk and Charon Asetoyer and Phyllis Young just showed me something.

So now I see the lives and hearts of those uncles, and my mother and father, through my brother and his grandson. I am the uncle, I must be the uncle now.

I want us to meet at Dhotsua's Ghadjjiya, whatever the hell happened to it; they turned it into a stompground or burned it down, but we can find it. Hna Quu, dini yotli! Alia liga! Wait, now. I didn't get finished yet. I just remembered something else.

How come he wrote it like that?

So here's what happened: I showed the piece to a woman who is a good critic and she had a lot of criticisms and I agree with all of them. So then I wrote to the editors Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat and told them I wanted to make some revisions, but I guess I didn't really want to because this is a last-minute addition. It is almost 1986, two years after the first writing.

In the first place, didn't they notice that the title is too close to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and anyway, wasn't the Allotment Act passed in 1887 or something? Yes, it was, and I can offer no explanation for why we always think it was 1884. Maybe that just seems right to us.

Then the critic said she didn't like the ending at all. "You're still being selfish; tell us *what* Donna Thunder Hawk, Charon Asetoyer, and Phyllis Young showed you." "Just leave out the part about preaching; it does sound preachy and we know you can write better than that."

One guy said that the piece seemed to be written in several voices, no clear style, and that it seemed to be telescoped, as though I had written it in a hurry without taking time to develop the different ideas.

For one thing, my father died this year. But at least he died on a fishing trip with two of my nephews. So when I went back to revise it, all the stories had changed.

But here is the real thing: I absolutely do not want to communicate anything to you. Another woman I showed it to said that I always seem to hold something back, that we never get to see inside, even in my poetry.

So you're probably saying if he doesn't want to communicate, why does he write? Here is the real truth: I absolutely hate this country. Not just the government, but the culture, the group of people called Americans. The country. I hate the country. I HATE AMERICA.

Now, if you ever come to my house I'll invite you in and act pleasant, and we might even become close friends. My hatred is really not as absolute as I need it to be. Why wouldn't I hate this country? Because you are a nice person? Because it makes you feel bad for me to hate this country? You want me to be properly indignant about 'injustices' and still be on the side of you and your friends who are also 'trying to bring about some changes in this country'?

Don't ask a white man to walk a mile in your moccasins because he'll steal them, and the mile, too. Only, just try standing in my shoes for a minute. The *fact* of the US is destructive to Indian country. Every piece of progress, social or material, is more destruction to Indian country. I'm not even going to bother to develop that idea, but why don't you just think about it — until the sun rises (that means all night long)?

Here is what I don't understand: how come so many Indians don't seem to hate this country (or at least don't admit it)? Simple — we hate ourselves and each other instead, and now there we all are, out there trying to impress the white folks with our one thing or another.

I do not want to entertain you in any sense of the word. I would hate it if you all came to understand me. And I'd really hate it if I wrote something like those 'sensitive and honest' novels some black writers are doing, so that any white person with a few bucks could spend a quiet evening being entertained by our sorrows, and gaining in power by 'a better understanding' of our predicament, our dreams.

Where am I supposed to go, and what am I supposed to do? Some folks say, "Why don't you go back home and live with your own people and those woods you claim to love so much?" In the first place, those woods are destroyed. In the second place, I am a human in the world in this century, just like you. It doesn't matter to me that there are contradictions that are irresolvable, because they *are* irresolvable. To be an Indian writer today means being on no path, contradicting yourself at every turn, so at least I want to face that condition and not 'act nice', pretending it isn't true.

Anyway, I'm not sure I like Indians all that much, either. Our intelligentsia, the writers and artists, are such a bunch of stuck-up, apolitical, money-grubbing, and flaky ripoff artists, and our political leaders are usually crooks and pretentious bastards or somebody's

puppets. Our regular folks are usually drunk or bad-mouthing their neighbours. Do you know that out on the res we have just as much child abuse and wife-beating as the rest of the country? Alienated, man; this is definitely not the old days. The people who work in offices, they're the worst: petty, banal, officious, completely distrusting and cynical, and they always have that self-righteous superior attitude and they're always incompetent. Our elders are all off being gurus to some white weirdos and talking about how some big earthquake or flood is going to solve all our problems.

I didn't give up hope: I been hanging in. But those other guys. Walking around, AIM-lessly. There is a whole crowd of professional Indians now; folks who wouldn't lift a finger if they weren't paid to but come off all concerned about our condition. They know they'd be out of a job if we ever got our act together and changed the conditions.

Let's see, what else. That's all I have to say right now, except like I said, hna quu, dini yotli! And I guess I'll throw in a couple of poems here. Oh yeah, I meant to say that the reason I used several voices, or styles, is that I wanted to experiment with mixing different Cherokee speech patterns as a way of showing confusion and the fight for some clarity within that confusion. I'm sorry if it didn't work out right. Anyway, here are the poems. One thing, though — I wrote the first part of this piece as though I were writing to Indian people, with one half of my brain; with the other half of my brain, I was writing to the white folks because who reads all these things? The white folks.

If we read — now here is a subtle point — if we read, we read like the white folks. We become like the white folks for the duration of the reading; that is, we read passively, to be entertained instead of to be motivated to organise to take back our land and all of our rights, no bullshit and no stopgap measures. But anyway, how many Indians are reading this? A few of my fellow writers. But maybe, a couple of college students who need to see how crazy it got. So here are the poems.

Guy Finds Two Deerskins in Manhattan!

Dateline Manhattan Island, April 22, 1984.

A man claiming to be an American Indian

Discovered two deerskins today, on a trash heap

At 108th and Columbus Avenue.

*The guy said he had no knowledge concerning
The origin of the skins or who placed them on
The trash heap.*

*"The hair is thick and shaggy, like northern deer
Have, so I don't think they were brought here
From Oklahoma, Texas, or Arkansas," he said.*

*"Immediately upon discovery I consulted
a wise woman from Brazil, who said that I
Should try to tan them," he claimed.*

*The Brazilian woman, who may also be at least
Part Indian, stated that she gave no such advice.
According to her the guy is always finding
Dead animals or remnants and bringing them to
Her apartment, which is furnished with a hammock
And purple walls.*

*"He believes that the coyote spirit leads him to
Things like that," she said in an interview.*

*The guy later denied her version of the story.
"I have no idea what's going on in Manhattan," he claimed.
"But obviously many animals lived here at one time.
And there were some Puerto Rican dudes hanging out
Close by so I wasn't sure if I should take
The skins or not. It was Easter Sunday and
Those guys would think I was nuts."*

*In the week previous to this incident a near-by
Church burned to the ground, and on Good Friday
(April 20) Russell Means of the American Indian Movement
Spoke at a meeting on Columbus Avenue near 107th.
Means has no known connection to the
Guy who found the deerskins.*

I Am One of Those Indians

*I am one of those Indians that fly around.
When we fall off cliffs we yell AIIEEE!
And keep zooming, never hit dust or bounce
From boulders. (Hi na?)*

*I am one of those Indians you may see flying
Around the Empire State Building in late Spring evenings.
But we are not steel workers or high walkers,
And our flying does not come from being bucked
From the backs of rodeo broncos.*

*The Bureau of Indian Affairs assigned me this special job
As part of the Termination Act of 1954.
(Their Acts come in the fours: 1884 was the
Allotment Act, 1924 the Citizenship Act, 1934 the
Re-organization Act, and in 1984 I turned 44, to
Which I reply, Nunh gi! Nunh gi! Nunh gi!
Nunh gi!)*

*Ancestral graves and my specific gravity were all
Terminated in '54 and I act accordingly. I act
like a flapping Redskin. We are not stars or birds
or ghosts; more like flying peeping toms. I am
One of those Indians that fly around witnessing
prophetic novas in burnt-out toasters.
(ka, ni, hi na?)*

The Ground Has Been Covered

In the early days we bent over backwards to accommodate the whites. Ultimately, however, our efforts proved *dista yohi*, because *tlunh tlunh yunh*, ani *yosgi unaduli squatsi*, *ola yadi!* Da *n'tunh sga*, na?

Don't worry — I'm a good Indian. I'm from the West, love nature, and have a special, intimate connection with the environment. (And if you want me to, I'm perfectly willing to say it's a connection white people will never understand.) I can speak with my animal cousins, and believe it or not I'm appropriately spiritual. (Even smoke the Pipe.)

I'm assuming there is an audience interested enough in American Indians to read this. Like V.S. Naipaul, I imagine the possibility of there existing at least a few readers with a detached intelligence and sympathy rather than ulterior motives. If there are such readers, however, they will probably already have 'covered' American Indians. Maybe they will pass over this article without reading it. So actually, I make the assumption only as an excuse to myself for writing.

V.S. Naipaul writes very well about the stupidities of the Third World, and white intellectuals just love it; as a person of colour, he can say things they feel they shouldn't say but wished they could. Third World intellectuals, on the other hand, often feel that Naipaul shouldn't be so mean, pointing out all the self-deceptions they want to hide from the white world. They say he either shouldn't be writing all that stuff or he should show more clearly that it is all the fault of colonialism. Now me, I think he isn't mean enough, that he has blunted his rage by some intellectual process that looks like a career move. More, he writes as though his books address some universal significance. The race, class and political situation of that audience remains unspecified.

I feel fairly sure that I could address the entire world if only I had a place to stand. You (white Americans) have made everything

your turf. In every field, on every issue, the ground has already been covered.

Inquiry and discourse itself are confined to the 'experts' of whatever field. They are confined to their 'proper' spheres — they are just *confined*, confined for control by a system of power not necessarily organic to human society. That system is in fact acutely specific; we can both remember and see how it arrogates the world, and for what purposes and to whose profit. But all those who do remember and see cannot effectively say what they see because there is no podium, and no audience except a designated audience. The motive for the designation is cancellation; designated, the audience becomes passive, a non-audience.

So discourse, including art, and certainly including the ability to act upon discourse, is kept compartmentalised in a kind of complicity that makes the Mafia's methods of producing complicity seem childishly underdeveloped.

One of the more distressing traits of Americans is a tendency to feel powerless and to blame vociferously their powerlessness on other Americans elsewhere in their field of view, or on a general or particular system, as though the blamers themselves were not complicit in those crimes and sharing the loot. It's like the wife in a rich household realising that to be a housewife is to be oppressed, and solving the problem in a housewifely way — by demanding a share in the household system, a share of the profits, a piece of the action. The system stays the same — it's just bought another person invested in its success. So many Americans braggingly dissociate themselves from participation in profit-sharing, but only in their attitudes. Artists in every generation can make their housewifely careers by such attitudes.

They have to be white, however, and they have to take care that their art primarily addresses other art. It's true that non-white artists sometimes make an entrance: Jean-Michel Basquiat, for example, has been allotted some space for a while. But isn't his kind of neo-primitivism a sub-compartment of contemporary art that was developed before the actual appearance of neo-primitivists? In that sense, he's only reading the lines provided for him.

Michael Jackson is allowed space, though he seems to feel he had to cut off his nose for it. But Howlin' Wolf is allowed no space at all. At a particular time twenty-odd years ago this blues singer was allowed a small audience at some universities because those institutions had 'collectors' of Howlin' Wolf. That part of the audience,

anyway, was a pretend audience; it was no more than collectors and potential collectors because its interest was no more than academic. If the system sees a use for neo-primitive music it assigns songs not to Howlin' Wolf but to Mick Jagger, and develops a self-referential sub-compartment, a turf, that can incorporate similar singers and groups. By and large, it is these people, rather than the people who developed the music they are playing, who get the audience, your culture's ear. It is not the case that Howlin' Wolf was too much of his own world, too ethnic, to get it. We have no world. People of colour within the United States, or those outside the US who want to find space in the US for their own discourses, cannot easily find it because there is no space.

Cherokees imagine the universe — that is, everything that exists — to be like a council meeting. It is the duty of everyone in the council to listen well and to speak well, with respect and integrity, so as to see and plan our next moves. It is the opposite in American society, not because we and you are opposites, but because your history and culture are invasions and thefts. Because of this the culture and its members are both arrogant and deliberately uninformed, so that the events or situations of most significance in understanding this history are the very ones most ignored and denied. A false history is then supplied as an alibi to cover up the truth, and this alibi in turn informs the culture in ways that serve to reinforce control.

Nothing could be more central to American reality than the relationships between Americans and American Indians, yet those relationships are of course the most invisible and the most lied about. The lies are not simply a denial; they constitute a new world, the world in which American culture is located. By invasion, murder, theft, complex denial, alibi, and insignification, American culture gains tremendous (if pathological) psychological power and energy, which draw their strength almost exclusively from their own falseness. To maintain the necessary level of falseness, the styles and specifics, even the internal challenges and rebellions, of art must be kept banal, and preferably must refer only to the art system. Only now and again at most can they refer to the overall reality of the larger false system. The art world and its individual members, including its would-be members, must complicitly not speak or hear of other things, even if the arrogance of power enhanced by lies allowed them to.

Obviously, then, the problem of audience is practically insurmountable (definitely not soluble) for Third World artists, so we owe

ourselves the inclusion of that insurmountability in our work. In the US it is an especially acute problem because, generally speaking, the American people combine the worst blind self-confidence of the British during their empire days with the bullying arrogance of the South African voortrekker. Are we supposed to challenge you, who are by your collective natures unchallengeable? Can we ignore you when your filthy boots stomp everywhere?

The black writer Amiri Baraka used to stand at podiums before 99-percent white audiences in university lecture halls and tell the audience that he wasn't speaking to the white people there. (The Indian artist, similarly situated, employs a similar irony, but feels he must point it out parenthetically.) Given our condition here, however, what could be more fun than speaking to you monsters? Once a grizzly bear, coming down a narrow mountain trail, met a mouse coming up the trail. The mouse stood up and looked the grizzly bear in the eyes. Then he said, "Is your name Kak?" The bear got so agitated at being called such a silly name that he fell off the mountain. (I got that story from reading Claude Lévi-Strauss.)

Your name really *is* Kak. You will not fall down just by *my* saying it, but if *millions* of us say it over and over maybe you will fall down, and that would be very good for you.

I want to say my own things to the world, and so, of course, given history, part of 'my own things' is that you don't let me say anything. Another part is that your name is Kak. You may think these are the main things I have to say; you probably think I am *your* mouse. You think I am *your* Other.

US culture and politics both operate by the mythos of the cowboy taming the wilderness — the pioneer family, whose innocent courage proves victorious over savageness. Robert Wilson wears cowboy boots. You all write and paint and politic wearing cowboy boots. You think there is some intrinsic connection between cowboys and Indians.

Several years back *Art in America* did a special issue on American Indian art. It included an admiring essay on Edward Curtis and showed some of his photos of Indians, with barely a word of caution. When an American magazine in any field treats the subject of Indians, the tone and the style are always very like those of *National Geographic*. The purpose is a tour of the territory, and thereby its reacquisition — the staking of a claim.

Nowadays you people love your story of us so much that you spend money on mystical Cherokee crystals, courses on shamanism, and

trips to the Hopi Holy Land. And of course you still retain the Washington Redskins as a ball team and wear *Cherokee** casual wear. You think you own us. You think our history is American history.

For all I know you've been waiting for a mean mouse to come along. James Baldwin was *such* fun at parties. Here is a poem I wrote called 'A Song for My Enemy':

*Ka, Now is the time in which it is perfect,
So that you will be full of stones and empty
Your ugly spirit into a dry place. I know all you names.*

*Your nickname is something stinking inflicted upon my eyes.
The names your lover uses have bitten my ears.
Your surname I can spit out without hesitation;
It is despicable, twisted spoiled meat.*

*The grain of corn is poison for you of course.
When you try to walk this path this corn will
Make you sick. Ka, Now your steps lose direction.*

*Of course you will stumble and sink into that blue pit.
The dry pit with stones. Stones hit your eyes.
Blue boulders in your gall bladder,
A stone for your liver, gritty stones in your teeth,
Sharp stones under the nails of your pale fingers and toes.*

*Now your stomach is full of dirty hair, balls of dirty hair
In your joints. You are incontinent, your prostate swells
And becomes a rock. Your pain hollows you out.*

*Ka, Now my hatred of you is clear and perfect,
Now you will die a hard death from my contempt.
At this moment you sicken, you turn blue, you
Fall down.*

*Now it is good, your nose is smashed against a jagged rock,
Your voice cannot longer pollute the air because
The rocks smash your throat. I will sing and
Have a good spirit as you fall down.*

* *Cherokee* is the brand name of a California-based manufacturer of shoes and clothing.

It is debilitating for art to speak to art. Yet that is the main criterion of value to the art-makers, the art-shopkeepers, the art-buyers, and most of the writers-about-art. And it is all done by voortrekkers.

Okay, I can do Indian tricks! Don't turn the page, here's another poem 'This Is Not New Jersey':

*Look, cousins, you made the wrong turn.
This is not New Jersey.
These salt marshes and pine trees understand
Neither Gaelic nor Sassenach English,
And those Leni Lenapé your father killed
Are walking around your closed, scared, suburban houses,
So you'd better just split.
If you want New Jersey, well, I think you got to
Tear down Old Jersey and build a new one there;
You can't import Jerseys, or Yorks, or Hampshires.*

*Or Georgias. Those half-acre wooded lots are not
suitable for building
And Mr Penn does not own that sylvan countryside.
Why look, you huddled masses are messing up our corn
Crop and the bean rows we took such care with.
Why don't you go huddle in Jersey or Silesia,
Or just ride a passenger pigeon into the sunrise?*

*Why don't you just clear out? Drop dead?
At least forget about Jersey, cousin; you're too lost for that.*

*Hey, cousins, even the grass around here hates you,
You know that? Why don't you just pack up your golf
Balls and jump in the gulf?
Or at least straighten up. You made the wrong turn.
This is not New Jersey and this is not the New World.
You need to get your bearings straight.
We live here and you are scaring the fish.
See, we don't call this place New Mongolia, or New Jersey.*

*If you lost New Jersey why don't you just go
Home and start out again in a different direction?*

*There are no golden doors here; that's only corn,
And we planted it. You got nice wheat to eat
Back in Jersey, why don't you pack up your Wonder Bread
And jump in the ocean?*

*Or turn your station wagon around and drive off
The scenic overview?*

*Why don't you ask the government to sterilise you?
You're so unsanitary, dragging around that load of Jersey
Bullshit. You are just German germs and Dutch elm
Disease.
Why don't you O.D. on English tea and jump into the
Irish Sea?*

*A pack of wolves are going to ride down
On you. Our wolves can beat
Your German shepherds that guard your
Family treasures. Cyclone fence or not.*

*You may think I'm just talking tough
But this is not New Jersey.*

Let's see, what else? I hope I am authentic enough to have been worth your time, and yet educated enough that you feel your conversation with me has been intelligent. I've been careful not to reveal too much: understanding is a consumer product in your society; you can buy some for the price of a magazine. Like the TV ad says, "Time puts it all right in your hands". Once you've bought some understanding, it's only natural for you turn it around and make a profit from it — psychological, economic, or both. Then you'd get even fatter, more powerful. And where would I be?

1988

A Certain Lack of Coherence

I want all of our history. I need every name, every artefact, every effort. I need to know the minute specific of our history because I need to be part of it. But I am part of it, and could not choose otherwise, the way a Jew is part of the Holocaust. In the Cherokee language the word for the world and the word for history are the same. Our history is, however, too closely tied to yours for the past three hundred and fifty years. It has become strange, untenable, unbearable and, in unbearable ways, untrue. Our history has become lies within your history. The lies have caused me great suffering from the day I was born, but at least I may (must) react to that suffering. You also suffer from the terrible unreality of a false story badly told, but must live within it, and like the torturer and his family in the evening at supper after a day's work, must do your best to continue to pretend that all is normal. I must return to the idea of the torturer later, with great reluctance, (but now that it has been written, its themes lock in with one of the bases of what I'm about to consider).

From our position ... so much is lost, and being lost, we do not recognise the loss. In one twenty-five year period we lost half our people, not once, but twice. Those who remained were in a state of continuous warfare against you, a war aimed at our destruction. Again we lost half our people, and of the remaining, a death here, an early death there, a desperate flight, which required of us every moment of energy and thought. Only imagine, half our doctors, our scientists, our philosophers, our historians (our children). Then again. Again. Again. And in such a war (such a *long* war!) that to laugh or dance or to make something was an incredibly arrogant act of resistance.

Here is something we have kept: an absolutely true and scientific account of our origins. The other animals held a council to see about creating humans (Cherokee). They couldn't agree because each wanted humanity to be like himself. Arguing, they fell asleep at nightfall. The coyote then took a bite from each, swallowed it all and regurgitated a Cherokee ... with attributes of the animals, but most

like the coyote in the love of singing and acting crazy. We have, of course, kept much more, perhaps because we had no books or libraries to rely on or to be burned.

My question must always be, does what we know matter? Does it *matter* if I interrupt your authoritative history with a correction or a footnote? I mean, to the ongoing human discourse in which your declamations must surely be short-lived? Or to you collectively and personally?

As Crazy Horse was being murdered by Indians in US uniforms, he said, after the first few bayonet stabs, "Let me go, my friends, you have hurt me enough". His concern was for them as much as for himself. He understood the relentless confusion that had made them don the uniforms, and wanted to give them a chance to turn back in their hearts at some future moment. (But that made them so afraid they became frenzied, and bayoneted him into their own complete oblivion.)

From now back to the beginnings of our mutual encounter we have tried to protect you in such ways. In honour of that human bravery, I must not take comfort or make profit from the situation. As a victim, I cannot have the luxury of being the victim; nor would it be a kindness (although a great entertainment!) to you.

Neither can you allow yourselves the luxury of curious detachment (and I know, if you have the least bit of intelligence, you must feel detached). The England that you know is made from our deaths. Both the ships and the great machinery, even the cogwheels and gears which crushed little children's hands in the textile mills of the industrial revolution, were made from American wood. They were made from the timber of trees from places called 'Virginia', 'Carolina' and 'Georgia'. Great fortunes, dynasties, were made first from the exploitation of sassafras, then tobacco, then sugar, (three medicines which cause cancer if misused); and always the sale of the skins of the animals who in council had decided that we were a good idea.

As Europeans you must surely hate and fear the monstrosity of the US, the banality of Canada, and the cheerful mindlessness of Australia. But I want you to see them as your best efforts, as the most logical extension of your culture. Your permanent settler colonies are your standard, your proper measure, not an aberration which you can disclaim.

You cannot disclaim them and maintain a necessary intelligence: intelligence demands integrity. Without that integrity there is only gangsterish cunning.

The torturer: Frantz Fanon wrote that Frenchmen torturing

Algerians suffered nightmares and bad nerves. The US torturer in El Salvador feels proud and excited. He is a more perfect Frenchman, a more perfect British colonel. The US is not simply a giant cancerous part of England: it is the perfect England.

Oh, Jesus! How am I ever going to sell any artwork here, talking like that? Well, of course I know that *you* personally are as gentle and lost as I am, so we can discuss matters calmly and irrationally.

When I began researching the lives and myths of Pocahontas and Attakulakula in London I found such a morass of lies and of important truths untold, I realised that there was no way I could present a counter-narrative, even on the most elemental level. There are many interesting facts, however, which I've uncovered in preparation for this work, all the more interesting because of the method and substance by which they have been covered. Some of them may help you through the four-point space of dreams and tricks which I've prepared.

The story of Pocahontas as written by her husband, John Rolfe, was taken whole-cloth from a book by Richard Hakluyt, published in London in 1603. Hakluyt's book, however, told the story with a heroic crusader captain and a beautiful Arab princess as the two characters. Hakluyt himself moved to Virginia later on, and Rolfe may have known him there. The story in both books is about an English captain whose life is saved by the princess, but in Rolfe's version the captain was John Smith. The myth of Pocahontas and John Smith became an important operant in the construction of America, and had its counterparts all over the hemisphere. In Brazil the story is told about a woman named Iragema; in Mexico, Malinche.

But John Rolfe determined to make it real, to participate personally in the myth. He brought Pocahontas to London, had her re-named 'Lady Rebecca', and had a child by her (John Rolfe Jr). The name by which she was known back home was 'Matoaka', so we may suppose that the change from 'Pocahontas' to 'Rebecca' was of no great concern to her. (The dialect of the Cherokee language that she spoke had no 'L's, so she would have said, "Mi nahmi issi Rahdy Ribbeccah".)

She died on the Thames, on her way home, but anyway, the river by which she had played as a child had already been re-named the 'James', in that 'Virgin Forest' called 'Virginia'.

Let the Little Carpenter be your spiritual guide, as he is the guardian of these trashy dime-novel treasures I've laid out. In his language he is known as Attakulakula, but his nick-name was 'The Fixer'. He was a guy who attempted to bring together society's disparate

elements, disputing factions and potentially profitable trade undertakings. His nick-name was mis-translated as the 'Little Carpenter', but as one of our official delegates to the Royal Court in 1730, he is listed on the Treaty as 'Colonna', which was his military title (corresponding to 'Captain').

He was a very personal man, and his unbending loyalty to friends ultimately brought him isolation in the desperate times of war. Even when fighting the British he protected the lives of his British friends. What did he think of London in 1730? Where did he go, and what museums did he visit? Did he see any plays — *The Tempest*, perhaps? He called London the 'Pigeon Place'. (We did our own re-naming.)

The Treaty of 1730 between England and the Cherokee Nation was of constant importance to us. We fought with England against the colonists, which brought us grief. In the Second World War young Cherokee men went to fight with England in honour of that treaty, and there is still told around campfires the prophecy that some day men in red coats will come from across the sea to help us.

We have loved England, and especially become enthralled with writing. By 1820 we had our own newspaper, written in our own newly-devised alphabet, and of course, some missionary promptly translated the King James version of the Bible, the first book written in Cherokee.

I should have written more about art; about its strange importance to history and to society's knowledge and ways of knowing. Oh, I *wish* I could cease being such a savage. My intention like Attakulakula's, is always to be a person in the world: the entire world as it is. That was the Cherokee reality before the enclosure. The objects here are not mine or yours; they are ours. My great-great-grandfather knew King George, and Father knew Lloyd George.

All that we know we know by direct action — such as a bee-sting — or by metaphor. Language is metaphor, as much as are dreams. My artwork is also metaphor, but not in a simple pictorial way. The material, the actual objects that I change, carry their own complexities. I always intend the most complex changes and constructions possible. Then, in showing the work publicly, a different and very specific metaphoric language attaches to it.

This is what we must be aware of most. You have some ideas from reading this what my intentions are. But what are your intentions? I've tried to present a combination of objects, ideas, facts, and of combinations themselves, with a kind of Brechtian (or Coyote-ian) directness, to see if I could address your intentions. Certainly, as you must see by the choice and arrangement of the work, I do not mean to attack

or confuse you; but don't forget — you once also found the metaphor of our cardinal points, of four elements, of four humours, useful. You once knew that space is made by objects, and that as we move between and interact with objects we are formed. *We are* from the past, but we echo and reverberate in the present. What a responsibility! It is necessary that, with great urgency, we all speak well, and listen well. We, you and I, must remember everything. We must especially remember those things we never knew. Obviously that process cannot begin with longer lists of facts. It needs newer, and much more complex, kinds of metaphors. Perhaps we must trust confusion more, for a while, and be deeply suspicious of simple stories, simple acts.

1988

“..... very much like the Wild Irish”*

*Notes on a Process
which has no end in Sight.*

WEST

As an authorised savage it is my custom and my job to attack; so when I was invited to do a work at the Orchard Gallery in Derry, Ireland, that was my first thought. I made a list of what I knew about Irish Americans: the various presidents who had gone out of their way to jack us around — Reagan, Kennedy, Jackson; of the atrocities committed against us by the Irish immigrants we call ‘crackers’; and of the more subtle atrocities committed today by Irish priests on our reservations, who make our beautiful free young girls dress in black and act more repressed and European than any European girl could hope to aspire to. My thoughts went from there to Hollywood’s classic stereotype of the wise and kindly Irish priest, starring Pat O’Brien, Spencer Tracy and Timothy Fitzgerald; and thence on to the murderous Cardinal Cooke of New York. I gathered these images like stones I would throw at those who least expected an Indian attack, at a bunch of whites who assumed so arrogantly a history of oppression similar to mine. BUT THEN, I remembered when I was an activist during the 1970s and the meetings with various political organisations from Ireland.

SOUTH

Declan McGonagle at the Orchard Gallery said that perhaps I would find parallels between my people and his.

At my place of exile in Southern Mexico I began to read about Irish history. My immediate thought was to find a way of presenting a little-known phenomenon: the Scots-Irish ruling class among my people,

* From a letter by an early English visitor to the Cherokee nation, describing the houses of the Cherokees.

the Cherokees, and among our neighbours, the Creek Indians. Among us Cherokees, some of the great families are named Ridge, Vann, Starr and Ross. John Ross, our principle chief from the 1820s through the 1860s, fought bravely and continuously against the US invasion of our territory. But he, and the other Scots-Irish Cherokees, remodelled our society and system of government to make it more like that of the US, even including, for themselves, large plantations worked by African slaves. BUT THEN, all this seemed more of a historical curiosity than a potentially effective operant for an artwork.

I thought of the parallels between our Red Stick Warrior Society and the Red Branch of Irish history. So I thought of the facts about wood and trees. I had just read that an English king had destroyed the forests of Ireland, just as our own forests had been destroyed. Old Irish literature is filled with references to trees and to wooden things. Once an Irish warrior sought the help of the woman of the tree — a benign yet potentially dangerous woman, much like our Grandmother Spider. I read about Yew trees, and found a picture of a sacred old Yew in County Fermanagh that was big enough, and old enough, to be a proper dwelling for an Earth Mother.

It seemed feasible that I could put something together for an artwork about trees and wood: something with a political edge, and a long historical, and pre-historical frame.

EAST

I was in London to attack the English in an art gallery. A friend gave me modern essays and books about Ireland. And as I read **I began to suspect that the Irish might, in fact, be like us — too set up by history**; that the combination of our grief, pride, and sentimentality with the world’s stereotypes of us might be too heavy a burden these days.

I talked to Declan on the phone again. He said it would be good if I could do something that addressed public language. I said in that case I want to construct an actual billboard. I want to make a savage billboard of tree trunks and old timbers, ropes and garbage; a memorial billboard, a reclamation billboard, an anti-billboard that calls attention to itself and its materials instead of being an invisible framework for a message unconnected to itself. I would want it to be a direct challenge to billboard-ism.

NORTH

BUT THEN, something began to come together in my consciousness. Reading Irish history while in Mexico I was shocked by the long duration and viciousness of the English oppression of Ireland; but I was equally shocked by the de-humanisation set up by English linguistic terminology. Both the massacres and their justification, and then the specific vocabulary used against us by the English, and by the English who called themselves 'Americans', had been tried and proved on Ireland.

I often wondered why the history of the English in the Americas was so different from that of either the Spanish or the Portuguese. The English fought a war of total extermination against us, with a virulent xenophobia, a disgust at the idea of inter-marriage, and a mind-boggling self-righteousness that fuelled an endless discourse. It is in large part simply because the English had accustomed themselves to such monstrosity, and had founded their new economic culture upon it, through their experience with Ireland.

(We have returned to the West.) It is this cultural agenda and narrative that became England's legacy to the US, that gave the US its vision and cultural means to become a more monstrous and self-righteous imperial top dog than England had ever been.

DOWN

In other words, there is something going on here. There is not history as past events. There are not 'marginal' peoples. Here is something more central to the agenda and cultural apparatus of, not really a 'dominant culture', but a machine-like ideological structure that is cutting down and swallowing everything.

So I must ask about the origins of all this: which English, why and how did it all start? The first invasion of Ireland began only about one hundred years after the Normans conquered England. They were in complete control, so the Sassenach armies worked on behalf of Norman lords. Economic factors do not seem to be exclusively determinate. A dangerously subtle ideological apparatus is in effect, one that can make a normal Englishman become a Black and Tan in the service of some rich guys from Normandy, or make a poor Irish

immigrant into a violently racist fool in Boston in the service of Anglo-Americans.

UP

It's still in England! It's still in London! Against the Irish. I had only to read the papers, or to listen to people talk. Here is something cultural that can be, that must be, challenged culturally.

BUT THEN, is there any way my savage billboard could attempt to be a part of that challenge, or must I scrap the whole idea and start on a new track?

INSIDE

WELL THEN, what have I got so far? About wood and trees: I've distilled an idea about the usage of material that can take a practical shape as material. About Cherokee and Irish history: I've abstracted what seems to be an important operating principle that may *not* be better fought for being abstracted. I'm a fairly smart guy, so it's easy to sit around thinking up ideas and plans.

But I've not arrived in Ireland, maybe my ideas do not suit the needs of anyone there. It is a little absurd to be the lone artist, riding into town to make some object or processional construct for the locals, and then to ride out. So my proposal is that whatever I do in Ireland, this document will be an integral part of it: first, as a letter of introduction. I want to get people's reactions and suggestions, and active co-operation.

Then, whatever gets done, this document will serve as a sort of evidence and measure. People can look at what was done, can read my intentions, and can compare the two and decide if anything serious and brotherly has been accomplished, or if it is simply necessary to clean up some tourist's garbage.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES

BUT THEN, I arrived in Ireland, at Knock airport because it was close to Strokestown where I spent two days in the country. Now, here I am in Derry, but it seems necessary to give you a brief report on my comfortable odyssey so far, with appropriate philosophical asides, and moral observations.

My first day in Strokestown, I went out into a small forest and picked two kinds of mushrooms and proudly brought them back to the house as my gift for the family's hospitality. The family was afraid of my mushrooms. One guy said he knew for certain that they were poisonous, deadly. I tried to reason courteously with them as I made mushroom soup. No one would try the soup, no matter how much I smacked my lips, made silly noises and went on about how delicious Irish mushrooms were; even though I had no qualms about sampling *their* gift of Irish whisky. According to my own culture, I had been seriously refused by the refusal of my gift. Then, secretly and viciously (in my own defence) I thought, "What else about your own land do you idiots not know?"

On my walk through the woods I had found some yew which had been cut. I recognised it right away from the words I had read about it. I have two pieces which I carry around, carving them at odd moments.

When I got to Dublin a man gave me a piece of bog oak, which I'd never heard of. He said that in Ireland every month had a tree. October was the month of hazel trees, and that is why hazelnuts are given at Hallowe'en. (But in Dublin peanuts were more common at Hallowe'en now; because they are easier to crack? It seems degenerate.)

I began to ponder the situation — very much like our own. There is a fierce love of the land, which becomes removed from the actual land and becomes an abstraction, almost a sentimentalisation of the land. Land as politics, as an idea, as an ideology. It seems to me to be a phenomenon that plays into the hands of anyone (any structure) that has an interest in our alienation.

The man with the wood took me to a pub with two other guys. The conversation was about either the *importance* of history and tradition or about the *burden*, according to who was talking. I agreed with both sides. I came back once again to an idea that has been in my mind more and more — the necessity for a dynamic complexity; a refusal of simple answers just when such answers seem most desirable. How is it possible to maintain and respect, to never forget one moment, with the obvious purpose of allowing us to live our lives as dynamically as possible with as much importance as possible? To have a base for the purpose of being in the world, instead of for the purpose of enclosure — either reservations or defence.

As I flew from Dublin to Derry, though, I drifted back to trees, because of the countryside. Why had the government in Dublin not done a re-forestation? A celebration of yew-trees, beech, oak, cedar, pine and hazel. BUT THEN, as I said, here I am in Derry, welcomed by two trucks full of British soldiers. My idea about billboards turned out to be pretty dumb; Ireland doesn't have such a complete attack of giant billboards as has the US.

My ideas about English/Irish history being the basis for US imperialism seems to remain a little too abstract outside of this text (even though the text remains a part of the work).

My current plan comes from having walked around Derry looking at the video cameras watching me, and talking with people. It must be much more centred around Derry as Derry, and my being here. So it needs to be more complex, more ambiguous, and more in solidarity with the people I've been singing with in the pub.

THE PROJECT

First, a text, which will be used publicly, like a broadsheet. Its purpose is to explain the idea of the project and to solicit participation. Second, a sculpture in a public place. The sculpture will be made of wood, found objects, photos, and a small earth-work, along with the text and 'evidence' submitted by the public. Third, a book which will contain a photo record, the text and the 'evidence'. The sculpture will be very vaguely in the form of both a Celtic cross and a Cherokee ceremonial pole. A log or tree trunk stands upright with a handmade camera at the top. Two large rear-view-mirrors (like those on the sides of lorries) are attached as arms. In the centre of the pole are four photos. Behind the pole is a small earth-work pretending to be an archaeological 'dig', with various strata of objects. In front of the pole will be an area where **the public will be invited to submit 'evidence' in any form (objects, words, photos, etc) about any subject or situation.** Close by will be a copy of the text. The final book will also be considered as 'evidence'.

The Search for Virginity

Amusing Personal Anecdote

I was actually taught opposites in school. That was in Arkansas, where everything is clear, in about my fifth year in school. (I think I must have been 11 years old by the European system of counting.) I had previously been taught that the correct way to say 'possum' was 'opossum', so I imagined that we probably said 'posits', and I listened to adults to see if I could hear that word and show off my new knowledge.

The teacher said that black was the opposite of white, sweet was the opposite of sour, and up was the opposite of down. I began to make my own list of opposites: the number one must be the opposite of the number ten, ice was the opposite of water, and birds were the opposite of snakes.

But I soon had problems, because if snakes and birds were opposite, where could I put the flying rattlesnake, which we saw every evening as the rattlesnake star? I theorised that in special circumstances things could act like their opposites. If grey is the blending of the opposites white and black then the flying rattlesnake could be seen as a grey bird. That worked out well because our most common bird was the mockingbird, which everyone knows, likes to eat pokeberries to get drunk — an activity closer to snake behaviour than to bird behaviour. I said to my family, "What is the opposite of a mockingbird?" "A mockingbird, ha ha ha." They didn't get it.

Much later in life some African friends made me study Marx and Engels, wherein I learned that progress is simply a matter of opposites pushing against each other. The cop pushes me, I push the cop; the cop puts me in jail where I have time to plan my next move and strengthen my resolve. My opposite, the cop, is unaware that he has played a part in my development and in the overall scheme of human liberation. I give him a superior smile, which heightens the dialectical struggle.

The moral: dialectically we are far beyond the stage when your

folks came over and pushed my folks. We have now reached the stage where I get paid real money for writing these words because some of your artists try to steal our images. Ha, ha, sucker, I win!

What You Think

You think you are the ones who move around and we are the ones who stay put. Even if you catch some of us moving around, physically or mentally, you think we are mockingbirds or anomalies. Explorers and explorees. But you think that way because your sexual affairs are messed up. In your system men and women are opposites and that, primarily, in socio-economical terms. Men are bosses and move-arounders; women are subservient and stay-at-homers. So the guys are all at the pub, and they think, "Jesus, women are mysterious, there in their houses, Lord luv 'em". Even after the guys have explored women to their own satisfaction and decided they know everything there is to know about those opposites, in their primitive naivety they extend that system so that England becomes the guy moving around and my folks are seen as the ever-lovably mysterious wife. In that set-up Jews, who are clearly 'others' but who had no choice but to move around, were assigned the role of prostitutes. There were even stories of 'good Jews' similar to those of the 'prostitute with a heart of gold'. Once Israel existed as a country it could become 'one of the guys'.

How many ways have European artists developed to paint women over the centuries? And then, why have so many gay men accepted the idea (the accusation) that they are somehow like 'women', and assumed 'feminine' attributes which they take right out of the men's textbook? You guys ought to think about that whenever you pose as gypsies or savages, or whenever you tell stories about us savages. Didn't you ever read Jean Genet?

The Search for Virginity

I have been thinking about the Yanomami Indians, even though I know that this is the German artist Lothar Baumgarten's territory. It turns out that humans have been around for at least 3 million years, so let's give 1 million for initial development and consider the last 2 million years. Are there some folk who have remained unchanged for 2 million years? Because that is the only point in time I can imagine when we might all have been primitive. Those unchanged folks: their language and thought-patterns haven't changed, their dance steps haven't changed, their food and their dinner hour haven't

changed for a *million years*? Well, I'm a little sceptical. Even if we say they haven't changed *much* for a *tenth* part of a million years, we are then making the very odd assumption that the first-pine parts of that million years really do not matter.

The Yanomami are now most-favoured primitives. Personally, I've seen so many films and articles about them, and signed so many 'Save the Yanomami' petitions that I'm a little sick of them. But there is something very crazy going on. We know that the peoples of the Amazon forest were once about 95 per cent more numerous than they are at present, that they had extensive intercourse with the Inca Empire, and that they were once brilliant stone-carvers and potters. Now, you would go through some weird changes by losing half your population to smallpox even if you had no direct contact with the rest of the world. It seems to me that as 'Virgin Territory' the Yanomami are pretty battered and used. If us primitives have some primitive wisdom that may be taken home as a souvenir of your visit, I would not trust the virginity of Yanomami wisdom any more than I would that of the Xhosa.

Virginity and primitivity are the same value to you guys, but your reasons for placing value on either concept are pretty silly. You want to be 'first' more out of fear than conquest (although the two go together), and then you want to be 'the only'; and that makes you bored after a while because the whole set-up is too empty. So you have a never-ending search for true virgin territory. 'Untouched Wilderness'. 'Breaking new ground'. 'Thrusting through the barriers to new frontiers'.

What If Groceries Were The Standard?

Human progress is measured by the technologies of poking and hitting. It is as though we took the worst part of ourselves to be the best. What made the Iron Age the Iron Age? What if there were some much more important developments at the same time which we overlook because the age has been assigned to iron? My folks, then, were in the Stone Age when you guys showed up. But if groceries were the standard, we were in the Maize, Tomatoes and Beans Age and you were in the Turnips Age. For you, today is the White Bread Age.

Poking, Hitting, Breaking and Exploring

Everyone loves the lone cowboy. Free and independent, away from the law, he doesn't have to work. He has that really neat existential loneliness and penetrating gaze. He is a perceptive critic of those who

live in the town, and he "doesn't take no shit off nobody". Sometimes he must kill evil savages, but the intelligent savages become his friends and he learns their ways while always keeping to himself. What a perfect model for twentieth-century artists. What a perfect way for Jackson Pollock to get the draw on Picasso. But wait, these days artists like to think of themselves as 'shamans'. What if you could be the cowboy *and* the Indian, like Karl May's 'Winnetou'? A perfect set-up for profits both psychological and economical.

It becomes problematic for us savages, however, basically for two reasons; first those cowboy-shaman-artist guys cannot seem to put themselves into even the slightest part of their analysis of a given situation (because they *do* imagine themselves to be lone cowboys). The second reason has causes within the first; the guys believe art to be like an object, so when they think of 'art as a weapon' they imagine it to be like iron — an efficient poker and stabber. So the artist guys say they are "challenging society" (to a duel?) and as cowboys and explorers and husbands they speak for us and about us. Now, in the first place, that is a bad situation because I want to speak for myself; and in the second place, all Indians and Wives know that Cowboys and Husbands don't know shit from Shinola.

1988

Here at the Centre of the World

Here in Mexico I sculpt in a hardwood called 'pine'. My first experience with it came about when a Mexican friend asked me if I wanted a pine tree trunk. At first I said no because pine is too soft for sculpting; but then I needed to make some furniture for my house, so I went to look at the tree trunk. The form was not like any species of pine. The bark, the colour and grain of the wood were distinctly anti-pine.

The trunk was on the site of a construction job and there was a bunch of guys standing around. I said, "This is not pine". Everyone assured me that it was and to prove it, pointed out a stand of the living trees. Sure enough, they had no resemblance to pine trees, nor to close kin such as fir, spruce, cedar or larch. But because I was new to the country, and the people who were pushing the pine-ness of the tree were (at least racially) local Indians, I decided that this pine tree was just another marvellous wonder of Mexico. Only later, with mallet and gouge, and all my senses applied to the wood so that its reality was acutely before me, did I once more say, "This is not pine".

I went out to my terrace to think things over. I suddenly became aware of my pineapple plant and said, "This is not a pineapple". Then a series of misnomers rushed to memory: a black walnut is not a walnut, a prickly pear is not a pear, a horse apple is not an apple, a Jerusalem artichoke is not an artichoke nor from Jerusalem, and a turkey is not from Turkey.

Back home that labelling of native life by some vague similarity to a European species was a constant irritation to me, but I hadn't considered it in Mexico. (For interested readers, I think the fake pine tree is a species of *ahuahuete*, a tree not found in Europe.) I knew, however, that in Brazil dozens of different kinds of little fruit are all called 'apricot', and Brazil is famous for a wood called 'Brazil wood' (which, unlike the more common England wood, is both exotic and cheap).

Until tomorrow, the culture and the cultural history of what is

incorrectly called 'Latin America' is nothing more or less than a backwater of European culture. Despite muralists using the native mural form and imagery, here in Mexico art is a European business done by Europeans for Europeans. José Clemente Orozco, the most 'Indian-oriented' of the great muralists, was also the most patrician Castilian, and perhaps he and the others did their work *in memory* of the Aztec thugs, but certainly not in any relationship to the suffering Otomi just up the road, nor to the Apaches and Yaquis who were at that moment in a life-and-death struggle with Mexico.¹

Indian culture is not yet a part of Latin American culture even though racially we are still the majority. Indian culture is, instead, a part of Latin America's 'cultural heritage', part of its colourful folklore. The Ballet Folklórico de México is famous for cleaning up Indian cultural artefacts and making them presentable to a more high-toned class of tourists (including, of course, the Spanish-Mexican tourists). We are still, although alive and kicking, regarded as pre-historic in Latin American culture because the Europeans who are 'Latin American' have decided when cultural history began. Specifically, in the plastic arts, it began in the 19th or early 20th century when what's-his-name returned from Paris or Madrid or London (and then in a brilliant stroke he added some 'local colour' to his canvases).

In Mexico Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is called the first Mexican (and therefore the first Latin American) writer as though Mexico were a European country, a European word, a European concept. As though Mexico could not have conceived of itself without these European women cleverly disguised as Mexican mamas — Sor Juana and Our Lady of Guadalupe. Isn't Guadalupe somewhere in Spain? Of course. But everyone *knows* about the Aztec novels that were burned. Recently, in a typically defensive chauvinism, Carlos Fuentes wrote that the good provided by the Spanish conquistadors was the Spanish language — the language of Cervantes and all those guys. But what could possibly be more graceful, more subtle and playful, than the language of Purepecha of Central Mexico?

It reminds me of a time when I had spoken militantly to a group of college students in Ohio; one person said, "But don't you think we contributed *anything* — what about Shakespeare?" I replied that I could easily have gone to England and discovered Shakespeare on

¹ I also think, of course, that the Mexican muralist movement was of crucial importance to art in the hemisphere; and *should* have led to an explosion of a thousand flowers. The fact that it did not deserves a separate study. Further, for the same reason, I have not mentioned the various 'indigenist movements'.

my own without having my family murdered and my farm stolen as the price for the privilege of reading *The Tempest*.

Over here in the Americas (which are *not* named after Amerigo Vespucci; he named himself after us — his real name was Alberigo), 'Latin America' is now part of the Third World (a French concept that did not consider American Indians), first because Europe itself exploited these continents, and second because one European colony here exploits another (at the expense of native people who are not given forums in which to protest — we are a four-hundred year old side-show).

But, in fact, bitter as it is, 'Latin America' really has (*recently*) become part of the Third World, as opposed to simply a murderous collection of Settler Regimes, because another European phenomenon — the US — has become the world's biggest monster.

Native peoples in the US are treated with the same viciousness and precious nostalgia as we are treated anywhere in our two continents; so are we to be considered part of 'Latin America', or simply another sad minority in the ugly history of the US? If the latter, then, truly, 'history' only began when Europe began to murder us. This is not a version about which we are keen; all the same, we recognise changing patterns and now have a great solidarity (that sometime sticks in our throats) with 'Latin America'. Mexico always has the completely unrealised potential of becoming a country of the Americas; the potential of the revolution led by Emiliano Zapata, whose native tongue was Nahuatl, and who was assassinated by the Spaniard Carranza who went on to become a hero of the institutionalised Mexican Revolution.

One of my Mexican friends said that Mexico is different from the US and from the rest of Latin America with respect to Indians because Mexico is more familial as a country. That is true, but the father of the family is a child-molester and wife-beater who thinks the Aztecs were a great bunch of guys. Another friend foresees the day when Nahuatl will be at least the secondary official national language. (Why not Otomi or Zacatec?). But there is not one primary school in the country with bilingual classes. Recently, here in the state of Morelos, the subject of bilingual education was brought to the Superintendent of Schools. He said, "You mean, teach them English?"

Here I am in Mexico: the centre of the world and the place where we Cherokees originated. Even so, if I want to do art that challenges, that influences, I must take one of the roads that leads to Rome — currently called New York (if only to participate in and celebrate its

downfall). Well, so you must have *someone* to drink a beer with; and if Indians drink with each other we often cut each other's guts out. I chose two Latin American artists the furthest from Indian reality: Eduardo Leon, a Chilean painter, and Elso Padilla, a Cuban sculptor. Leon, a political exile for thirteen years, has since returned to Chile. Padilla, although back in Habana at this time of writing, wants to live in Mexico City for a while.

Let me make a few further observations, though, before we get to them. One of the most well-known art critics in New York recently said that Latin America has not yet made a substantial contribution to the history and progress of art. I think that she is wrong; that in particular the Mexican muralists have influenced art far beyond our ability to analyse at this moment. But if she were right, so the hell what, given the fact that the current history of art is just a European and US marketing scheme, and since 'they' consider Latin America not *really* part of Europe?

Secondly, besides the constant demand that Latin American culture should, at its highest points, 'measure up' to the European market standards, there is an extremely saleable concept of Latin American exoticism which constantly negates the previous demand. Everyone loves García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. But I am suspicious. I love García Márquez, I don't like Borges. Borges, however, wrote a story about some Irish settlers in Argentina who speak neither English or Gaelic, who have forgotten who they are, yet who do not read Spanish and cannot think of themselves as Argentinians. No one ever seems to remember that story because it is not about those 'exotic others'.

Beatrice Schiller, a Brazilian photographer who lives in New York, has said:

People in the US look for that which is useful, for quality. The Mexican muralists offered something useful to the art world and were accepted for a time. They were used and then forgotten. If anyone offers something useful the US grabs it. There are strict limits to what Latin Americans may participate in. The limits placed on Latin American artists are almost as severe and effective in our own countries as they are in the US because of the power of the US.²

Now then, a Latin American artist *is* that; there are no Indian artists in Latin America because, by definition, an Indian artist does 'Indian art' not Art. When the New York critic speaks of the 'contributions'

2 Interview with Jimmie Durham, *Art & Artists*, New York, 1983.

of Latin American artists, even the Aztec and Mayan stone carvers are not included.

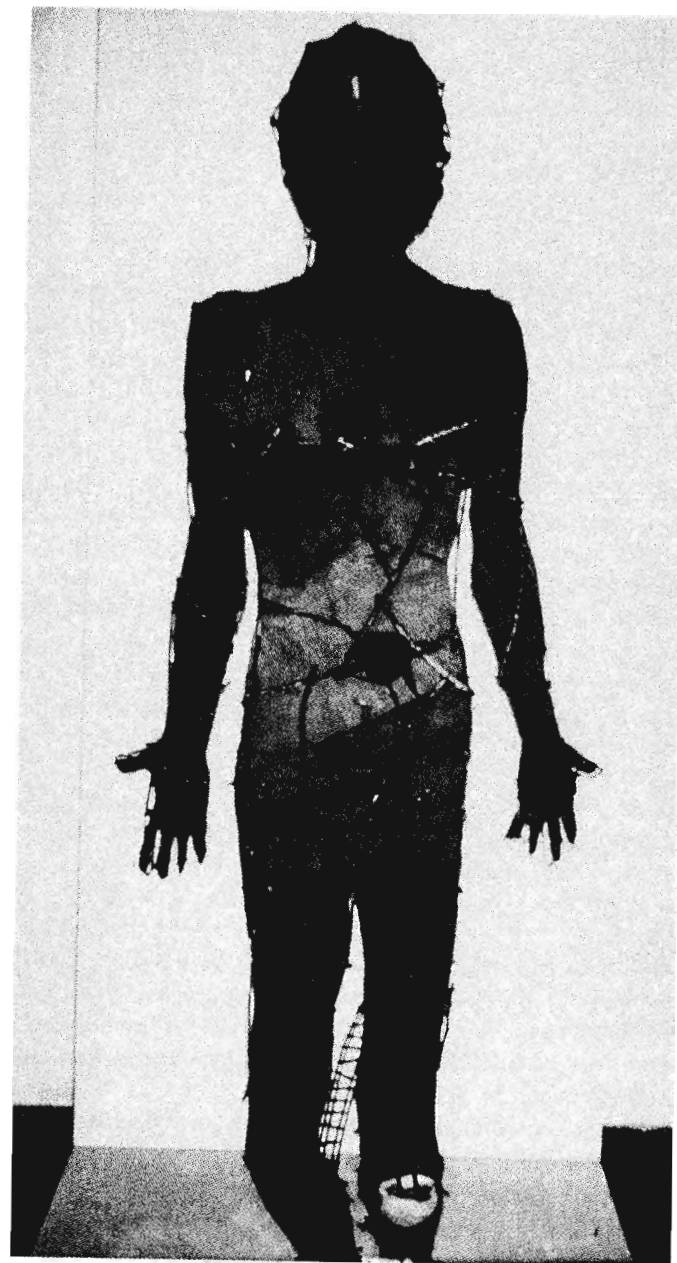
Mexico has a justly famous tradition for very strong 'folk arts'. Even in today's tourist-permeated cultural climate the sculpture and painting of Mexican villages vibrate and radiate. Although tourism and folk-artism are viciously destructive to any sense of the things themselves, we must consider why they are not 'art'. Back in the late '60s a Polish critic wrote that if we accept the notion of 'folk art' we must necessarily accept its counterpart which would not be 'high art', but 'gentry art' (art as the gentrification of art).

In Mexico it is very dangerous to try to break out of European gentry art; one finds oneself making bad copies of good people's art just like the Ballet Folklórico. But if a Latin American artist can make a disciplined and non-romantic attempt to deny Europe and affirm the Americas, she or he will have begun a serious, if lonely, political undertaking. Once begun, however, there is the constant threat of sliding into the success possible in the part of the market that deals with 'sophisticated' exotics.

Elso Padilla and Eduardo Leon are relative innocents in all these goings-on. Elso Padilla is part of a generation now three times removed from the generation that made a revolution in Cuba. He is committed to its continuation, but the revolution itself has given him the opportunity to be more revolutionary, on an artistic level, than the Old Guard can comprehend, or more exactly, its bureaucratic protectors.

Cuban art went from Wifredo Lam to the justly famous poster art immediately after the Revolution. From there, artists in general seemed to go back to European standards with Cuban proletariat motifs. Technical mastery — virtuoso drawing and brushwork — was the order of the day ten years ago. Then a small group of artists, still the *enfants terribles* and highly suspect to the small defensive art circle of Habana, began to approach Cuban art from an international perspective organically tied to what the ordinary Cuban people were up to. This group of artists is fascinated with the *santería* religion, with popular imagery and 'folk-sayings', with all the common material so long thought in 'Latin America' to be the antithesis of art. But their approach is not removed, not primarily intellectual, and so not really 'neo-primitive' in the European sense. They come to their stands primarily by an innocent love for objects and material.

In much of the Third World, this kind of attitude can result in a progressive political stance. It is very contrary to both the European bourgeois colonial mentality of the staid old art schools, and



Elso Padilla, *El Morte*; mixed media.

the hi-tech consumerism being pushed by the US. Santiago Bose, a Filipino artist, recently built, with the participation of the local villagers, a bamboo, vine and banana-leaf 'radar station' on the top of a hill. It stands in defiance to the US radar station one hill over. Such works need a nomenclature other than 'neo-primitive' or other afflictions of the First World.

Padilla has lived in Mexico City for a couple of years, and uses native bark paper, glue made from beeswax and volcanic ash, animal parts from the Brujos Market, and twigs from guava trees, because he is in love with those things. For the past year he has been making God from such material: a giant face, a giant hand, and a heart — called *The Heart of America* — are completed. I believe he understands that there is a sense in which the completed God will be more than an interpretation of a god. The bigness of these pieces is still on a human scale; the heart is about two metres tall by a metre and a half wide. He works meticulously, with the care and virtuosity of an Italian sculptor in marble. A piece called *The Land of Living Maize* stands three metres tall and has two giant (almost *trompe l'oeil*) ears of maize hanging from a tripod of sticks over black volcanic ash. The ears of maize are carved from palm root. Another piece with the same name has ears of maize made of ceramic in the form of a pyramid.

In all his work there is a constant and complex association of material that, although deceptively simple-looking, goes quietly past the artificial confines of the art system, and shows us thousands of possibilities for a living art in the Americas.

The paintings of Eduardo Leon are still very much in the traditions of both European painting and the more recent new work in Chile. Also, Chile, which to my savage Indian mind is just another European outpost pretending to be 'Latin American', really is culturally different. Pablo Neruda is distinctly Chilean, whereas the great Ruben Dario could conceivably come, like Simón Bolívar, from any one of several Latin American countries. Leon does with European painting what Neruda does with European poetry: he takes it out to the *barrios* and to the streets, not as a rhetorical set-up but because *he* is more at home there.

Previously in Chile he was politically active, but an exile has many problems simply maintaining political integrity in a host country. Leon's solution has been to delve deeper into the subject matter of the people in the streets and their images — what he calls their mythology. The fact of being an exile and a stranger in Mexico has given him a clearer insight of the day-to-day hopes, illusions and stupidities of Mexico's streets. He has remained politically active on



Eduardo Leon, *Untitled*, 1986; oil on canvas

the profoundest level. His constant experimentation with painting has remained brilliantly optimistic and specifically Chilean-in-Mexico. A native can never see what a stranger sees.

The metropolitan culture of Mexico is amazingly degraded. Mexico, the first country in the hemisphere to carry through a revolution — and one that deliberately chopped off the Church from

affairs of state and finance — is the most religiously Catholic and most sexually repressive country in the hemisphere. (In that sense it is similar to the US.) Perhaps, because it is such an Indian country away from the metropolitan centres, this repression is necessary for the ruling powers who call themselves, without shame, the 'Institutional Revolutionary Party'.

Myriad fantasies of sex and violence, taking on the most luridly childish aspects and convolutions, abound in the streets: on posters, in 'adult' comic books, in advertising even such products as clothes-lines. This is, of course, coupled with worship of the Virgin. But the Mexican Virgin is still part-Aztec goddess, often appearing inside a maguey cactus (the plant that gives us pulque and tequila). Her twin sister is Malinche, the woman who betrayed the Aztecs by becoming Cortez' lover (actually she was sold to Cortez).

That stupid history flashed in front of Eduardo Leon every day as he walked the streets of the village of Santa María, which also has the Indian name, Ahuacatlán ('Place of the Avocados'). Practically every city and town in Mexico, as well as every god and saint, has a European name and an Indian name.

Eduardo Leon uses that imagery and that situation, not romantically, but with an acute love and solidarity with the people and their ridiculously schizophrenic situation. A Third World white man, he approaches his work in a typically Indian manner, with humour and relentless badgering.

The three of us (I was a bit uncomfortable with the fact that we were three male artists) sat drinking beer on my terrace overlooking a steep canyon with a waterfall full of colourful plastic garbage. I did not interview them; we talked, but my Spanish is so bad that they both spoke baby-talk to make me understand. (Neither of them speak Cherokee.) Eduardo the pragmatist began by asking, "Why would a magazine in London be interested in us?"

Jimmie Durham: I am not sure that it is; but a new situation seems to be emerging in London, forced by many people from former British colonies who are challenging the preconceptions of the status quo. In New York there is an interest in Latin American art but there is not yet a possibility of intervention into its closed dialogue. Being top dog, New York feels that it need not listen.

Elso Padilla: Colonisation is pervasive. Latin American art operates under a colonial mentality. We still operate from a system of patrons, just as an example. We need to develop a second art system — one that is part of a real infrastructure. We need new thought patterns about art that are native to here.

Eduardo Leon: It really is completely colonial. The European and Gringo artists are the only ones who are noticed — or at least they get top billing.

EP: That's the structure of the market. It's the same with any commercial area.

EL: But for Latin America it is a matter of self-respect. Self-respect is just not in our culture.

EP: Yes, exactly. That is a main part of the crisis in Latin America.

EL: But you are right, the market controls everything. How do we get around that?

EP: I don't know, but it is necessary to continue, to maintain. We must protect that which is truly Latin American so that it can grow. I don't mean some kind of 'folk art' like Botero does, only, it is hard for Latin America to *accept more* than that. It is very hard for Cuba, for example. The Habana Biennial could be an investigation of reality by Latin American artists. Instead, it is a 'competition' — and who is invited to it? As Latin American artists we are between two walls.

EL: The problem of how to maintain is specifically a problem for individual artists. And we still want financial success as proof to ourselves that we are worthwhile artists. I think we might do better if we made our livings some other way.

EP: Oh yes, artists develop all sorts of defensive identities — the 'romantic passion' of the artist is still a pervasive idea to Latin American artists. But another piece of that problem is — who *are* the artists? In Cuba the people who get into art school are those who can 'draw well', and I'm sure it's the same everywhere.

EL: I really wonder why some painters paint. Sometimes I go to a gallery and see some guy's work and I think, "What did he get out of doing that; and what am I supposed to do with it?"

EP: Is art a job? If it is, what kind of job is it? Artists in Latin America live in a fantasy world, and that keeps art in a colonial mentality.

EL: But popular art, especially here — it's very alive as a way of relating things. There is a language there, in the relationships, in the materials, and in the images. It's here, and we live in the same world, so why not use it? Just because Europe says it is not really 'culture'?

JD: If we compare the plastic arts to music the difference is strong.

Since the 'New Song Movement', (Nueva Trova Cubana) which in fact the people seem to have left behind for being a little too contrived and intellectual, there are all sorts of developments and blending. In poetry — in literature — there are exciting possibilities. What Rius has done with the popular 'comic book' form, for example. The plastic arts are locked into this fantasy world, as Elso said. Maybe they are the last bastion of colonial culture. But now, Elso, talk about being here in Mexico as a Cuban artist.

EP: Well, I'm not exactly a stranger here. I think there are no strangers. But I *am* Cuban, and my most serious problem is the economic part of the culture. Capitalism is a bad deal for an artist. The everyday practical problems wear down your spirit. Then, people like my work but they don't see it as real 'art', I'm afraid, or don't see it as 'typical' art, which is so important to this art system.

JD: In Mexico City I've noticed posters that say 'Defend our national culture'. Do you think that is a dangerously defensive chauvinism, especially when there are so many artists from other Latin American countries working here?

EP: I think Mexico needs a new language, a new vocabulary, to talk about such things. Mexico wants and needs more self-sufficiency. But the humility of the common people is good, it is an important key.

EL: Mexico has a surrealistic nationalism. It does the opposite of what it says.

EP: But people change slowly. Mexico is big, and important in Latin America, but not culturally. A real universalism is important, and Latin America has a possibility to show some ways toward that.

EL: Why not a biennial in Mexico? Mexico has all the necessary factors to pull together a serious biennial, and that could give a tremendous energy to artists here.

JD: OK, we are dreaming. Eduardo, what are you going to do back in Chile?

EL: I am going to participate in the culture of Chile. I didn't stop in 1974, I am alive *now*. I want always the most quotidian relationships between art and other areas. We need a new set of relationships. My generation, like all of those before us, is so academic, and politics also was always connected to the academic. There really is no art system left now — maybe that's good, but there is such a sadness in being Chilean. I am always searching for a quotidian

dialogue — the spontaneity in the streets, the people's mythology. I like to mix things up. Everything has equal value as material; paper is paper. If I use a piece of paper, with all its content, that I find on the street, that's just as good as stretched linen.

EP: Yes, yes, but "material carries so much. Carries ideas, carries its pasts and connotations. If you paint in oil there is already a set of ideas involved in 'oil painting'. I am after the relationships, the political relationships of objects and material.

EL: Me, too. That is why I like to mix other elements into oil painting. Anything — old plates and cups, whatever.

JD: Eduardo, you put all this stuff on your canvases, and Julian Schnabel does the same thing in New York, but your work seems diametrically opposed to Schnabel's. Can you talk about that?

EL: Who is Julian Schnabel?

It seems to me that 'Latin America' cannot seriously challenge the US and Europe in their own game because that power structure, as Beatrice Schiller pointed out, sets the limits. Culturally, practitioners of all the arts must ultimately walk away from the colonial connections — internally and externally — and decide to stop being 'Latin American'. The 'Gringos', the European US population, have little chance of ever becoming Americans, given their terrible history, but the people of 'Latin America' seem not only to have a chance, they often seem to have the desire. Artists, I think, must take the first step; and in fact there seems no other sensible, or even tolerable, road for them. But I can imagine how wild and indigenously chauvinistic such an idea will seem.

Militant Indians greet each other here with the phrase, "Michico atiahui" — Mexico Forward.

Cowboys and ...

...the exploring party returned to England with such good accounts of the new country that Queen Elizabeth called it Virginia in honour of herself.¹

Wilbur F. Gordy

I recollected seeing a boy who was shot down near the house. His arm and thigh were broken, and he was so near the burning house that the grease was stewing out of him. In this situation he was still trying to crawl along; but not a murmur escaped him, though he was only about twelve years old. So sullen is the Indian, when his dander is up, that he had sooner die than make a noise, or ask quarter. The number that we took prisoner, being added to the number we killed amounted to a hundred and eighty-six.²

Davey Crockett

For the other remains to be discovered. The fact is worthy of astonishment...³

Tzvetan Todorov

In an installation piece in California's Museum of Man, Luiseno artist James Luna put himself in a display case. Viewing 'the body', an American white woman said to her husband, "Dear, I think he is alive". The husband replied, "Don't be silly; they don't put live ones in museums".

Luna makes other installations wherein 'American Indian' people are represented by only a few articles of clothing, sometimes by cowboy boots and hats which are typical 'Indian' dress today.

1 Wilbur F. Gordy, *Elementary History of the United States*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1930.

2 Davey Crockett, diary, 1813.

3 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, Harper & Row, New York, 1984.

In New York much of my own work has dealt with what Jean Fisher has called "the necrophilous codes of the museum",⁴ and of misrepresentation and misidentification of 'American Indians' by the colonisers. But Luna and I did not know each other's work. At opposite ends of the US we worked on similar problems, because, I believe, the problems are so intolerably before us.

This essay is concerned with the invisibility of 'American Indians' in the Americas; not to plead a case for more visibility but to attempt a tentative investigation into the ramifications of the "presence of the absence/absented Indian body"⁵ in American discourse.

This solid vacuum is a special case. I feel, therefore, that I must tell anecdotes to convince readers that the situation actually exists. Certainly for readers from the Americas, it is necessary (at least from my experience) to approach the subject obliquely. The following few anecdotes, then, are related only by the invisible theme of invisible 'American Indians'.

The great Shawnee resistance leader Tecumseh was killed around 1810 in Ohio Territory. One of the most famous generals in the US Civil War, William Tecumseh Sherman, was born in Ohio surely not much more than ten years later. How is it that Sherman was named after the most hated and feared man of the time while the Indian Wars were still, further west and south, in full bloom?

Naomi Bliven, reviewing Nirad Chaudhuri's autobiography in the *New Yorker* magazine,⁶ compares England's colonisation of India not to its colonisation of 'American Indians' but of American whites. She, feeling herself and her country as fellow-colonised persons, has a sympathy with Chaudhuri and India.

In V.S. Naipaul's book about the American South, Anne Siddons, a white novelist from Georgia, states, "We [Southern whites] were a conquered and occupied people, the only people in the United States to be like that".⁷

At a recent convention of the College Art Association (CAA) in New York, a Brazilian woman showed slides of Brazilian paintings. The paintings were traditional-looking in form, done on stretched

4 Jean Fisher, 'Jimmie Durham' in *Matoaka Ale Attakulakula Anel Guledisgo Hnihi*, exhibition catalogue, Matt's Gallery, London, 1988.

5 Jean Fisher, private letter.

6 *The New Yorker*, Nov 21, 1988.

7 V.S. Naipaul, *A Turn in the South*, Vintage International, New York, 1988.

canvas or linen in oils or acrylics. Her thesis was to show, by the styles of paintings that, as she put it, "The Brazilian people are truly a new people". If Europeans are then the 'old people', who are the 'Indians' of Brazil? Obviously, they are considered either as a special kind of property of the "new people", or not at all.

In the US people phrase their questions about 'Indians' in the past tense, not only to me or other individual 'Indians' but also to groups. It is not unusual for us to answer in the past tense. Once in South Dakota a white man asked, "What did the Indians eat?" One of our elders replied without irony, "We ate corn, beans and squash". (That is the standard answer in US school books.)

There is in the US (and to a lesser extent in Chile and Argentina) a curious phenomenon that is seldom given intellectual *consideration*: whites claiming to be 'part-Indian', and even more, whites who claim to be 'Indian'. Surely there is not another part of the world wherein members of the racist oppressor society claim to be members of the oppressed group. (The Americans do not, of course, claim any of the concomitant disadvantages.)

It also seems necessary to state that the 'Indians' of the Americas are colonised peoples; that colonisation is not simply the language of some political rhetoric of past decades. Europe may be passing through a post-colonial time, but we in the Americas still live in a colonial period. Our countries were invaded, genocide was and is committed against us, and our lands and lives are taken over for the profit of the coloniser.

Although I do not want to express a moral outrage, since the investigation is about American discourse and not of an 'Indian' problem, I ask you to imagine my state of mind when once more I say that we are *colonised* peoples. We are not 'primitives' who suffer under a culture shock by contact with 'more developed societies'. Yet, in my experience, if I were addressing a live audience, someone would question the simple facts: "But didn't you at first welcome the settlers?" Or, "Weren't relationships friendly at first?"

For the peoples of Europe the 'Other' may be a foreigner, the person from another place. For those Europeans who have established permanent colonies, such as the US, Australia, South Africa or the Latin American countries, it cannot follow that the 'Other' is the colonised person 'here at home', because that would call into question the very legitimacy of the colonial state. In these states the 'Other' must be denied one way or another. Golda Meir said that there were no Palestinians, and South Africa has always claimed that there were no Africans in the area until after the arrival of the settlers.

'Aboriginals' have only recently been included in Australia's census, and of course the American pioneers tamed a 'wilderness'.

There is something unique about the US; it was the first settler colony to establish itself *against* and through the *denial* of its original inhabitants. It developed thereby a narrative which was more complete, more satisfying, than similar narratives in Canada and Latin America. That narrative has generated new cultural and political behaviour which has been a main influence in the modern world. When, as a political activist in the 1970s, I attempted to present our case to the United Nations, I was more than intimidated by the tenacity with which other countries upheld the American narrative. And that was in the most obvious and unsubtle political discourses. The economic power of the US does not seem reason enough for the propagation of the myth, because the myth was expanding its influence long before the US obtained its majority.

The narrative has its origins in Europe, of course. But the US refined, that is, coarsened, the European premise of the 'primitive' so that it was made more operable for industrial expansionism.

America's narrative about itself centres, has as its operational centre, a hidden text concerning its relationship with 'American Indians'. That central text *must* be hidden, and sublimated, and acted out. 'American Indian' artists, as artists and as persons responsible to our people, have traditionally attempted intervention, but even our attempts are seen as quite minor entertainment. As we approach the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus many people throughout the Americas renew certain superficial discourses about their history. *That* seems to be for the purpose of reasserting known propositions. In the US, we 'Indians' are now called upon to speak within this framework. The difficulty is not so much that we are expected to say known things as that our speaking at such a time *is* a known thing. Coming just at the period when institutions in the US are already celebrating a 'multi-cultural'-ism, I suspect that this new development in fact makes intervention on our part more difficult.

The US, because of its actual guilt (instead of some thought-out or not thought-out perception of guilt) has had a nostalgia for itself since its beginnings. Even now one may read editorials almost daily about America's 'loss of innocence' at some point or other, and about some time in the past when America was truly good. That self-righteousness and insistence upon innocence began, as the US began, with invasion and murder.

The Master Narrative of the US has not (cannot be) changed. It

has been broadened. It has been broadcast. This narrative is only superficially concerned with 'taming the wilderness' and 'crossing new frontiers'. The US has developed a concept and a reality of the state, I might say 'state-ism', because US culture is so completely ideological.

The profound operative concept has to do with a specifically American premise of the 'Other'. Any poll taken in the US would show, I believe, that Americans imagine that the Ohio Valley mentioned earlier has always in some way belonged to the US, and that in fact what is now the continent-wide state was always the proper property of the US. It is a country which may continually expand (and as a state, not as a 'commonwealth' or 'empire') but which cannot give up territory even if, as in the case of Puerto Rico, the territory has been proven to be held illegally.

There is an unbroken line between the first American Thanksgiving Day, celebrating the slaughter of an entire 'Indian' village, and the overwhelming popularity of Bush's slaughter of thousands in the 1989 invasion of Panama.

Whether from the Right or the Left, whether the topic is Panama or Mapplethorpe, criticism in the US must ultimately depend upon the 'American'-ness or 'Un-American'-ness of the project being criticised; it must *rely* on ideology and state-ism.

Can we assume from this that there is *no* US except its ideological and expansionist state-ism? The question is not meant spitefully. I once explained 'American Indian' legal rights and the consequent demands of the American Indian Movement to a member of the Institute for Policy Studies. His response was: "That would mean the break up of the United States."

Suppose Germany had *begun* with the Holocaust and its denial. The intellectual or political admission of the situation might cause a breaking up of the state. But the comparison is a little silly. The US is a continual and movable holocaust.

In 1914 the US Navy was slaughtering Yaqui 'Indians' in the centre of Mexico for the 'protection' of European settlers. (After Mexico had consolidated its revolutions in the 1920s it too recommended the killing of Yaquis and Apaches.) The last battle between US troops and my own people was in 1923. The US has been continuously at war, continuously invading and killing since the Jamestown and Plymouth Colonies. Supposedly it had an 'age of expansionism' beginning in 1898 with the invasions of the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Cuba, just after the last 'Indian' wars(!)

If 'Indians' are not considered as victims of colonial aggression

how are we considered? I am tempted to write the question twice, for emphasis. It implies a second question, however: why are we not considered as colonised? For any 'Indian' person the questions are subjective and quotidian: "How might I exist?"

The Master Narrative of the US proclaims that there were no 'Indians' in the country, simply wilderness. Then, that the 'Indians' were savages *in need of* the US. Then, that the 'Indians' all died, unfortunately. Then, that 'Indians' today are (a) basically happy with the situation, and (b) not the real 'Indians'. Then, most importantly, that this is the complete story. Nothing contrary can be heard. Europeans might at least search for 'authenticity' among the primitives, but Americans already know the complete story. The narrative is complete and known and not important. The settlers claim the discourse on 'Indians' as their own special expertise, yet the expertise is of such a familial, at-home nature that it is not worthy of being expounded. Husbands know their wives very well, of course, but the wives, as known property, cannot be the subjects of serious discussions among husbands; less so can they speak on their own behalf to the husbands. Americans believe themselves to be cowboys (frontiersmen, pioneers). So, they believe that if, in fact, there might be 'Indians', 'Indians' would be their silent partners in wilderness-taming activities — that is, like wives.

This is the state's idea and scheme. It is its scheme for existence. How might it otherwise exist? The US scheme has always been, necessarily, both 'biggest' and 'best'. Because of its atrocities it must be the *most* innocent and the *most* just, and it must expand. If America's notion of itself has seemed to fit so well the times we call modern, isn't it because that notion created these times? What I am calling an American notion is a European project, except the European states could not themselves carry out the project efficiently. They are intertwined with what we say are countries. The state called 'France' is connected to something like a country, also called 'France'. The state called 'America' is connected to an independent settler colony. At the end of its 'empire' Great Britain must return to that island in Europe. The economic power of the US is losing its grip in much of the world, but at the end, to where might it return? It is *only* a state, *only* a political entity, so its ideological base and its narrative can be absolute.

If someone imagines otherwise, at the end of America's 'external' empire it would follow that there is a country that is America. Would *my* country become free of the US? If so, where is America? If not, do I really not come from any place? Is the country of my people really only a story in the Great American Story?

The denial of 'American Indians' in American discourse requires a lengthy investigation and what I have presented so far is a rough outline. We may, however, consider some curiosities as brief evidence.

First, there is little intellectual interest in the situation. The existing discourse on 'American Indians' is always sentimentally moral. Edmund Wilson's least known book, *Apology to the Iroquois*, is properly seen as no more than an apology. It contains no analysis of the conditions of US society which make the apology seem necessary to him. Aside from Roy Harvey Pearce's *Savagism and Civilization*, ahead of its time and academically sequestered, and Leslie Fiedler's *The Vanishing Indian in American Literature*, more a literary reportage, there has been no serious treatment of the United States' relation to its 'indigenous populations'. Instead there has been a stunning silence.

The settlers must consume us. There is no one to challenge their ownership except ourselves, which of course cannot be allowed. In American literature the 'Indian' is always a passive witness to the cowboy's action. Neither Queequeg in *Moby Dick*, nor Tonto, nor the Indian in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* have speaking parts. There is a vast difference between Tonto and Gunga Din. Gunga Din, as the good Indian fighting the bad Indians on behalf of the Empire, is capable of heroic deeds. In the US a good 'Indian' is necessarily passive; like Cochise in the films, his role is to 'allow the settlers in'.

It is in film that we can most easily see that the myth of the US is not intellectually challenged. The Lone Ranger is always alone in the wilderness he does not quite call home. (His home might be named 'travelling the earth and protecting the settlers'.) It is amazing that he can be quite so alone; I mean, without any of us at all. At first, John Wayne as the Lone Ranger, in films such as *Wagonmaster* and *The Searchers*, saved innocents from the savages. In the last great wave of Hollywood westerns — *Shane*, *High Noon*, et al — the hero and the settlers are all by themselves on the endless prairies. They cannot remember when they last had to kill 'Indians'. At some point late at night by the campfire, presumably, the Lone Ranger ate Tonto. By the time Alan Ladd becomes the Lone Ranger in *Shane* he has consumed his Indian companion. Now the Lone Ranger is himself the stoic, silent, Noble Savage, so much neater and more satisfactory at the job.

In the 1970s, films such as *Soldier Blue* used 'Indians' as the backdrop for America's coming to terms with its war against Vietnam. Nothing has had, though, the impact of the earlier films. At any rate,

film critics from James Agee to Pauline Kael have seen nothing noteworthy about America's image of itself as seen through the camera's not looking at the situation with 'Indians'. Every other part of the American myth may now be critically examined. The central, operational part remains sacred. Americans retain the right to be the pioneers.

'American Indians' cannot have a Sidney Poitier or Harry Belafonte, much less an Eddie Murphy. We still cannot be trusted to portray ourselves.

A second curiosity shows in the political arena. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s (and even as far back as the debates before the Civil War) created a situation wherein the struggles of American blacks are seen as an agenda item for the entire country, not exclusively a concern of black people. Something of the sort has also happened concerning Chicanos and Japanese Americans; but no such perception has evolved in relation to 'American Indians'.

The African peoples are seen to have legitimate political struggles, as part of an important concept called 'human rights'. Africans may be called Africans. 'American Indians' obviously cannot be called 'Americans'; we cannot, therefore, be 'considered' politically. We must be spoken of mythically — 'American Indians' — or anthropologically — 'Native Americas'. We are removed from the political arena. Instead of human rights we have the more specialised and esoteric 'Rights of Indigenous People'. It is a set of rights which precludes intellectual consideration and substitutes sentimental feeling. Colonisation of Africa and even the United States' repression of Latin America are seen as 'outrageous' and 'intolerable'. It is merely a shame about us!

The United States takes pride in describing its government as one "of laws, not men". According to the American Civil Liberties Union and other institutions, any breach of the US Constitution is a breach of that valuable constitutionality by which the people are protected from despotic tyranny. Yet we 'American Indians' are continually and consistently denied our legal and constitutional rights. The denial causes alienation and poverty. (We are the poorest people in the US.) But Congress and the courts pretend that our legal rights are too mysterious to decipher.

The blatant racism that allows comic strip characters with exaggerated facial features and names such as 'Leapin' Lizard', sports teams with names such as the 'Washington Redskins', and the use of 'American Indian' names and images to sell every sort of product, in the face of the actual suffering of 'Indian' people, passes unmentioned by the American public.

I once thought of making an installation using the more obviously racist images of 'Indians', juxtaposed with the Noble Savage-type portrayal such as one sees with *Cherokee* clothing and *Big Chief* writing tablets. The title would have been 'Which is the Correct Way to Portray Indians?' But I didn't, because it seemed to me that even the most perceptive American viewers would be able to smile and remove themselves from any involvement in the situation.

The Master said, "What is necessary is to rectify names — If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language is not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success".⁸

We divide the world into North and South. It is understood that the concept 'Third World' is in large part concerned with the Southern Hemisphere *versus* the Northern. In that simplistic scenario 'American Indians' in the US and Canada are once more negated, and 'Indians' in Latin America are negated by being made part of a Latin American project. But intellectuals of the Third World, perhaps even more so than those of the First World, have often accepted a monolithic idea of some Third World of which they are proudly part, or which they must overcome.

I have written that the US is unique, yet its narrative as a colonial power differs from those of Latin American countries only by degree of completeness. In a way, Latin American culture remains more closely tied to Europe; it remains colonial in a more traditional European sense. For that reason the US narrative has 'won' over those of Latin America. The mythical plains 'Indian' of the US West has become the prototype for 'Indianness', has become the 'red Indian', even for Latin America's 'Indians'.

Once again, it may be useful to relate some anecdotal curiosities:

The Latin Americans do not know what an 'Indian' looks like. Even in countries such as Bolivia and Peru, a man with typically 'Indian' features is nicknamed *Chino* (the Chinese). A man who is large, robust, and with features typical of Southern Spain will be called *El Indio* (The Indian).

One knows a 'real Indian' by his 'Indian' suit. Quite often a person who is obviously racially 'Indian' but culturally alienated will have

8 *Confucian Analects*, Book XIII, Trans. James Legge, as quoted in *The Notion of Tribe*, Morton Fried, Cummings, Marlo Park, 1975.

no awareness of 'Indian' ancestry. One also finds obviously European members of the Latin bourgeoisie boasting of their 'Indianness', and even of Latin America's 'Indianness'. (Paul Gauguin learned to adopt that attitude as his own.)⁹

The literature of Latin America, as in the North, chronicles very well the alienation of the settlers *sans* 'Indians'. Colombian novelist García Márquez lived part of his childhood in the countryside; at that time, and at the time he was writing his novels, and at the time in which the novels are set, 'Indians' in Colombia were politically organised and were hunted down and slaughtered. There are no 'Indians' in García Márquez' Colombia.

Juan Rulfo, the Mexican writer who is cited as aspiration for so many Latin American writers, could not produce even the ghost of an 'Indian' in his Mexican village.

Miguel Asturias' novel, *Men of Maize*, so mythologised Guatemala's 'Indians' that they seem more like exotic animals than humans. Later Asturias became an official in the government which razed 'Indian' villages.

In Isabel Allende's recent novel of the Allende years in Chile, *House of the Spirits*, which attempts to give some sort of overview of the conditions in Chile at the time, the only 'Indians' present are so placidly evil and so inscrutable that the author cannot maintain an interest in them herself. One is described as having "tiny oriental eyes", and later in the book what the author calls "mongoloid" (Downes Syndrome) children are also described as having "tiny oriental eyes". Allende's 'Indians', like virtually all Latin American 'Indians' do not speak languages — they speak 'dialects'. (In Latin America *lengua*, language, is reserved for European languages. 'Indians' speak *dialectos*.)

While the US advertises itself as a "nation of immigrants", Mexico claims that the battle between Cortez and the Aztecs "was neither a victory nor a defeat, but the birth pains of a new race and a new nation — Mexico";¹⁰ nullifying the existence of hundreds of 'tribes' who today still fight for enough land to stand on.

In Brazil 'Indians' are still 'wards of state', neither adult human beings nor children in the legal system.

Uruguay makes a contradictory boast. It captured and killed the

9 Letter from Gauguin to Theo Van Gogh, 'On Painting', ca. 20 November 1889, as cited in *Gauguin: A Retrospective*, edit. Marla Prather and Charles F. Stuckey, Park Lane, New York, 1989, p 109.

10 This is the inscription over the entrance to Mexico City's Museum of Anthropology, but it is so widely quoted in Mexico it is like a motto.

last 'Indian' within its borders in 1926. Uruguayans are prone to consider themselves *gauchos*, 'Indian'-European *mestizo* cowboys. Along with Chile at various times, it has also claimed to be "the Switzerland of South America", just as Costa Rica has called itself "the Switzerland of Central America". Here one may see the American insanity at its most simple. Even discounting the 'Indians' from other countries who must surely wait tables and carry garbage in Montevideo, Uruguay cannot be 'Indian-less'. They must have the twisted discourse which first programmed them running on endless cassette, the convoluted American pathology well in place.

The Europeans who make up the countries of the Americas have never left Europe. They brought it along with them. They are always and obviously never at home here. Their true feelings about the actual land are fear and contempt. In their minds they still live on the 'frontier', and are perfectly willing to 'pull up stakes' and move on. After 500 years they still know very little about the local flora and fauna (many Latin Americans believe that armadillos, like vultures, eat dead things), and they seem to think that our 'Indian' knowledge of such things is either occult or some sort of animal cunning. The difference in *look* and *feel* between the cities and developed countrysides of Europe and those of the Americas is striking. Europeans seem to feel at home in Europe. Americans do not feel at home.

The *Patria* from which springs their exaggerated patriotism — 'The American Way', 'Our great Mexican heritage', etc — is a combination of the political state and defensive bravado. It is not based on land. In no other countries have both the people and the governments had such a will for the despoliation of the natural habitat. It is the despoliation done by colonisers pretending to be native, without need for the most simple concern for the actual native peoples. The settlers feel that they must consume us. They feel that they have an historic right to us, and often that they *are* us.

In the American countries where we are no longer a significant percentage of the population we have a deep fear of populism. The 'populace', whether picturesque peasants or radical students, is always a ready lynch mob against 'Indians', either by direct action or programmatically.

In Latin America as in the US schemes for 'progress' are always against 'Indians', and the various nationalisms are anti-'Indian'. Both Peru and Brazil are well-known examples of that, but Panama might be a more instructive case. The US invented Panama from a piece of Colombia. Its interest, and then the interest of the Panamanian

government, was the canal zone. 'Indians' in Panama's southern forests were thereby protected by disinterest. The same 'tribe' in northern Colombia is hunted down. When the canal is returned to Panama there could well be a development of interest in the entire country by the Panamanian government. The 'Indians' of the south will then face the same problems they face in Colombia.

The governments of Latin America often develop a sense of self-hood and unity for their countries and regions by appearing to oppose US imperialism. The US may then be seen as a benefactor of nationalist sentiment; in any case, it is clear that Argentina, Brazil, Chile, etc, would be willing to fill an imperialist vacuum should the US disappear.

The settler colonies most often tied their sentiments for independence from European fatherlands to a perceived softness toward 'savages' on the part of the parent countries.

The progressive intelligentsia of Latin America have adopted the pose, 'we are all the same people'. They take our land, our music, our clothes and our history; in turn they insist we take up their struggles, but they will not call a truce. Geronimo, the Apache leader, said in his surrender speech to the US army, "So you have captured me; the Mexicans would have killed me".

I have tried to present the outrageous idea that the profound division in the Americas is between 'Indians' and settlers. As the hidden operant for all American narratives, its discourse is not a product of US imperialism but its instructor. The concealment and its methods have served to take away from 'Indians' a reality in the world, and therefore our voices in the world.

I began this section with a quotation from Confucius about names. The false terminology used against us is so pervasive that any of its words call up the (false) idea of 'Indian'-ness. The word 'tribe' comes from the three peoples who originally founded Rome ('Tribunal', based on the number three, comes from the same root). It is not a descriptive word, nor a scientific one. Its use in anthropology has been completely discredited, and came from the European concept of human progress at the pinnacle of which were the capitals of Europe. 'Tribe', 'Chief', and similar words do not describe a part of reality for any peoples; they are descriptive within the discourse of enclosure and concealment, for the purpose of showing primitiveness.

Yet these words must be used. In the US an 'Indian' reservation is governed by a Tribal Council (controlled by the US Bureau of Indian Affairs). Those opposed to the Tribal Council usually organise

themselves under a system of 'chiefs'. We cannot insist that the world learn the terms for our leaders in our languages (almost 300 languages in the US alone), nor can we realistically insist that the terminology of modern states be applied, such as 'President' or 'Prime Minister'. At best one ends up with 'Tribal President', 'Tribal Chairman', or in the case of my own people, 'President of the Cherokee Nation'. In that example the use of the word 'nation' has become synonymous with 'tribe'. (One does not say, 'the President of the French Nation'.)

It is not understood that we are colonised but it is well understood that we are *not* nations, in the sense of independent modern states; therefore, any insistence on our part for a different terminology is perceived as sensitivity to racism, as in the African-Americans' insistence against the term 'negro'.

The world knows very well who we are, how we look, what we do and what we say — from the narrative of the oppressor. The knowledge is false, but it is known.

We, then, are left somewhere else, (no-where else). By the very act of speaking we contribute to the silence, the nullification, laid upon us.

It is not as though we ourselves are attempting to speak from within some pristine state of savage grace. Colonisation is not external to the colonised, and it makes for neither wisdom nor charity among the colonised. Made to feel unreal, inauthentic, we often participate in our own oppression by assuming identities or attitudes from within the colonisation structure.

This century began with 'Indian' people making more individual attempts (as opposed to communal efforts) at intervention. Among artists those efforts are still, today, usually made with constant reinforcement of the individual's identity and authenticity by employing parts of the stereotype. One's 'Indian' community cannot authenticate or designate a position in the world of art because that world *is* of the coloniser. One must approach the coloniser for the space and license to make art. The coloniser, of course, will not grant the license but will pretend to in certain circumstances.

In different ways Guayasamin from Ecuador, Rufino Tamayo in Mexico, Allan Houser, Howe and C.N. Gorman in the US, produced what Blaise Tobias has called "Indian-flavoured art". Tobias means art within the European tradition but with recognisable signs of 'Indian'-ness. No matter how foolishly (or wisely) or cynically those efforts have been conducted, they *were* attempts to intervene in the

Americas' Master Narrative. Conversely, no matter how successful the individual artist became, the attempts cancelled themselves because of the nature of the Narrative.

In the 1960s and '70s there was a veritable explosion of 'American Indian' art in the US and Canada. The sociological reasons for it, I believe, are connected with the American settlers' anxiety about themselves at the time. With the Civil Rights Movement, the Feminist Movement, the Counter-Culture, the War, the assassinations, and culminating in the Watergate scandal, the US needed to adjust its self-image without admitting any new images. The hippies had already adopted their ideals of our ways and dress to suit their self-image (a variation on the cowboy-as-Indian theme), so the idea needed only to be expanded and cleaned up.

I do not believe that we necessarily produced more, or more talented, artists during that time, although it may be true simply because suddenly a larger market existed. What seems more pertinent is the fact that the market arrived. But the market has never been the 'art market'; it is always a sub-outlet — the 'Indian art market'. It did not come about because of our demands but because of America's needs. Therefore, the subject-matter of 'Indian' art was the 'Indian' face, the 'Indian' body romanticised; not us, but their image of us.

The three most successful 'Indian' artists at the time were Fritz Scholder, R.C. Gorman and T.C. Cannon. Scholder painted 'Indian Chiefs' in full regalia, using brilliant magentas, greens and oranges. The facial features and bodily forms were blurred, indistinct, as though part of the painterly landscape. Gorman painted and drew 'Indian' women wrapped in blankets, placed like stones in decorative Southwest desert landscapes. Cannon gave his painted 'Indian Chiefs' a little Oklahoma Pow Wow glitz; metallic paints and contemporary trappings in settings that were always clearly the past.

We had begun our 'new' political activism in New York State and in Oklahoma in the 1950s. Our resistance became nationally visible in 1967-68 with the take-over of Alcatraz Island. After the massive resistance at the village of Wounded Knee in 1973 I became a full-time activist in the American Indian Movement (AIM).

I was continuously incredulous at the way the American public seemed to welcome our struggle. (I was never surprised at their ignorance of what we were struggling for.) Completely passive, even complacent, people felt that the 'Indian' struggle was one they knew. It was one they had sympathy with, *as though it were their own*, and they *knew* that we did not threaten them. We would not ask for a seat anywhere.

In public addresses, no matter what situation or atrocity we described, we received the same audience responses: standing ovations and then the questions; "What did the Indians eat?"; "How can I find out about my Cherokee grandmother?"; *et al.* As our situation worsened, America loved us more.

By 1980 white men were already teaching 'Indian' shamanism in universities. White students were participating in Sun Dances and Peyote ceremonies. Every shopping mall in the country had a store which sold Cherokee magic quartz crystals, and every airport had a boutique which sold 'Indian' dress and artefacts along with cowboy gear. As Ralph Lauren's television commercial has it, "...the Spirit of the West that is everywhere today."

Our lives, and our rights, continue to deteriorate. The 'Indian' art market continues to expand, but it has never been ours. It has served to isolate 'Indian' artists through commercial success in a specialised area. James Luna has said: "What should be foremost in the intent of American Indian artists is the opportunity to say, not to be spoken for or about ... it is truly unfortunate that there are so few Indian artists who address current issues of Indian communities or those of contemporary American art."¹¹

Those of us who have considered ourselves as militant or traditional (in the 'Indian' sense of that term) have often relied on some strategy or another for presenting the 'plight of the Indian', that is, using art to attempt to show our situation to the US or to show our view of the US to itself. It is natural, probably, or understandable, given the situation, that we make that error; but it is an error because such attempts are expected and accepted within the narrative. 'Indian' suffering is part of the entertainment.

Finally, though, to accept any idea of ourselves as the subject matter for our art is, potentially, a trap.

Today we have non-'Indian' artists using us as subject matter once more. It is a phenomenon that seems exactly connected to the special American discourse about 'primitives' and 'primitivism'. Brazilian photographer Claudia Andujar has taken the Yanomami people in the Amazon as her exclusive property. Her photos of abstracted parts of 'Indian' bodies with arranged exotic flora have made her reputation. She has founded a committee to create a 'park' for the Yanomami.

German artist Lothar Baumgarten has also made a reputation

11 James Luna, catalogue, Centro Cultural de la Raza, San Diego, 1985.

using 'Indians' as subject matter, but in a more sophisticated way. According to a mutual friend Baumgarten's intention is (in part) to address a new, more committed, concept of anthropology, yet the anthropology remains a science of the Other. (If anthropology were truly 'the study of mankind' why are European men not studied?) Although I sometimes use the Cherokee writing system in my own work, when I saw that Baumgarten had used it as the principle element in an installation in Pittsburgh, I felt appropriated and sort of cancelled.

Mexico has a history of portraying 'its Indians' in art at least since Diego Rivera, so much so that Mexican art is often perceived as mainly those portrayals. The sculptor Zuniga makes large bronzes of groups of 'Indian' women, in a style that recalls Henry Moore. How are we expected to look at those placid and elemental giant bodies? Were the models friends with Zuniga? Did they appreciate the likeness he achieved? Did they cook beans and tortillas for him?

Francisco Toledo is probably Mexico's most important contemporary artist. He comes from the Zapotec city of Juchitan in southern Mexico, and has remained close to the community and committed to the people's struggles. In the early '80s, Toledo, along with Gloria and Victor de la Cruz, published a magazine, *Guchachi'Reza*, in Juchitan. It had poems in Spanish and Zapotec, with artwork by well-known artists such as Cuevas, Gallegos and Rius; and included letters about the area by D.H. Lawrence, Edward Weston and others. Besides presenting explanations of Zapotec language by anthropologists, the magazine chronicled the history of the struggles. But to present such a collection to the very Spanish art world of Mexico City, a bastion of settler 'Indianitude', without challenging that system, is to volunteer for appropriation.

'Indianitude' is an actual and employed term in Latin America. In Colombia, Antonio Caro has been doing installations using the signature of Quintin Lamé, an 'Indian' leader in the early part of the century. (Lamé's signature was a kind of calligraphic design.) Caro is not 'Indian' but he is dedicated to producing art that is socially oriented. In an interview in *Arte en Colombia*¹² he stated that his work about Lamé "combines art, sociology and ethnology", and that he has allied himself with 'indigenism' (*indigenismo*). Quintin Lamé's kinsman Justiniano Lamé was assassinated in the 1970s by Colombian troops. I expect I would not really like to see documents of Justiniano's life hanging in an art gallery, but Caro's selection of a man

12 Bogota, Colombia

from a more distant past, who happened to have an artistic signature, seems insulting.

As America becomes more comfortable in re-employing its 'Indian' myths, the more invisible we become, even if (or probably especially if) we are allowed to participate.

One wants, of course, to develop ideas for effective strategies for intervention in the American narrative. It is not a narrative about us, it is a narrative absolutely *not* about us. There is nothing to correct, no footnotes to add. The negation of 'Indians' informs every facet of American culture. It is most obvious in the language: US businessmen speak of 'shooting their way out of the thicket', 'circling the wagon train', 'sending out scouts', and 'scalping'. The most destitute section of the Bronx has a police station called 'Fort Apache', and American children act like 'Wild Indians'. That is just the surface.

Americans have the reputation of 'moving on'; not only physically but intellectually as well. Culturally, in art, literature, daily life, not simply in academic circles, knowledge is reduced to facts which are to be assimilated *so that* one may move on. The public is rightly called 'consumers'. The energy and vitality for which the New World is famous comes from vampirical activities.

Americans must always be at the height of their empire. It is a nice empire, and democratic. Much of Europe has been forced to accommodate a token of receptivity to interventions in its myths. As America pretends to copy that model it becomes more closed, but 'kinder and gentler'.

I continue to think that this tightness might show itself as a potential weakness of the system, so I continue to experiment.

1990

Cowboy S-M

Long before Cynthia Parker was captured by the Comanches, Rome had invaded Europe. America may not be aware of the debt it owes to *Playboy* magazine. Before *Playboy*, American men read the *Police Gazette*. The 'girlie' photos in the *Police Gazette* were of women against whom violent crimes had been committed. Men gazed at the bloodied bodies, read the descriptions of the crimes, and tried to look further up the victims' skirts than the photos allowed.

Magazines such as *True Detective* and *Outdoorsman* carried stories about women (and men) getting sliced up.

Playboy made pornography and voyeurism wholesome for the new bourgeoisie of America.

No, wait; I'm sorry, that is not true. What happened was simply that the market became more specialised and efficient. Now the guys who are blatantly pathological have their own magazine, and there are other magazines for every degree of more acceptable pathologies.

But what about films such as *Halloween*, which have immense popularity and public acceptance?

American moralists often claim that films and magazines (and popular music) cause violence. Most likely these signs of violence are more effect than cause.

I grew up in a large, poor family, yet we had no sibling rivalry. The trouble is that Freud thought that the shopkeepers of Vienna were normal people; so normal that by discovering their motivations he could discover human motivations.

The US is the world's imperial top dog; it therefore sees itself not only as normal, but as the absolute standard. But being the world's imperial top dog makes the US crazier than Austria could have dreamed of becoming.

Seven of every ten thousand Americans deliberately cut themselves with knives on a regular basis (that is, the individuals do it chronically). I bet you have read other strange American statistics haven't you?

American literature is even more fun to read. I remember a novel, I think it was by Lawrence Schoonover, wherein some of us savages had captured a settler couple. The captive wife was young, blonde and pretty, so the savages decided to rape her before torturing her. First, though, they tied the husband to a stake and cut off his eyelids so that he would be forced to watch. I do not remember the details of the torture because I was so struck by the stupidity of the Indians; how could they not realise that the man would see nothing? First his eyes would be too bloody and then they would get too dry from not blinking.

That novel is one among thousands which describe, in Technicolor prose, rape and torture of white women by us. Yet it was the whites, in reality, who did the raping and torturing.

Cynthia Parker was captured while a girl in the 1830s. She took a Comanche man and had two children with him. Later, the whites re-captured her and returned her to her family. She escaped and went back to the Comanches only to be re-captured by the whites. The events were repeated several times until the white parents locked her in her bedroom. Cynthia starved herself to death in protest.

The story of her capture and subsequent refusal to return to 'civilisation' was actually a common one on America's frontier. It happened with frequency, but the reverse story, Indians being captured by whites and remaining satisfied, did not happen.

In America's myth, though, it is Indian men who are driven to sexual frenzy by white women. Here I will present personal testimony: many white women who have wanted to make love with me did so because they assumed I might be more aggressive than their white lovers. And, from what I have heard from white men and women, very many white men like the idea of rape.

It seems to me that American society is the most violent society on record, and I write that not from spite. The competition is indeed impressive; at a festival the Aztecs once sacrificed twenty thousand children. The Assyrians made hills from enemy penises and testicles. In America, however, the violence is both random and all-inclusive. Every human relationship and every institution seems based on and continued by either the threat of violence or by verbal and psychological aggression, or, more often, a combination of all three.

As I have said in other essays, the US exists as a result of the invasion of other peoples' lands and the genocide of those people, not at some tragic earlier point in history but continually. Americans have not noticed this. Americans insist fanatically upon their goodness and innocence.

When Rome first conquered Europe it had two simple excuses: the conquest made Rome richer and the conquered people had been savages. It really makes you feel bad, resentful and ashamed to be conquered because you are thought of as a savage. Such conquests seldom lead to clarity of mind on the part of the conquered.

The second Roman conquest of Europe came about as Rome took the Christian religion for the state. It was much more thorough a conquest, and its excuses were that Rome was good and was *doing good* and that Europeans were savages *who could and should be 'saved'*. For more than a millennium every small act of resistance to salvation was met with hideously ingenious brutality, until, by the time of the Reformation, the colonisation became so profound that it was practically self-motivated. Folks such as the Puritans burned their own people even without orders from Rome.

In that process, words which had begun as geographical descriptions became loaded with connotations of state religion. Originally, a 'heathen' was a dweller on the heath, a 'pagan' was a plains dweller, and a 'savage' was a person from the forest. A 'barbarian' was to the Greeks someone 'from some other place'.

Rome took the simple story of Adam and Eve, who were made in the image of god and subsequently punished for disobedience, to create a more terrible story of European heathens being born in sin; 'of the flesh', and of heathen flesh. That still-current colonial story not only claims flesh as bad, but women as bad and as 'other', 'heathenism' as bad and as 'other', and therefore sex, joyousness, and sensuality as bad and as 'other' — ie things engaged in by heathens. Europeans as 'saved' (conquered) heathens were in constant danger of back-sliding. Every moment required guarding and chastisement. (I must say that pre-Columbian Cherokees did not hit school children with canes, and in fact did not even imagine inflicting school upon innocent children.)

We should remember here that this particular re-unification of Europe was not achieved by true believers preaching their own ideas but by torture and death over almost two thousand years, until by a kind of selective breeding (doubters got their stuff cut off) the truth of Jesus Christ was unanimously accepted.

Even European men are still biologically human. Under their auto-colonial system they learned to fear what they desired. But because they desired, they desired what they feared.

Around 1492, those men discovered a new world filled with what Columbus described as sweet, beautiful, generous and naked people. Their job and duty was to kill those people and take their land. It

was also their job and duty to civilise those people and make them into Europeans (Christians), which they could not do because it was likewise essential to maintain the 'other-ness' (non-Europeanness) of those people.

Moreover, for the first time in a thousand years, those brave settlers and explorers were free. The Popes and the Kings were an ocean away. *Who was free then? How free?* They were free to do as they pleased, after they killed us and took our land; but, comprehending European history, we might imagine with the greatest sympathy and understanding that they were actually so wounded and so pathological that they were free only to become *more* monstrous in the new world than they could have been at home. They saw us naked and desired/feared us, and so had to take our land and kill us.

Poor guys! They had been set up. Whatever they achieved was not right or enough, and they could therefore get no satisfaction. Oy vey, los pobrecitos.

Naturally, they got madder, and meaner. Wouldn't you? They could do as they wanted here, but their 'wants' had become pathological. Invasion and violence a holy necessity, and all tied up with sexuality and repulsion/desire.

Next to the reality of their making hat bands from Indian womens' vulvas and tobacco pouches from Indian womens' breasts, they placed the myth of the lone cowboy, the killer-rapist who seldom killed or raped because he had become self-sufficient and alone by the act of killing and raping. The American Cowboy-against-the-World is really only old Ollie Cromwell cut loose from the confines of his little island and set free among us pretty, naked people.

I see now, of course, that I should not have made fun of them. Now I shall have to hide.

1990

The Immortal State

When one is confronted with the State one might wish to kill oneself, yet a primary act of the State is a law against suicide. In a castle in Belgium there is a Museum of Justice. Amid the horrible implements of torture, a leather padded cap is on display. Its purpose was to prevent the torturee from killing herself by beating her head against the wall.

The State takes control not only of killing, but also of death. Therefore, of course, and of life. The verbs 'to kill' and 'to quell' (as in 'to quell the rioters') come from an old German verb which meant 'to grievously torment'. State killing is not a matter of eliminating a person undesirable to the State, then, but a matter of tormenting everyone. (Couldn't you be 'arrested' next, and isn't that part of the torment?)

'Punishment' comes from the idea of having to pay. In Saxon society the payment for a crime was usually a fine. The Normans brought pain, and the words 'pain' and 'punishment' have the same root, in 'payment'. Over time, since all 'punishment' brought 'pain', anything which hurt was pain. Now if I stub my toe there is 'pain'. (I 'pay' for my physicality.) All 'suffering' (that is, life under the State) belongs to and contributes to the State. 'To suffer' is 'to bear', to support or to allow. One must allow the state to hurt (which means 'to hit') one. One must suffer the punishment, even the leather cap. Today in the US those on 'Death Row' cannot commit suicide; they are expected to appeal their sentences. If they do not appeal their sentence, someone will often do it on their behalf. We as the State want them to suffer and be killed. The actual death, after the suffering of being killed, is an unfortunate by-product.

In both the medical and torture professions, there are now ways and regulations to prevent death, so as to prolong suffering. The problem with death, especially for the State, but then also for us, because our knowledge and perceptions come from the State, is that it is unknowable and unexperienceable. We can only know the absence of one who was present.

At best, beyond that, we can know 'the stench of death and decay', that is simply the evidence of bacteria and microbes. A 'dead' body is a vehicle for unauthorised life forms. A reminder to us that the 'person' of that body no longer responds to our world.

Mortuaries do everything in their power to 'arrest' and 'kill' what is left. Poisons are injected to kill the microbes and the body is hermetically sealed against alien life. When the body is truly dead we can then pretend, as in theatrical pretence, to continue our relations with the 'person'. And the bodies of famous men, of course, 'lie in state'.

1991

The White Man's Car

I A chant for deers and antelopes

He shoots them from his car.

He kills them from his car.

He gets out of his car and shoots them.

He hides behind his car to shoot them.

He hits them with his car;

Runs them down with his car;

Runs over them with his car.

He ties them to the car.

He throws them into the trunk of the car.

He puts them tied in bags in the backseat of the car.

His car is auto-mobil, and the shift is auto-matic,

but he steers it,

and causes it to chase them or to hit them,

or he shoots them from his car.

II Canto for Señor Cantu

Put your feet on your head and step out of the car!

Get out of the car now with your feet in the air!

Lean against the car! Spread your wings! Empty your pockets!

c. 1985

The Gulf of Mexico

*I want you all to go and stand
By the little Rio Grande.
It is not a wall, you know,
Doesn't it flow into the Gulf of Mexico?*

*Comanches, Apaches, Papagos, and Yaquis
Live on both sides, swim in the middle.
At sunset rock doves come down
To drink and fly across the Rio Grande.*

*We must all stand up beside our little rivers now.
If Texas had been less vicious
Their great barrier would have been further north,
Would have been the Pecos or Nueces,
Or they would have chosen the San Jacinto River
Or the San Bernard, or even the River of the Arms of God.*

*Should clouds be wasted, and little fish
Assumed complicit? I want you all to stand up now,
And stand on innocent land falsely accused.
It is not united states; it is united by tears.*

*The rocks broke up patiently year after year,
And here are parts of pre-historic trees.
Many kinds of little creatures, and the pretty Rio Grande,
Assisted in the transformation from solid objects
Into soil.*

*Out in the Gulf of Mexico drops of water have strained
To break the surface minute by hour by
Millions of years to fly as clouds and water the Rio Grande.*

*The scorpion in the sky is innocent and echoes
Kindly the little scorpions which have responsibility under rocks,
So that all these sacred processes return.
Will policemen arrest the Gulf of Mexico?*

1984

Sequoyah's Silver Spurs

*In our language 'cow' is 'waka' because
Spaniards gave us cattle.*

*Did anyone ever love silver like Spaniards love silver?
Sequoyah loved it more, and iron; he loved iron
and writing. Long before he knew to read
he asked his friend who could write, "Make my spurs say my
name."*

*The Cherokee Walela careening around Echota
with silver spurs strapped above moccasins.
Utsistalu gigi! It shines! 'Sequoyah' stamped
on the left, 'Sequoyah' stamped on the right spur,
a design that reminded Sequoyah of snakes
and branches, connections so distant they made him
think in, walk in odd patterns. Anyway,
you know Sequoyah was lame and was an artist.*

*Sequoyah's first wife 'but there is no such word
in his language, only a word that vaguely means
'co-friends') saw him veering around Echota with
that combination and dreamed he would become a great Otashty.
So when he spent years exploring the idea of writing,
she burned the house down. Anyway, Sequoyah
was also working in silver, utsistalu gigi! and learning iron.
They are both metal, shiny, and dull, hard and hard —
cooperatively. Silver comes from the earth and shines
like the moon, iron is fallen stars and shines like death.
Or shines at least like ligaments rotting
on the leg of a dead animal. (You know that shine on old sliced
meat?) Like lightning behind a cloud, and it resists! It fights*

*every step, until the knifeblade
is finished, then nothing is more completely in
agreement than iron and its form.*

*Did he have a horse to go with his silver spurs?
Yes, he had a horse he called "old man",
but no saddle, and Sequoyah did not know that spurs
could be used against horses.
He had tried wearing spurs at his wrists
and at his elbows, but was always poking himself.*

*Sequoyah explained arrows: An arrow cannot
be said to have parts because the parts are all
something else until purpose connects them.*

*The head is stone, the body is wood,
the tail is feathers because an arrow must fly.
Is its purpose to fly or to penetrate the target?
The stone cannot lead the wood and feathers
because the feathers guide the stone,
at that, only through the medium of wood.*

*One needs the other like pine trees
connect the earth to sky.
When we see this cooperative contradiction
we think of a bow, then an archer, then
a target, then death, then supper.*

*The footnote to the life of Sequoyah
is of course they murdered him in Texas
and named a tree after him in California.
They said he was so smart his father
must have been some white guy.*

*Was Sequoyah allowed a last word
before being shot? A note to his daughter?*

The Two Boys on the Ranch were Indians (A Poem for my Bestiary)

*The sun pierced mesquite, nopal
And my hat my first day on that ranch.
Branches cut my face, and a bat,
A tiny baby bat, lay struck down.
A soft obsidian shard.*

*Burn it, nail it to the barn door.
I rode back in to lunch, to shade
And showed the little gargoyle angel of God
And everyone said burn it; nail it.
I made a bad impression my first day.*

*Two burros were local criminals.
Sentenced to haul a wagon, they escaped
Through bad fences to the creek where
Cottonwoods laugh silver and shade
Their own fallen leaves like bats in the creek.*

*Appointed marshall, I had to arrest burros.
Two or three times a week I joshed
Them into custody. But sometimes splashed
Water on them, and me in cool shade.
We played three of the boss's hours away once.*

*He sold the burros after that. I saw
Them loaded, they saw me seeing them
Loaded onto a truck. I strung new barbed wire
On posts. But most of the horses had seen
The little burros leave.*

*Now, then, the two boys stuck close
By me when we could. I carved wood
For them and heard their history
As they understood it, young as they were,
The boss married their mother after their father ran away.*

*That one was Indian, my father's family
Knew his family back home. The boys' mother
Was not so white; obsidian eyes, raven feather
Hair, all that. The boss had a ranch but he was jealous,
Whether of me or her or Clem and Floyd, who knew?*

*The bat lapped milk from the tip of a handkerchief
In my hand. It tried to live, so quietly died,
Black sky dude. One morning in bad weather
I was telling a kitten and a puppy their fear
Was unfounded so early in the game.*

*The boss heard, and fired me on the spot.
But the kitten and the puppy were trying to listen.
And the lesson would have lasted only minutes more.
By the time the dew dried, I said, I'd be out.
Burning stickers off nopal.*

*It was probably about a week later
I told my cousin Doyle I was going to try
To find those two crazy burros and buy them.
It must have been ten years later when I read
That if you leave a baby bat where you found
It that evening the mother will come.*

On Collecting

Perhaps every imperium has had its official collection, and perhaps these collections always began as piles of war trophies. Some of those piles have lasted: in the 1970s a bill was introduced in Congress to provide for the establishment of a museum of the Central Intelligence Agency. In London there is an Imperial War Museum. Others have vanished, like Montezuma's zoo for animals from the far reaches of his empire — a museum of natural history. But whatever has happened to the piles physically, they have transformed themselves as institutions. When the European states began to expand their empires, the line between art and beautiful things from other places became too fine to draw. There came to be mixtures of art, war trophies, and tourist curios, museums of collections.

The United States began without a history. In its process of self-realisation and self-recognition, the nation has had to reconcile its narrative — of religious freedom, liberty and justice for all, success through hard work — with its actuality of intolerance and violent aggression. It has had to balance its lack of culture with its culture. This has always been a state project, but also a more local one, as American individuals and communities have invented thousands of eccentric beliefs, icons and dance steps with a desperation that looks like energy. But more, both state and individuals have raised the phenomenon of collecting to absurdist heights. The matchbook collections alone are worthy of a national museum. The Library of Congress as a book collection has grown to unusable proportions.

There is something endearing about such classic collections as coins or stamps, wherein collectors agree on astronomical prices for items without hint of intrinsic worth. (Artists have tried the strategy with limited-edition prints, without a tenth of the success.) So many collections seem at first inexplicably obsessive, without monetary value or interest. Of course, we can say that they have to do with control over some small part of the universe. But the setting of the US has also made a bond between collecting and 'history'. 'History'

in America is a part of nostalgia, and nostalgia is a disease deriving not from a loss but from a vacuum. Something like the British Guy Fawkes Day is unimaginable in the US, though there are plenty of incidents that could inspire it. Instead, American institutions collect the fragments of Lincoln's skull. And if an American farmer finds arrowheads in his fields, he has a collection and a narrative, which may be individualised and isolated but which nevertheless conform to the official collection and narrative.

The Heye Foundation's Museum of the American Indian, recently taken over by the Smithsonian Institution, was something like a cross between the farmer's arrowhead collection and the collection called the 'Elgin Marbles'. It was isolated even in New York: geographically by being too far uptown, culturally because New York maintains an old-world cynicism that allows little space for the US narrative. To American Indian leaders, much of the collection was stolen or illegally purchased. American Indian communities have been asking for the return of some of the objects for years. Now that the Smithsonian has the entire gigantic collection, the demands grow stronger.

Recently I was on a panel with three other American Indians discussing the return of the collection to respective communities. A man asked what we would do, for example, with the thousands of pairs of beaded moccasins. We had no real answer. What *could* one do with thousands of beaded moccasins? The Smithsonian is, perversely, a perfect place for them. It is the ultimate official collection. It is so much bigger than any other collection in history that it seems to collect everything, though actually it collects only what, as the imperial collection, it considers American evidence. From that it constructs an American story. (Never the crime, only the defence.) It has become the authorial and authorising voice on collecting as a phenomenon, as well as on collecting's relation to history.

Over the past twenty years the Smithsonian has evolved into an industry for the production of history and knowledge, with magazines, television programmes, special events, travelling shows and branch offices. The Institution publishes books, including a multivolume set titled *The Smithsonian Guide to Historic America*, through which, according to an ad in last October's issue of *Smithsonian* magazine, we may "experience the dramas of colorful times past and discover our nation's wealth of historical treasures...on a special tour through the places that shaped our nation's destiny". Road maps are included, the instructions are complete. This same issue of *Smithsonian* contains an editorial about the new National Museum of the American Indian, to be built from the Heye collection. The editorial is nervously

sensitive about the possibility of being forced by law to return some of the articles to American Indian communities. After agreeing that American Indians must be able to retrieve the bones of ancestors because the right to such remains is, "after all, the root of one of the West's great tragedies, *Antigone*", the editorial concludes that "we can best serve the Indians by actively seeking out ways to make available our material and human resources for community building and strengthening".

Last summer the Smithsonian held a daylong meeting in Albuquerque and heard from "a number of Indian and museum spokespersons representing many viewpoints". Surely those viewpoints have been collected, and just as surely they will be packaged and properly displayed.

The cover of the October *Smithsonian* shows a collection of model monsters from the movies' LucasArts studios, with the caption 'Creepy creatures from the masters of make-believe'. The lead article is about LucasArts and special effects. The stories of both *Star Wars* and *Back to the Future I and II* have been taken by the US public as stories about the US, and *Smithsonian* has made it official. Another piece discusses Lincoln Ellsworth, a little-known early Arctic explorer. The article is beautiful. Ellsworth, "the forgotten hero of polar exploration", was a rich man who bought his way into one of Amundsen's expeditions and then paid for his own. He "claimed more than 400,000 square miles of Antarctica, much of it now known as Ellsworth Land, for the United States". The article ends with a photograph of the new Lincoln Ellsworth commemorative postage stamp.

"After 130 years, Americans are finally learning about the late, anguishing role black soldiers played in the Civil War." So begins an article about black soldiers, timely now that so many are fresh from a new war. Has information on blacks in the Union been repressed all these years — perhaps by the same government that operates the Smithsonian? Is the Smithsonian, then, in bringing these facts out, the good cop to some other government agency's bad cop? As presented here, the information itself is sinisterly governmental. The central idea is that black men wanted to fight for freedom and their country and many people did not want them to. But many of those black men had recently been slaves, and all had come to the US through slavery; to present their predicament 'historically' as an ambition to become 'good Americans' is unacceptably simpleminded. Should an African-American now arrive to treat the situation more analytically and comprehensively, how will his or her voice compete with the Smithsonian?

Two of the photographs accompanying the article are especially poignant. They are 'before-and-after' shots of a black boy about 12 years old, taken by the army for recruitment propaganda. The 'before' shot shows the boy dressed in rags so ragged we can imagine that the army may have provided them. But his physical stance and expression seem to show a belligerent independence. In the 'after' shot, he is dressed in a neat drummer's uniform, and seems cowed and afraid. We wonder if he was ever able to prove himself to himself. Or did he become an American after all?

The following article uncovers a historical scandal: the 1905 Paris Salon that introduced the Fauves. Next we are shown pigeon fanciers around the world. *Smithsonian* must be a postmodern magazine.

Not much happened to William Kernan, an Irish immigrant who came to New York State in 1800, except that he acquired much land in the 'trackless wilderness' and became rich and prominent. Yet he merits an article in *Smithsonian*, written by his great-great-grandson, who was "inspired by the recent centennial of Ellis Island". William Kernan did not report having encounters with Indians, although once he was chased by wolves. The inspirational theme of his story can only be that it happened (since nothing else seems to have happened) and that it was collected. The story's 'typicalness' must be reassuring. It makes every American family yarn worthy of collection, famous for fifteen minutes. If a later *Smithsonian* uncovers the genocide of the Iroquois in Kernan's part of New York State, there will be no need to revise his story. The two articles can be displayed separately, and we can be proud of facing the troublesome parts of our nation's past. But Kernan's story is more collectable and more a part of the collection industry.

There are more than 200 advertisements in this issue of *Smithsonian*. Of these, 62 are about collectable products. One may "build a memory" by ordering a model airplane kit. The consumer goods include some American Indian lines; there are six ads for Indian things. Many more ads allow Americans to buy representations of dolphins, hummingbirds and whales; or one may purchase the "endangered species collection" necklace. There are two articles about travel by car. There are ten advertisements for cars, all full or double page, so that they dominate visually. There are 21 ads about travel. There does not yet seem a way to include products or souvenirs of black American history except in folk art collections. Ads tell readers with "typically American" backgrounds that they may buy books or services to trace their family trees; the existence of these products serves as a message to not-so-typical citizens.

The Smithsonian amasses power from everything it contains. Tourism and history, Hollywood and American Indians are all part of the same collection. The country can be run more efficiently, more cheerfully, and 'multiculturalism' itself can become a source of power for the state. What if, however, American Indians actually force the Smithsonian to return some substantial part of its collection. The collection itself may not be badly damaged; it has millions of pieces. But the *idea* of the collection is the Smithsonian's real collection, and that can be damaged. All this century American Indians have gone to court to claim the right to exist separately from the United States. That litigation is ongoing, and the written laws are on the Indian side. If the Smithsonian, just as it is making its final consolidation, must be the first to concede to any sort of American Indian autonomy, its function as the imperial collection is diminished in a central area of its project. Could Rome return shields and spears to the Gauls and still serve Gallic communities?

1991

Free Tickets

(*Edward Poitras' guided tour of the End of Civilisation as We Know It.*)

White folks on safari in the wilderness often wonder if they can trust their Indian guide. With Edward Poitras guiding us to the future (the Tight End of the Tunnel) we begin to get nervous because he is quietly chuckling, "Heh, heh, heh".

In this show, *Marginal Recession*, Poitras has made a heroic sculptural frieze called *Progress* which is set above the entrance of the provincial Capitol in this province called Saskatchewan ('Misaskwatomin', a very specifically named place which was good for gathering a specific fruit). *Progress* over the Capitol portrays some white woman — the Queen (Regina), 'Canada', whatever — and her heroic settler consort. Next to them, passively of course, sits a Noble Savage Indian dude, reassuring the legislators and wheeler-dealers.

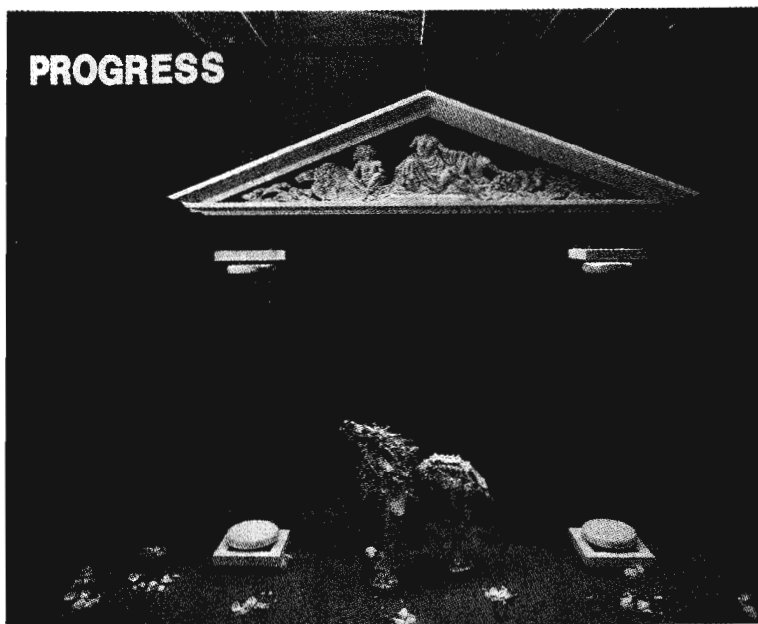
Edward Poitras didn't bother to make heads for the Queen/Regina/Canada or the settler/hero; he figured they'd soon be toppled anyhow. To explain his reasoning, it's necessary to jump ahead to the next piece of evidence.

While in Europe recently Poitras picked up a newspaper called *The European*, in which he saw photos of statues of Lenin and Stalin being torn down all over the place. In a typically Indian way Poitras perceived the phenomenon prophetically. For him the fall of one monster signified the fall of other monsters. He began to look at Canada and its icons and edifices expectantly. But this attitude is not mere bravado.

Please forebear while this text goes in one more direction before coming back to *Progress*. Edward Poitras lives in Regina, Saskatchewan, a place which might be considered a little out-of-the-way to those who feel there is a centre somewhere else. There is in Regina a museum which purports to show the city's history "from Pile of Bones to Regina". 'Pile of Bones' was an older name for the city, and

was so because it had been a depot for the buffalo hunters. The image of the Queen sitting shakily on a pile of bones is apt. According to statistical extrapolations 'whites' will soon be a minority population in Regina. Less superficially, surely we can see that the crisis developing in capitalism will be more profound than the crisis that is bringing down communism. (And to add a prophetic *non sequitur*, the newspaper *The European* has folded.)

Let us now return to *Progress*. It is situated in a large glassed-in display area at the entrance to the gallery, so that it introduces the installation like the preface of a book. Poitras has made a scale model of the entire facade of the provincial legislative building. This works well as a metaphor because the architecture of the Saskatchewan legislative building (like most 'official' buildings) is already both metaphoric and metonymic. The columns of the model are made of nylon cord. At ground level, there are many little fallen heads — of



Edward Poitras, *Progress*, 1991; mixed media installation with sculpture *Coyote*, Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina. (Photo: Patricia Holdsworth)

Lenin, looking like so many scattered chicken's eggs. In the middle of this white marble gore, 'Pile of Bones' has come to life. It is a coyote made from the bones of seven coyotes. This coyote stands on its own as a sculpture (and often has; it is one of the pieces that Poitras has employed in many installations), but here it both makes and disrupts the 'preface'. It is Poitras' opening challenge. Our Grandfather Coyote has come to be a symbol of survival-with-hubris for most Indian people. Coyote always says: "Whatever you do, I am going to do something else."

We see Coyote next in the newspaper in Poitras' installation. He is interrupting the headlines in *The European*. Those headlines, 'Revolution', 'Gold Rush', 'Free Tickets', must have been made by Coyote just for his buddy Poitras. Poitras repeats the headlines in oversized red lettering high on the gallery walls, instructively opposing them to the slogans of the 1917 Revolution — 'Peace', 'Bread', 'Land' — on the facing wall. They are exactly as Poitras found them when he picked up the paper. (The 'Free Tickets' were for 'the best art exhibits'.) Sub-headings include 'Fears Grow as the Empire Tears Apart' and 'How the Mighty are Fallen'. Using a colour copier Poitras has transferred this newspaper front page onto pillowcases. (He has very kindly provided pillows for the heads which might soon roll.) With additional lightning bolts he has substituted photos of *Progress* and of *Coyote* along with the others. It is typical of the ways in which he takes over myth and history (and their signs) for his own artwork — carefully, almost tenderly.

Poitras is a remarkable artist. Consistently, in whatever medium, his work is what I must badly describe as spiritually meticulous. (English is not a good language for talking about such things.) It is as though his hands are perfectly synchronised with both his good heart and his incisively intelligent brain.

The next piece in this installation, after *The European* headline pillows, is a pair of tinted photos of a work for which Poitras has become well-known: *Offensive/Defensive*. This is a funny echo of a piece which itself is in the installation. Often Poitras plays this sort of trick; a coming-forward and then distancing, which resonates with both art world concerns and with those of the larger world. This shows another of Poitras' amazing gifts. He makes works which are politically full but never instructional or even 'expected', yet which function intensely in all the ways in which we need art to function. Most of us are unable to make art so full of content yet so integrated. There is always in his work a look of calm mastery which seems to be barely masking another thing which is probably explosive. (I'm

still trying to explain the idea of being spiritually meticulous.)

A complexly simple piece, *White Buffalo Cloud*, shows these properties. It begins with a poem engraved in a brass plaque:

	cloud	
setting		Sun
torn		offering
red		Skin
background	round	
	ground	
	under	

Perhaps so many Indian people are good at several disciplines because we do not tell ourselves not to be; but whatever, this poem seems perfect. It introduces a small piece of granite which has a bowl-like pit carved into it. The pit had at one time been filled with something; blood, maybe. We do not automatically know if it is dried blood, and then we don't know *what* blood — Poitras? Buffalo? We are made to study and not exactly know. Urgent study and contemplation go back and forth in this important piece. Another of its parts is a piece of pipestone carved to look like a book (A 'little red book'.) The spine of the book has 'The Pipe' inlaid in lead.

Now there are things it seems to me that everyone living in North America should know but few non-Indians know. Certainly, what pipestone is, and what it looks like, is one of those things, and what the pipe means for Indian peoples is another. Indian elders often say, "The Pipe is our Bible", and we can imagine that Indian elders must have said the same to the first Christian missionaries. What the elders mean is that there is at least the same rich complexity centred around our practice and knowledge of the Pipe as there is surrounding the Bible in Christianity. Pipestone is usually called 'catlinite' by non-Indians, because it was first discovered by the artist George Catlin. (As America was first discovered by a man with the strangely intestinal name of Cristobal Colón.) It has a strange, almost fluid density and is deep red like blood. It is found in only one place, very close to the geographical centre of North America. A part of a story is that there were other humans before us. They were not right, not good.

A large stone mashed them back into earth, and that red earth is the pipestone we use.

When Poitras offers us a 'book' made of pipestone, with the title, *The Pipe*, he's telling typical Indian jokes, but he's also telling profound truths. On the other side of the 'book' is a little pile of granite dust, obviously what was taken out of the piece to make the pit. We can see there a sacred treatment of this stone. This small installation-within-an-installation is properly lineal. Its lineality shouts itself, we cannot miss the point, which, further down the line, is White Buffalo Cloud Stone. This is a bulky piece of Brazilian soapstone, vaguely shaped like a buffalo (if the buffalo were a cloud), in which Poitras has very subtly carved just a few buffalo suggestions. It sits on four brass 3/4 inch columns over a North America carved from pipestone (with a pit in the centre, where pipestone quarry is).

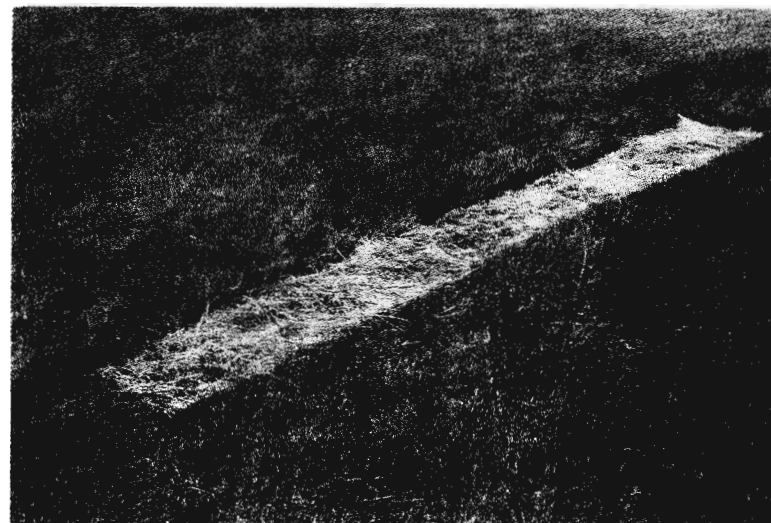
There is something about this quiet little piece that is also so blatant that it skirts vulgarity, and that is another of Poitras' tricks. Not in the same vein, but similar, Poitras put together an installation in Montreal in 1989,¹ in which he exactly executed all of the parts of a prophetic dream of Black Elk as described in *Black Elk Speaks*. (An 'as-told-to' book actually written, of course, by a white man.) I can in no way describe what an act of intelligent, innocent/cynical bravado that work seemed to me. (One wants to say that it was 'breath-taking'.) (Are readers beginning to make a construct around Edward Poitras' spiritual meticulousness?) Domingos Cisneros said to him at the time, "You're really taking a chance with this piece". To the uncaredful public the work could have easily been seen as simply 'Indian artefacts': Poitras made all the pieces *right*. He would have had to have invented a true and real faith for himself 'on the spot'; but then also have invented (I think 'invented' because I can't imagine anyone of us having such faith) total and generous faith in his audience. All of his tricks and his demands have that generosity.

According to your inclination, *White Buffalo Cloud* would lead you, in this installation in Regina, towards a giant fallen head of Lenin (with Stalin thrown into the face, like a police composite) — or past one of Poitras' older pieces that he will not allow us to see as 'one of his older pieces': the flinty, simple *Wounded Knee 1890 Merry Christmas 1990*. ("I'm dreaming of a White Christmas" with frozen corpses of Indians in the snow.) This path leads to the back wall of the gallery and a giant photo called *The Death of Jimmie Wolf*.

1 Centre international d'art contemporain de Montréal, *Savoir-Vivre, Savoir-Faire, Savoir-Être*, 1990.

I'll go in the direction of Jimmie's cheerful death. Benjamin West, who did the famous painting, *The Death of General Wolfe*, was an American painter who moved his career to London, the art capital of the English-speaking world. If you are from Canada you might not know (I'm sure Canadians will be surprised at this) that General Wolfe was the 'dauntless hero' who came and planted "Britannia's flag on Canada's fair domain". (Poitras has pillows ready when his statues fall.) West presented himself to London as an authentic American 'savage' and completely took over art styles and society. Basically he invented a kind of Hollywood/comic book kitsch/heroic style of painting which remains the mentor of very (too) much American and English art. Poitras' photo is a mock-up of that painting, but with an Indian guy (Jimmie Wolf) in the spotlight instead of the dauntless general (who, personally, after all, *was* daunted, just as who knows what else might soon be.) The photo is not really a copy; it is a little operetta inspired by historical truth rather than the glamorised portrayal of Wolfe's death. Who in fact did not want to be seen in this state, for fear that it would demoralise his men.

The subject was brought to Poitras' attention through conversations with Robert Houle, an art historian and artist who has also reworked this particular painting. The photo was made in a studio with a background very self-consciously made up to look like an inner-city slum: (Jimmie Wolf) is wounded and is attended by his aide (Edward Poitras) who seems to have a bit of stage fright and, at the same time, seems slightly bemused to find himself in a photo of a dying friend who really seems basically OK. Here is what we must by now call excellent vintage Poitras: thousands of young Indians do die sordid deaths in those back-alleys. Poitras has been taken over by *Coyote*, so that with the same astounding bravery that Geronimo had, he says, oh sure, but not as dead as you guys. But he is not callous. The 'witness' to Wolfe's death, shown in West's painting as surrounding background to the martyr's death, are here two separate giant photos, each of which can stand on its own in the installation. (Throughout this installation, if you don't want to work and study, you surely must be affected anyway.) The first is archival: a photo of young Indian girls in the uniform dresses and haircuts of their government boarding school. It is a striking photo because the girls were so conscious of being out of place and of being *forced*. Yet even though there is much sadness in their faces there is just as much beautiful belligerence. They, from an older generation, observe Poitras' version of the results of the boarding school system and other colonial atrocities, so that Poitras seems to be reporting to those



Edward Poitras, *Offensive/Defensive*, June 1988 continuing; transposed sods of natural prairie grass and cultivated lawn, buried cast lead, c 3.5m in length.

twice-removed ghosts and thereby reclaiming *their* deaths also. Back-to-back with this black and white photo is a colour photo of a young Indian boy standing against a graffiti-covered wall, looking like a little kid having his picture taken. If we take these three photos as one set, the little boy is in the same position as the Indian witness in Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe*, except that he is looking at us instead of at the death scene. The piece is not the least adequately described here. It is big, back-lit-colourful, flamboyant and touching. It dominates the space of the gallery.

But so does a giant plaster fallen head of Lenin/Stalin. (Lenin, actually, but Poitras convinced him to work overtime and take on several roles.) It is kind of in the middle of the space, and looks as though it had maybe fallen through the roof or something. There are still many pieces of rope about, though, which may have been used to topple it from its monumental body, except that the ropes are green. The ropes are accompanied by red hammers (no sickles) and tough, climbing ivy plants. Have you ever noticed how militant plants are? They'll grow in any small crack in the pavement and force it wider.

Poitras must have been encouraged often by that militancy. Close by the fallen head, acting as witness to it and to the *Death of Jimmie Wolf*, lies another of his very well-known works: the *Offensive/Defensive* grass experiment. A couple of years ago now he transposed two strips of grass; one from an urban lawn and the other from the natural prairie of his reservation. The prairie grass, of course, having the strength of its never-messed-with freedom to be, flourished in the urban park environment. The refined urban grass, however, didn't fare so well when left to its own devices on the reservation.

There is a follow-up story to this which is important to consider in some detail: Edward Poitras said that after the installation some Indians were critical of the piece for political reasons. They said that it gave the message that Indian people could do as well or better if re-located away from their ancestral ground. Now, this is the sort of 'PC' thinking which we all like to make jokes about, but I think it shows something more dire in the Indian world than simply an attitude of being politically correct. If in these days, when we are still losing most of our real battles, yet winning the 'respect and admiration' of our colonisers *while accepting unconsciously their definitions of who and how we are*, we take up the colonisers current ideas of being 'PC', we must surely do so as an act of destructive desperation. In the US and Canada so many Indians refuse to have a natural immunity to this debilitating desire. (The itch feels so good when you scratch.) The more we become 'super-Indian' the more we become the white man's Indian.

Edward Poitras, though, quietly grins and continues to work in his saintly way. He has a deep trust in his work, I think, because he has no ulterior motives. He also seems to demand of himself that he trust us, the audience; tricky business these days. Perfectly willing to be a little foolish or even a little too smart (above the acceptable norm), as were so many of the good old saints (Jeanne d'Arc, for example). He is legitimately angry but never desperate. The PC Indians show a desperation that is at its base cynical. Instead of whistling in the dark they shout in the dark.

This exhibition, with the beautifully understated title *Marginal Recession*, would be important for any Indian to see.

Leaving the grass (how could one help but write that?) one comes to a ghostly wall, white silkscreen on white wall. The very idea of silkscreening onto a wall is silly. Silkscreen is for moveable, sellable multiples; a workshop process. Poitras has silkscreened, as *Summer Show Tribal Relocation Program*, the barely discernable names of Indian nation after Indian nation which have been the victims of unspoken-about genocide. He does not do it with pathos; remember Seattle's words, "...we may be brothers after all?" You could easily pass by this non-silkscreen without noticing it. Once you notice it, you may then decide that it's necessary to go back and look at other things more carefully.

In 1988 the Bear Island Ojibway barricaded a logging road to stop the cutting of their forest. Chief Gary Potts said there: "We have been here on Kedoki-menon for at least 6,000 years. We are a patient and tolerant small nation of people. This land is our crown. The Tene-Enen-Augama Anishinabe will gather on this spot June 1, in the year 2099."² Poitras includes a small photo of that demonstration, *Bar-ricade*, next to *Summer Snow Tribal Relocation Program*. Gary Potts later said, during the Oka crisis, "The time for peaceful demonstrations is over". Poitras can be subtle or in-your-face, but never obscure.

The next piece is actually at the entrance to the gallery. (We have been circling the show.) It is *Untitled*, obviously. On the floor a map of the 'Gulf', as in the 'war in the gulf', is made of lead and clarified petroleum (motor oil). It looks like a piece of a stained-glass window puzzle. A buffalo skull is there, partially wrapped in lead, like part of some obscene ceremony. Above this tableau of strange signs a little doll sits in a swing. The doll itself is just a doll, but it has been carefully prepared for the Sun Dance and other things. So much has it been worked on that one perceives it as ritualistic — not art-pretend

2 Text provided by Edward Poitras.

ritualistic. It truly disturbs. Poitras says that he has been working on it over years, and that it is for him a representation of himself. (Suddenly, one thinks, I am in the presence of a really weird person; not at all the person I'd already had pegged.) This is something deeply private and personal, but Poitras continues to maintain it publicly. That is another sign of his intelligent innocence. But he stole that little doll; *truly* stole it, absolutely stole it. He took it completely out of its universe, even out of itself.

It becomes a sort of almost-invisible centre to this installation, and with that and all the other signs and messages here, Poitras has done his own 'tribal re-location programme'. He has re-placed us at the centre of the world. As he juggles history and current affairs back into their proper places he gives us primarily works of art which encourage and energise by their complex integrity.

In another display window just outside the gallery entrance, *Buffalo Kill Sight* has a geological map of the area in which Regina is situated. It bears the legend, 'Her Majesty the Queen, in right of Canada, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. 'There are three photos of Indian students in government boarding schools, a little red book (made of pulverised trees, not pipestone) with a small bronze figurine of Lenin as a young student 'striding confidently out into the world'.

When the Indian Benito Juarez executed Napoleon's 'Emperor of Mexico', Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph, he apologised courteously. Edward Poitras commits no executions, he is just an observant witness. He does act as spokesman, though, for all of those Indian students trapped in the photos. They ask the 'Queen, in right of Canada' courteously if she has any last words.

This '*Recession*' is a high ground and a beginning for Poitras. 'Pile of Bones' has always been his home, and he will not leave it for some more sophisticated art scene (although his work is shown internationally). To do this show here, at this time in both his career and in history, is a gathering of strength at his own centre. Edward Poitras beings it all home to us. The tickets are free.

1991

To be a Pilgrim: Walton Ford

A couple of years ago Walton Ford was making small illustrations for the diary of an ancestor of his who had lived on a Southern plantation. The stories were about slavery and slaves; the diarist was a woman, so not quite a slaveholder, just confusedly complicit. The atrocities revealed in her diary were of the common, everyday, complicated sort during slavery times. She wrote, for example, that when her father sold off the two little girls she used to dress up like dolls, she missed them very much. Her last name, Walton, was included in the images along with Walton Ford's own.

Photocopied as black and white posters and plastered around downtown Manhattan, these pictures were quietly stunning. Their statement was in the realm of art primarily because it was in the larger realm of US culture, not because they'd invented some new art style or trick. The posters weren't graffiti, and weren't slick and ad-like. They seemed confessional, in an intelligent way, and honestly humble.

In the South, it's still not unusual to hear defences of the plantation system. And it's normal to hear defences of the South itself in ways that mix nostalgia and fantasy monstrously. But it is rare for white Southerners to look disinterestedly at the South's legacy. Ford did, and implicated the rest of the US at the same time. He didn't pretend to an attitude of superiority, nor to one of undue guilt. His position seemed that of a thoughtful person who, having perceived some typically avoidable truths about the US, didn't try to escape the realities but instead straightforwardly proclaimed them, showed them.

Of course it's easy to poke opportunistically at the US in one's art. It's even within an American tradition to do so; to point at the agreed-upon follies of 'less-enlightened' Americans for the comfort of some elite or another. Ford, though, seems to have placed himself (or to have recognised his place) not as an observer but within American culture, which he treats with intelligent and analytical perception — and intolerance. It is a valuable and rare combination.

SIX FINGERS



Among the little babies born on the plantation, was one having six fingers on each hand. My mother cut off the extra fingers, and I buried them under a rose bush in her flower garden. She was given to me and I named her Queen Victoria. I once saw a picture of the baby Queen with pigeons around her, and I thought it a beautiful name for my little pickaninny.

—EMILY DONELSON WALTON, 1837-1926

Walton Ford, *Six Fingers/Sharp Teeth* (detail), 1989; linoleum block print with type, diptych, this panel: 26.5 x 19in.

Ford is a true iconoclast. As an insider he knows where the icons are kept and what sorts of beliefs they hold in stasis. His recent work is a series of paintings, begun in late 1990, which take on the beginning of American painting, its 'spirituality', the country's history, the little house on the prairie, and John James Audubon, all from the perspective of unediting the imagery of the American story. One

picture is worth a thousand words in our knowledge of the past. We tend to believe the images, the paintings, simply because there is little acknowledged discourse in which to argue. Especially in the US, where we are constantly told a complex lie as though it were history, and also told that Americans have no use for history; visual portrayals of the physical land and of Americans doing things on it have a strong hold on knowledge and imagination.

Ford seems to know early American art as though constantly aware that he grew up with it and needs to engage it. Not only do his paintings look like their older models, there is a stiff quiriness in his style that makes his canvases seem as though there had actually been some dementedly honest early-American painter. I say 'honest' because Ford includes everything the original artist omitted. Maybe at first his paintings might have said to the artists of those days no more than "You forgot the flies: there must've been many flies". Then flies became for him the same type of symbol that eagles and bluebirds were for them, except that flies symbolise not nobility and peacefulness but putridity.

I've heard it said that Ford isn't such a good draughtsman, but most of the paintings he addresses in this series weren't at all well painted themselves. They're part of history's large body of art in which the picture takes precedence over the techniques of painting. Probably the largest part of American painting, taken as a whole, falls into this category. If Ford's work does so too, we must say that his primary interest is his subject matter; he is presenting visual narratives. If he painted with greater virtuosity the pictures might lose their power and also their 'authenticity'. This authenticity that does not come from technique looks more as though it came from rage.

In an earlier group of paintings in a very different style, Ford portrayed the realities (instead of the sentimentalities) of adolescence. In a work called *Lunch Break with Nature Boy*, 1986-7, some boys are sitting around in a room. A slightly older boy bursts through the door holding a long black snake. 'Nature Boy' is fearless at catching wildlife and then using it to scare kids. You may have known him when you were a child.

Audubon, who seems to be a special project of Ford's, was not exactly Nature Boy. He was a full-grown monster who for years made a living by killing birds and animals and shipping their skins to Europe. A perfect American type of the very bad sort, he had to have taken a special joy in death and conquest. Audubon's bird paintings, often touted for their 'lifelike' accuracy, actually look quite strange,

the postures weirdly distorted, as in some painful ballet. This is because the birds were all dead and arranged for display, like puppets. Once Audubon had a live eagle and wanted to kill it so he could paint it. To have a bird entire, rather than mangled and shot full of holes, was an opportunity too good to pass up. Audubon tried to kill the eagle with poison and with gas, and it took days.

Walton Ford has a painting called *A Spasm for Audubon*, 1991. Audubon, wearing an Indian robe that could also be a Napoleonic cape (one of Ford's favourite metaphors), sits with his easel, brushes, rifle, tomahawk and calipers in a clearing in early America's impenetrably dense forest. A dead eagle is posed, if that's the right word, on a once magnificent tree that has been cut back to a stump as though with a chain saw. Audubon looks sickly; perhaps he has poisoned himself killing the eagle. The beautiful early-American sunset beyond the forest — there are many sunsets in this series; the artist faces us west — mixes the Hudson school with Caspar David Friedrich. But the forest itself looks kind of burnt, and, high in the air, almost invisible among the trees, a ghostly Iroquois 'false face' mask, an unsettling spirit, stares out from it, in a symbolic haunting. The host is keeping an eye on the destructive guest. Ford takes the tradition of symbolism in classical European painting and with a funny twist on American bravado exaggerates it by going it one or two better. He does the 'stage spotlight' lighting of heroic painting to the point of absurdity, but the humour is incredibly sad.

In the Field with Audubon, 1991, shows the three bears (but they are all cubs). Audubon and other thugs, with attendant dogs, have driven them up into a tree. Though the gang carries rifles, the point isn't to shoot the three bears, but to set the tree on fire. The men are having their sport. To kill animals for pleasure has of course a long aristocratic tradition in Europe. In America it obtained its democracy, and in one form or another it is almost compulsory here. It is part of the American religion, which makes it patriotic.

Killing animals is also 'scientific'. The buyers of Audubon's skins were European museums and scientists. In the brightly lit foreground of *The Naming of Names*, 1990, some empirical zoologist holds in one hand a dead bird and with the other writes in a notebook. He faces a large pile of animals killed for his interest. Behind him, in the darker part of the painting, two men are gutting and skinning more animals. The investigation of life in process and in whole relationships is a relatively new idea in science. It's vivisection that's compulsory in many US schools as the proper way to impart knowledge about life. Ford's paintings show us the historical background, the known

but almost unconscious construct, of American culture's feelings about the physical land on which it sits. They also illuminate (that silly spotlight!) America's confusion of science with conquest, and how we are educated into such attitudes through images.

In *False Face*, 1990, a European-looking family on horseback rides out of a painting by Bruegel into the land of the Last Mohican. Another Iroquois mask grins at them from deep within the forest primeval. Perhaps they have not noticed this false face, but the horse maybe has, for it has stumbled in panic, throwing its riders. Just as well it did, because they were all about to kill themselves galloping over a cliff. The spotlight shines brightest on the baby, which is flying through the air toward the abyss. In its white gown and with its appearance of pleasant unconcern, it looks like a prophetic little diving angel; an involuntary suicide.

The painting is very like the jokes American Indians tell each other about 'whites'. Its metaphoric heavy-handedness works as humour, but the humour is about American self-destructiveness and obliviousness. Ford accomplishes American Indian jokes often, and they are remarkable. He portrays Native Americans without seeming to appropriate either the images or the 'plight'. Often it appears that Americans have no way of accepting the kind of joke that contains truths that seem obvious to anyone else. They may outright refuse to hear (or to tell) such a joke, or they may exclude themselves from one — tell it on the 'other Americans'. Tom Wolfe, say, in his 1987 novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, tells a lot of basically untrue jokes on everyone except himself and the readers, who are to be considered his peer group. This is also the kind of joke told by H.L. Mencken, Johnny Carson and George Bush. Naturally it is a seductive and comforting position. It also promotes a superficiality of perception that keeps the state's agenda on a smooth track.

Most Americans (whether or not it's most humans does not concern us here) are too defensive to laugh at a joke in which they themselves are implicated. Like an adult with a recalcitrant child, Ford tries to josh us out of our meanness. There is a maturity of thought in these paintings. Not all the jokes are funny — *Princess*, 1990, for example, which tells a joke about the early American paintings of American Indian women, is actually entirely sinister. It is an illustration of a crime. In America's discourse about itself, the crime is covered up with a romantic story.

Sometime early in the 17th century, the geographer Richard Hakluyt translated into English a tale about a Spanish soldier in



Walton Ford, *Princess*, 1990; oil on wood, 37.75 x 47.75in.

Florida who was captured by the Indians but was saved when the chief's daughter fell in love with him. The story followed an existing archetype: in the Middle Ages, there was a whole genre of 'enamoured Moslem princess' stories revolving around the Crusades, and long before that there was Julius Caesar, Mark Anthony and the Egyptian princess Cleopatra. A writer rather than a traveller, Hakluyt was still enough of an exotica expert that he briefed the Virginia Company on where its colonists should land when they arrived in the Americas. Among the new colony's proto-Americans were Captain John Smith and John Rolfe — Smith, who would later be rescued from the Indians by Pocahontas, their 'princess', and Rolfe, who would marry her. Between them these two men supposedly had pretty much the same experience with Pocahontas and her father, Powhatan, that numerous crusader captains seem to have had with Arab princesses and sultans. Actually it appears just as likely that Smith based his part of the

Pocahontas story on the Hakluyt tale about Florida, which may itself be a version of the enamoured-Moslem yarn.

But Pocahontas was a real person. The British kidnapped her and Rolfe took her as his wife to London, where she promptly died after giving birth to Rolfe Jr. Today much of the upper class of Virginia claims Pocahontas as an ancestor.

The colonists arrived with script in hand. They invented the story of Pocahontas, and made it replace her own history, as a way of owning her and her people. This is a problem, but the more serious problem for her was that she was physically owned to death. Today we tend (appropriately) to interpret the story of Pocahontas as a kind of American fairy tale. Often, though, we still believe the pictures — we remember seeing Pocahontas saving some white guy's life. (Miles Standish? Daniel Boone? It doesn't matter who.) All of the early colonies had laws against marrying Indians, none against the rape and murder of Indians. The massacre of the Indians began with the colonies and continued as long as possible. (The hunting decreased with the supply of game.) Early American portraits of Indian women also began simultaneously with colonisation, but the kidnapping, rape and murder weren't shown. When we see pictures of the Indian maiden, can we remember the history of her death? Visual images tend to recall other visual images, so we are more likely to remember the next picture, which shows a savage Mohawk man carrying a white woman away into the dark forest.

In *Princess*, an Indian woman sits for her portrait. Beside the painter stands a second man carrying a rifle; behind the 'princess' stands a third white man, also with a rifle, keeping the woman in her seat by holding onto her hair. All this is happening 'in the dark', in the background of the picture. Spotlit in the foreground is another victory, another trophy — a pile of dead animals, with flies. We have needed this image. It could hardly have been done except as a comment on early American painting: as a joke. There is no escape from the joke, we cannot accuse it of being a bad joke. We cannot complain that it is not funny because it is so obviously meant to be not funny. Yet there is no bad taste here, no dead babies or human gore. The magnificent dead animals are the same ones we see in sporting paintings and *natures mortes*.

Humour ('the best medicine') is given too much place in the US. It is as revered as ice cream. America is funny and likes to have fun, but the country is so *mean*, so aggressive. Seen from another planet we must look like that movie, *Night of the Funny Dead*.

If we do not remember the past are we condemned to repeat it? If the past is history how can we remember it? George Bush claimed that having learned the lesson of Vietnam, we gave ourselves absolution for that war by achieving our stated goals in Iraq, or almost achieving them. Others say that Bush misinterpreted the lesson of Vietnam. There are many interpretations, and opinion is divided. If we have to argue over history, how can we remember it?

Many people these days seem to feel a need for a strong nationalism, but also to forget the history of this century, let alone the ones before. Maybe they have to forget so they can get on with business. If they have any troublesome doubts or memories, they can always say Look at the Russians, who have never known either business or the democracy that business is said to require. In other words, those other countries have trouble, and so do I, but basically the US is OK. It's funny, a little weird in the sticks and the boondocks, yet it's generous. We are normal people. The fact that Grant Wood's *American Gothic* couple were our grandparents is only a little bit problematic. They were stiff and puritanical, true, but their lives were hard and they worked hard so that was understandable. Surely no other American painting has been so parodied as *American Gothic*. The parodies are usually soft and nice; making fun of our grandparents.

In the 1960s and '70s American Indian, African-American and Puerto Rican activists said, as loudly as they could, "This country was founded on the genocide of one people and the enslavement of another". The statement, hardly arguable, was not much taken up by white activists. *American Gothic* is American history, genocide is not. If a little genocide was committed in the Wild West (there, not here), Kevin Costner can erase that memory by giving us *Dances with Wolves*. If you'd been alive then, of course you'd have been like Kevin Costner. You wouldn't have been involved.

Walton Ford is really abnormal. His remembrance of the past has no important dates, no proofs of what actually happened when big decisions had to be made, no arguments. He is not painting moustaches on *American Gothic* (though indirectly he does an incisive job on the Marlboro man). Ford's subject begins with America's encyclopaedia/bible of visual images. With intellectual honesty, he enters new data into a cultural programme that makes imagery stand in for historical knowledge. Maybe his pictures will act like computer viruses.

1992

Legal Aliens

The poet Robert Bly has become a TV star because he has become the champion of men in their fight for self-awareness and empowerment. It seems the men's mothers have been withholding wisdom from their sons (and their wimpy old dads, having gone through the same oppression, stood by and did nothing) according to Bly's latest book, *Iron John*. (Is that a porno title or not?)

Feminists are reacting strongly against the book, as certainly we all should. But completely aside from its sexist, wrong-headed ideas, the book and its surrounding phenomena must surely have been inevitable. It is part of the self-help industry.

Late capitalism has discovered a seemingly endless goldmine in the self-help industry. In this country of endemic alienation, there are self-help books, videos, seminars, support groups and counsellors for more and more specific problems and 'ways of being'. The 'demand' for these products comes from that alienation, 'supplied' by the same cultured factories which make it. We might even say it is ecologically sound, in that the supply and demand are completely recyclable.

Whatever else the men's movement might be, it must also be seen as another marketing scheme for the industry. There must be about a third of the US population — millions of white men — potentially in need of those services; waiting to buy self-empowerment. We can imagine a bright future wherein products may be more specifically fine-tuned for achieving the self-realisation of men from Scandinavian ancestors, but who live in Southern cities, men with bisexual mothers, and so on.

Is it too far-fetched to consider 'multi-culturalism' as coming from the same self-help industry, but from different factories; those of the art world? Of course, I do not mean such a simplistic answer, yet it must be a piece of an answer. In the 1960s and early '70s, commonly referred to as the time of the Civil Rights movement, 'minorities' and women fought for some sorts of specific justice and equality. Twenty years later, not much, not nearly enough, had been gained. In a longer

view, many people had to ask, often not quite consciously, what *could* be gained. Complete equality in a society that seems incapable of containing meaning might make one only equally foolish.

But in films and television the 'gains' have been continually celebrated, especially to the middle-classes who do 'cultural activities'. I think quite a few people believed and did not at all believe the stories of 'gains' and progress. Immediately one begins searching, the factories begin to offer new and improved products. If people began trying to retrench into 'their own cultures', they may find 'their own roots' in a situation in which they might otherwise have been secretly cynical, (not unusual, if one doesn't believe a programme, one may follow it all the more fanatically, to force one's self to believe in the belief).

In buying the products, the 'gear' for self-empowerment, one also buys the defined cultural construct produced by the industry. We are somewhat like those Third World countries which change their societies to fit World Bank guidelines so that they can get World Bank loans to pay off the previous loans. There are obviously hierarchical relationships built into that construct which we buy while pretending not to buy.

Whereas the 'men's movement' promises the 'movers and shakers' the ability to move and shake more kindly and gently, the multi-cultural movement promises us others the ability to find fulfilment without moving. We may even find financial reward for being the 'ourselves' set out so clearly in the programmes we invest in.

I want to think about a couple of glitches in the programme. Since 'authenticity' is one of the most saleable artefacts we others might make, it can be helpful to examine its authenticity. Not even the most remote Chinese or tropical rain forest village is untouched by the cultural aspects of late capitalism. Of course, the audience, the tourists, are now sophisticated enough to appreciate our appropriation and uses of some of their stuff in our products — if we use it charmingly and innocently; that is, authentically. But since we others are rather heavily touched by the dominant society, how can we and they be assured of authenticity?

Throughout the world, many makers of tourist-trade objects have discovered that by adding a final layer of dirt to the finished objects, a marketable authenticity can be achieved. If your tourist-trade products are more in the nature of software than of hardware, the dirt must then be of a more intangible sort. Gritty anger, the bleeding wounds of grief and colonial injury, and indignant accusation are all possible devices for that final layer of authenticity. But at that, we

can imagine a not-too-distant future, say, 1993, when even those devices will have worn too thin. At that point the cultural tourists will no longer return to our stalls.

Autobiographical and confessional work is currently popular. Baring one's breast for the tourists is by now such a long tradition that it can be considered authentic. One problem is, though, that by following the formulae anyone can now do it, including the newly self-aware white men. They, naturally, trust their own authenticity more than they trust ours, and also tend to confess things more interesting to themselves.

Our confessional work then becomes a matter of us talking to ourselves about ourselves through their programme while they watch approvingly or disapprovingly.

In the movie *Alien*, some American explorers go to another planet, where the mean savages truly get right in their faces. The Alien does not bare her breast. Instead, she bares the breast of the explorer. I must say I like that strategy more.

It is curious that our most intense works, showing the pain and crises of being 'non-white' in a racist society, have become so popular that they are almost obligatory. Other kinds of work by 'artists of colour' are then excluded as being inauthentic. In the most harshly accusatory works there is comfort for the white art world. It is not threatened, but it comes to the show with the pretence that it will be threatened. It enjoys the pretence in direct ratio to how well we ourselves enter into it; in other words, it has come to see its *own* show in which we are enlisted as bit-players. We are not even as scary as a horror movie.

The second glitch, then, is that multi-culturalism assumes that a 'dominant culture' exists, although it is now supposedly not quite so dominant. (Now we can *all* feel good.) I believe that, instead, the case is that modern nation-states produce and control cultural phenomena while arresting the creation or maintenance of an actual culture (and that may not be all bad; left to their own devices, white Americans tend to make lynching parties).

There is no dominant culture. There are nation-states with involved, controlling narratives. The US is not a culture. Modern England and France are inventions of those states' narratives. Anyone, then, and no one, can 'join' this modern culture. These nation-states have programmes and agendas of dominance, however, variable according to their intra-mural hierarchies.

The point is that doing one's own thing, self-empowerment, and multi-culturalism become an absurdity under colonialism. Whether

or not Europe and its former colonies now exist in a post-colonial situation, it is difficult to make such a presentation in the Americas. European intellectuals speak of post-colonialism and American intellectuals take up the term as though it were only some useful new French idea. But the world is, after all, full of specifics, and Californian Chablis is not the same as French Chablis.

Boricua is an island country in the Caribbean, like England is an island country in the Atlantic. Its European name, Puerto Rico, means 'rich port'; probably not because of all the riches brought there. The United Nations has declared that the US has colonised Puerto Rico oppressively and should cease to do so.

How can we speak of post-colonialism in the US in this case? It would be an odd contortion of logic to say that we are living in a post-colonial time except for Puerto Rico. It is to say that Puerto Rico doesn't count. If integrity forces us to say that Puerto Rico actually *does* 'count', it might then lead us to the outlandish conclusion that Comanches, Navajos, Cherokees and other American Indian nations 'count' in some way. Tread carefully here. If those are not colonised peoples, what are they? Are they simply 'tribes'? They '*jes grew*'? (Are your intellectual facilities functioning well?) We might come to the conclusion that the US is an intensely colonial situation.

Multi-culturalism would then be a matter of 'separate but equal' under the administration of the colonial power. Its meaning is enclosure in a colonial context which pretends the opposite. A stacked deck. Letting us scream at them is their ace up the sleeve and ultimately another roadside attraction.

Puerto Rico is a colony of the US and the narrative tells us that it doesn't matter. How then might an artist from Puerto Rico work and maintain? Absolutely any strategies which include overt elements of 'Puerto Ricanity' will conceivably be bought (or rejected) by colonialism for its own furtherance.

An artist must be more than either a victim or a tourist attraction. Papo Colo is an artist from Puerto Rico who feels his and his country's situation acutely. He consistently refuses to participate in his own victimisation by the colonists. But he conducts his life that way perhaps *primarily* because he is serious about his work, and secondarily (if such a division can be made at all) because he is a resistance fighter against this unacknowledged colonialism — a patriot. It might bring him some limited fame and fortune if he showed how deeply he is capable of suffering or put together more titillating guilt trips. He wants something more; more sustaining and more generous — more intolerant.

Is Papo Colo a Puerto Rican artist or an artist who is Puerto Rican? The question is, why ask such a question? What is the framework surrounding such a question? It is by its nature an exclusionary question. Colo's work should be included in the same critical discourses which treat the works of Dokoupil, Koons, Polke, *et al.* If Colo can be considered as an artist attempting to investigate the world as an artist, *then* any special insights or talents that being Puerto Rican gives him must be taken seriously, used and considered critically.

It is certainly odd (if we keep up the pretence of 'post-colonialism') that Colo's work is not seen that way. A friend from India said that while the master need speak only one language, his own, the slave must speak two languages, his own and the master's. There's more to it: the slave can sometimes ring changes in the master's language, speak it with a fluency it did not know it had. Who knows the house better, the servant who cleans it or the master who owns it?

In agriculture, one speaks of 'hybrid strength', although in sporting animals, one looks — often detrimentally, even to the sport — for thoroughbreds. It should be obvious but seems not to be that, in the art world, one who participates *within* as a member of another culture as well as the dominant non-culture could be especially functional. But when we imagine 'hybrid' strength in that context there is immediately the question of *what* is or should be strengthened.

Whites often say to American Indians, "We have so much to learn from you". The statement is full of arrogance. If it is the current art system of the dominant narrative that is strengthened, we are all done a disservice.

In literature, there was the idea of being universal by being specific, of making the local universal. But it seems that sentimentalists took the idea over. The colonialists took it over, and told us not to talk about things outside the reservation.

The popular music industry — and I'm not talking about recording companies, but the part of the state narrative which tries to control music — has waged a war of containment against jazz for one hundred years. Jazz keeps on, though, and John Coltrane could 'universalise' little European tunes which had before become too banal by their local-ness to even be heard. Jazz's counter-attack has been so effective that popular music has been entirely changed by it. Ultimately we come to Miles Davis, who says disdainfully, "I do not play jazz". We know he is telling the truth because he does jazz so truly.

In visual arts, I cannot think of an artist more local, more

community-based, than David Hammons. Probably he has never 'officially' done 'community-based' work. So, his work shows us a more real universality of objects and relationships which we had let slip by before. Hammons is a Universalist of our times. It is as though he neither accepts nor rejects the systems, notions and labels of who he is. He just goes someplace else and appears directly in front of us.

Elaine Reichek does a similar sneak-attack. As a white woman in an art world still controlled by colonialism's white men, she does works which question their agenda at every hidden level, subtly, incisively, but completely without the didacticism through which they might escape. She is a feminist, and there it is, solidly in the work. Yet, it is difficult for 'the boys' (as Reichek says) to categorise her work that way, to put it 'in its place'. She is not being a 'woman artist', but a man could not do the work she does.

We live in a very tightly controlled narrative which has no one's best interest at heart. The daily controls that we see come from the market. But it is this colonial narrative which makes the market, and the art market, the art system, such a tiny, silly little piece of a thing. Artists in general have a place in the market very much like its traditional places for women and 'minorities'. The premise says that we are cute, decorative and not functional in world affairs. Just by refusing the premise, artists can begin functioning in the world.

We might take comfort from Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. A Black Hole is a star which has collapsed in upon itself to such a degree that its matter is condensed into a state of non-matter. Nothing escapes, not even a photon or a quark. It is then a completely closed system. But a completely closed system is what physicists call a 'singularity' — one which has *no* relation to anything else. In which case it would not exist in this universe. Assuming, however, that Black Holes do exist, physicists use the Uncertainty Principle, which states that *something else must* always happen. There are no completely closed systems. There must always be at least 'virtual particles' intervening at the boundaries.

Roland Barthes has said that language is fascistic because it *forces* us to speak. Umberto Eco, writing in *Travels in Hyper-Reality*, has commented that not everyone will always be forced to speak someone else's sentences. We can use the idea of the Uncertainty Principle to assume that discourse, and interventions in existing discourse, can always be *possibly* effective.

Approach in Love and Fear

For a long time there were only plants. Although in their initial ascendancy they killed most of the existing life on earth by releasing large amounts of poisonous oxygen, plants are not basically aggressive. They process sunlight and a few minerals.

When animal life developed its very definition was to move about and eat other life. Without other life to consume, animals die. Therefore animal life developed more and more proficiency in attacking and consuming; first, mouths evolved, then concentrated bunches of nerves better to direct the mouth, then a sense of smell to help the mouth differentiate, then a sense of hearing and sight, then a continual complexity of the bunch of nerves to organise actual brains. Our brains are close to our mouths because their primary purpose is to serve those weapons of destruction.

When I was a child I grieved that we killed any animal which crossed our paths and ate its flesh. Plants we would often pull completely from the earth, so that we could consume the roots as well as the leaves. And I saw that we were not the only ones; all the other animals had the same voracious cruelty.

We had to cringe in fear. Any animal unable to fear would not be successful. You must kill, and fear death.

Mammals, then, as a strategy for survival, developed emotions. We might say that emotion is a secondary definition of mammalian life.

But we cannot say that the emotion of fear is primary. Love and fear must be simultaneous. Because every animal, even your boyfriend, has a mouth with some sort of teeth, one cannot easily allow an approach. Non-mammalian animals overcome this problem of reproduction by what we call 'ritualistic instinct' — patterns of behaviour that automatically trigger certain responses. But mammals have overridden the instinct for reproduction with an emotional (and of course it is also physical — *everything* is 'also physical') desire to mate, to have a mate. We have developed emotions of love and of delight in the voluntary denial of fear.

More, mammalian mothers can love and fear for their young. That allows us to produce fewer young so that the individual can be better protected. Those two kinds of love can easily expand to a phenomenon more important than survival.

Recently I saw on the highway to Mexico City, a stray dog risking her life to try to save another dog which had been hit by a car. Saint Dog — Holy Dog, but not uncommon.

With humans, every individual is capable of what we call 'mother love', and we can even extend it to the love of other species.

We can love each other and the cat and the mouse.

We also articulate. A fox in a cage knows sorrow and grief for the dangerous freedom of her lost home, but I can miss individual hickory and black walnut trees, and the little translucent salamanders of my lost home; as I remember the constant death and suffering.

We live under such a beautiful curse, all the more a curse because we find so much beauty here.

What is there other than this physicality? Not 'transcendence', not 'heaven', but our knowledge of the intolerable situation and a love of all of us.

1992

Elaine Reichek

Unravelling the Social Fabric

Two or Three Prologues

Historians of Europe know the 11th century Bayeux Tapestry, which tells the story-in-pictures of the Norman invasion of Britain, as a primary source of knowledge about the period when the tapestry was woven — woven by many women. That time might be considered a golden age of the state narrative: the men went out and beat people up, and the women stayed home and wove that cloth. The men saw weaving as women's work but they knew the importance of the end result, not as women's product but as society's product. The tapestries were functional, decorative. But they were also the carriers of the state narrative.

During the ensuing centuries men came to understand that women couldn't really be active participants in the part of narrative production involved with 'proof'. Whether or not women had actually become untrustworthy in the years between, it became clear to 'everyone' that the narrative of the state was not-about-them. Painting gained its ascendancy in part because, with the introduction of 'scientific' perspective and other devices of 'exact' representation, it could offer a clearer 'proof' than tapestry and such. But maybe it also overgrew just because it wasn't weaving or any other 'women's work'. A careful master might make his own stretchers and meticulously stretch his own linen (or have these things done within his workshop). But he wouldn't have *woven* his own linen. The cloth was to act as a vehicle for the image — was to be invisible. To call attention to it by making it oneself would have been absurd and also kind of unmanly. The finished painting would have been infected with 'craft', and not even with the craft of the lower classes, but, in weaving, with the mythological and traditional craft of women.

Knitting as politics: there is early Celtic bronze work — pots and bowls — that shows people dressed in one-piece knitted garments looking something like long underwear. The Romans called this clothing *bracae*, after the Celtic word *braekkes*, from which we get the modern word 'britches'. Though Roman writers took these beautifully practical cold weather longjohns as evidence of Celtic primitivism, they did bow to mentioning and recording them. Yet in histories of costume, britches — pants or trousers — are usually considered a fairly recent invention. (And everyone knows Celts wore skirts, or nothing at all.)

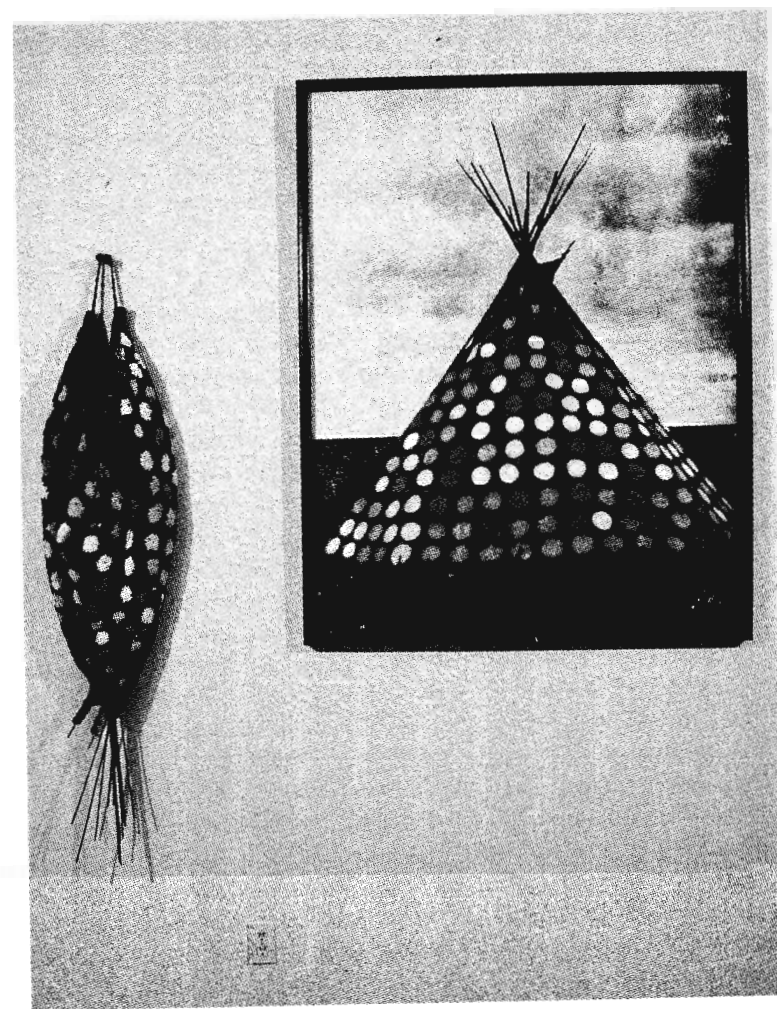
The Roman conquests let Europeans know that non-Roman ways were invariably bad. The people most ready to assume Roman customs were considered the most civilised, so that knitted garments became a sign of lower class. The peoples who knitted, the Irish and other 'savages', were recognised as primitive because of such habits as knitting. Perhaps by extension, knitting itself is still seen as one of those unimportant, silly activities of women (although closely associated with the practical, 'mothering' production of baby clothes).

There is a Cherokee story of how Grandmother Spider went over and captured the sun from whoever had been hiding it, after all the more bigshot animals had made fools of themselves trying. They all asked why they hadn't seen her before, seeing how she was so powerful: "It's just because I'm usually sitting quietly in the corner weaving, so you didn't notice me." Often in the telling of the story the point is stressed that in the light of the day that Grandmother Spider brought to the world, the heroic attempts of the other animals looked even more foolish.

And Now Elaine Reichek

Although I think Elaine Reichek's work must be seen as the production of a deeply committed and analytical feminist, it is not at all what we might easily call 'feminist art'. Reichek began working, and with a Yale art-school education, at a time when it might have been natural for her to make 'woman artist' versions of the current ideas of what art was. What she does with knitting and embroidery is much more radical.

Reichek did not knit as a child, when many girls learn, but took it up deliberately as an already mature artist, out of a seemingly innate dissatisfaction with the laws of acceptable art practices and materials. For her, knitting was symbolic of what is most excluded (so excluded that it is not even forbidden). Yet she does not use it in any superficial symbolic sense; she has 'mastered' knitting the way painters are supposed to 'master' painting.



Elaine Reichek, *Blackfoot Teepee (Polkadots)*, 1990; wool and oil on photograph, 57 x 69in (collection: Michael and Leslie Engl)

The knitted elements of Reichek's work clearly show both discipline and a love of the medium and material. She has defended the process often, though surely in a less sexist art world defence would be unnecessary. Reichek observes that knitting is labour-intensive, and

she likes that fact about it as much as she likes the labour itself. Though her work has a perfectionist gloss, she is very much a studio artist, a maker of things. She aligns herself with the makers, with people who do work that is time-consuming and respectful. Knitting is obviously not primitive, Reichek believes; it almost must be done in a cosmopolitan setting. At the same time, knitting is most easily defined by what it is not. It is not high art; it is not the art of the 'guys'.

Truth, Lies and Torquemada

At no time does Reichek consider knitting only as a complexly simple thing-in-itself. She does not show us 'knitting'. Instead, at the same time that she treats this practice truly and respectfully, she also employs it as a system through which to expose other systems. Those other systems did not previously allow themselves to be seen as systems among systems; they put themselves across as 'truths'. Among them are photography and especially the photography of ethnography, two 'truths' still basically trusted in the most intimate parts of our knowledge of the world.

Ethnographic — 'scientific' — photographs of American Indians fit so exactly into the canon of 'truths' needed to construct the American narrative that most often they are taken at face value. There is even still an idea that photography is objectively 'representational'. According to John Berger, Fox Talbot invented the camera because, in the custom of his class at the time, he liked to make sketches of places he saw in his travels. Often the train would go too fast to allow 'accuracy'. With a photograph he could bring the scene home, where he could draw (interpret) it at leisure.

There was also the fact that the European states had been having trouble defining the official knowledge of their territories overseas. States produce 'truth' for their own service, so when early travellers to the 'New World' drew fantastic varieties of pictures of whatever they hoped or feared to find, including the natives, the state decided that their active imaginations needed controls. The world must agree on the properties of the property. Long before cameras were even thought of, the European states were eagerly awaiting them and their progeny: a 'scientific' ethnography. The camera cannot lie!

Reichek does not take photographs, does not own a camera. In her work with photos she has described herself as an archivist. She could equally be described as a systems analyst, or a muckraker, if descriptions of this kind serve at all. Certainly she is not an explorer. When the men tell about their exploits and explorations — and show

their snapshots — Reichek raises an eyebrow and says, "Well, let's see now..." She doesn't believe in much they say; not even, she has decided, that their photographs *are* photographs (not, at any rate, in the sense of the 'photograph' as 'an accurate record', the sense that the men claim for the word). This is another radical attitude that seems to come naturally to her. In conversation she asks pointed questions, then takes her answers from your choice of words, your delivery, your stance and your circumstance. She combines Torquemada, Maigret, and your big sister. Her *modus operandi* is never what you might expect.

Suspicion

The work is complex and sophisticated and operates on many levels. Yet the wools, the knitting, the photographs of 'natives', can trick us into the momentary complacency of thinking we are seeing what we expect to see. It is for this reason, combined with an understandable but overly defensive sensitivity to appropriation, that some 'minority' artists have felt that Reichek is improperly messing with 'our stuff'. These artists must think she is talking about *us*; when in fact she is using the systems of her own culture, the 'dominant' culture, to confront hidden oppressions in its systems.

We might make a case that images of us taken by the white guys still belong to us (though in fact we have never bothered with this case, so that books like *Touch the Earth* and *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, which are illustrated with such photos, pass by with little from us but admiration). But Reichek hardly uses images of us, or, rather, she uses those images to make people see through their surfaces into the systems that produce them. And to those systems she counterpoises other systems entirely opposite to them. She is not an 'Indian fan', not a collector. Her images of American Indians are ethnography's images, so that the images she uses are images of ethnography. Any moral points that her work might make are well away from the sentimental. She has written:

The thing that attracts me to these images is largely the fact that I am suspicious of them. I'm troubled by their pretence to be objective, non-ideological records of their cultures when in fact they're deeply invested in two related codes: the code of Western science and the code of photographic representation, both of which imagine themselves as universal codes conveying uninflected matter-of-fact truths about the world...It's important to remember that all of the images I use were produced within Western culture, and they document *Western* beliefs, morals, and fantasies.

But the work speaks eloquently for itself. What is most amazing and delightful about Reichek's investigations and analyses is that they are done in an artist's studio as art. There is no evidence of 'verbal' intellectual work having come first, and then being translated into art things. When I imagine Reichek saying "Well, let's see now", I imagine her doing the seeing with her knitting needles, happily deflating 'the man's' boasts with vicious innocence; *making* something. But at the same time the commitment there is so smart and so informed — and so sceptical of the information. Here is a way of doing art that is not often seen. Is there even a name for it? With Reichek it is a matter of conversing with all of the world strictly as *an artist*. She blithely declines to accept the strictures on how art should operate. Her way of doing art shows us the doors out of the closed-room dilemma that art now seems to be in — a way for art to force other discourses into more natural conversation with it.

Aha!

In this exhibition at the Grey Art Gallery, Reichek has carefully situated the works so that they form a narrative about themselves, which we can understand as we move through the space. But I don't have such exactness (not being a weaver) so I must write about works as they come to me. Reichek 'receives' a photo of a tepee. "What is it", she asks: hard, glossy, two-dimensional paper, with a design of black, white and grey on it that has been explained as an 'image' 'truly' showing a tepee. Very well.

Reichek sets out to make an image of the tepee design by knitting it in wool. She goes back and forth between accepting the photo's given meaning (only in an exaggeratedly literal way) and the pretence-cum-reality that what it shows is unknowable except through a parallel kind of work or construction of meaning. This to-and-fro gives a kind of weight and energy to the pieces. Here she agrees that perhaps the tepee is cone-shaped, as the photograph explains through the conventions of perspective and shading. So she knits a soft collapsed tepee that may be somewhat conical, but is in any case *exactly* the same size and shape as the image of the tepee in the photograph. Reichek is 'believing' the photograph. But of course it is she who has enlarged the photo to that particular size, and she could have chosen any size, and we know that.

Then she agrees that what seem to be wooden poles in the photograph actually *are* wooden poles. So she supplies her own tepee with real wooden poles. Whatever designs are shown on the tepee,

on the other hand, she decides, must be mimetically and faithfully reproduced, and so she copies them in knitting. The patterns of light and shadow on the photo's tepee poles she paints on her own poles in black and grey paint; shadows on the tepee itself are knitted into the wool.

Next, Reichek questions the photo itself. It is black and white. The thing 'represented' was not black and white, probably, and there is now no way of knowing that part of its reality. Reichek might paint it red, or yellow, but she doesn't give us to think that the original was red or yellow. *This* one is. You may say that tepees are not red and yellow, but then must admit that neither are they black and white, or two-dimensional, or that particular size. Reichek doesn't try to paint the 'real' tepee, she only adds simple primary colours to a two-dimensional black-and-white visual pattern. The 'black-and-whiteness' is both respected and annulled. At no time does she alter or even address whatever the 'actual' tepee might have been. She does nothing with 'Indianness', or with Indian property or artefacts.

Reichek wants us to know that in all these different kinds of operation she is carrying visual information across from one system to another. Thus her tepee, unlike the tepee design in the photograph, is a real three-dimensional object. It hangs upside-down, of course; but after all it is not in 'use'. It is also a magical object in itself. There is no 'joke' here. Its seriousness gives its weight as it hangs there an inexplicable moral feel. Its material resounds with echoes of kinship to other objects almost in a different universe from tepees or photos; we might remember shawls, purses or dresses, then catch ourselves remembering them and say, "Aha!"

There is a melancholy here, well mixed with delight, that is completely foreign to the 'meaning' of the image in the photo. And then we might see that Reichek's intelligence of work is generous to us. There's never an ounce of meanness or aloofness, or that superior instructional attitude so common amongst 'the boys'. The work is proof that intelligence works.

Tears and Confessions

Reichek's more well-known images of Indian people in her knitted work are obviously of a different character from the tepees if one looks at them. Reichek is sometimes willing to concede that a photo of a tepee 'represents' some three-dimensional object. She does not do this with the photos of people.

Anthropologists and missionaries took hundreds of photos of the Indians of Tierra del Fuego as those people were dying away. There

are none left alive now and there have not been any for some time. The photos are of the men, for the ethnographers weren't interested in committing the women to history. These men dressed themselves mostly in paint or mud — a garb exotic to the point of being truly alien if your standard is European missionary gear. What now can the world do with these photos if they're to 'represent' these people? The people are all dead, have no chance to intervene. This civilisation killed them. Will we keep the photos as scientific souvenirs and say, "Oh, poor tribe?" Are the photos of scientific importance? There's nothing left to study there.

Reichek's mid-to-late '80s work is a visual and as usual careful rejection of the entire Tierra del Fuego missionary and ethnographic project. Her knitted deconstructions of these photos do not admit that they necessarily show people, or if they do, that the photographer ever saw those people. She lifts from the photo the black-and-white pattern that is given to 'represent' a person and knits it as a two-dimensional pattern. "Let's see what you have here — there's black, here's white, knit one, purl two, left, right, right, left"; but the resonance is astounding. In the present show, this Tierra del Fuego work is continued through images 'of' American Indians.

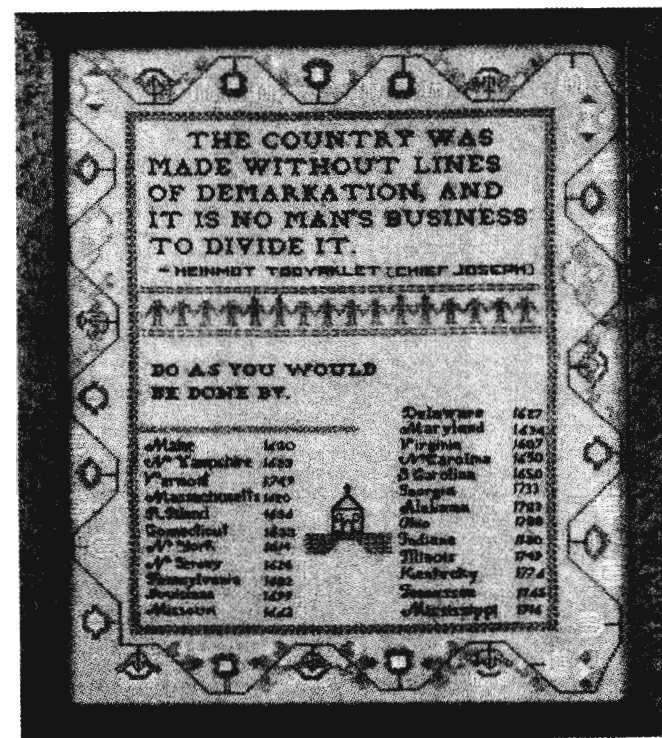
As an archivist, Reichek has become a sort of sneak thief. She cannot but notice that the publicly distributed photos of Indians have been severely edited to show a second, more controlled dishonesty than that of photo-ethnography itself. It is here that she begins the photocollage work. This is tricky business, because photocollage seems to want to be sloppy, strident, didactic. Reichek makes it eloquent. The photos are made to speak with each other, and ethnography is 'put to the question' so calmly that it confesses before having realised it.

Looking at the photocollage, *Tears Were Shed*, 1991, we must see that this ethnography is a silly minion of a larger system. *Tears Were Shed* is a blown-up photo of a museum diorama — one of those dry aquariums wherein curators place tiny little Indians doing their little Indian things of long ago. Reichek goes to the archives, checks out the 'Indians' file, and comes back with the proper footnotes to the diorama photo (which is itself already a removal of a removal). She finds a photo of a scientist surrounded by skulls, one of a white woman with a bunch of little 'Indian chief' figurines, one of a white tourist taking a photo of Indian gear, one of an American Indian Movement protest march, and because she doesn't claim the purity of exemption from the lure of the exotic, she adds one of herself in an Indian museum. The photos are small and are set within the larger

photo in a way that recalls book-jacket illustrations, museum introductory displays and travel brochures.

Another photocollage, *Sign of the Cross*, 1991, has smaller photos arranged more ceremonially. The base is a heroic romantic American picture of a train crossing the wilderness, with a deep abyss and high peaks on either side. Reichek has done much thinking on American landscape painting and photography. She notices the constant theme of abysses, cute little cabins nestled snugly between two hills, and so forth. A true non-believer must notice a more complete story than the storyteller might wish.

Into this very long-distance scene, in which our point of view is aerial (we are made into angels by the view, since it is obviously



Elaine Reichek, *Sampler*, 1992; embroidery on linen.

pre-airplane), photos of very close-up little non-scenes are set unobtrusively in the form of a cross. They include Indian children with a Christmas tree, a white photographer in a small room getting in the faces of some Indian men dressed in Plains 'chief' gear, a touching but intrusive photo of some Peyote cult items including a Christian cross, a tepee beside a log cabin, and some Indian children in missionary school. So the basic narrative of the collage is clear. The articulate complexities come from Reichek's choices and assembly.

Bayeux-on-Hudson

One thing leads to another in Reichek's investigations. Her photo-archive work on America's Indian story has led her to investigate numerous Indian-related visual items, including wallpaper, children's clothing, kitsch toys, and souvenirs. And she has also arrived at places where no Indian has ever been encountered. One of these is the genteel colonial parlour, with its needlework samplers. Here she is back on a swamplier part of home turf: that of 'women's work'.

Samplers were traditionally made by more or less upper-class young women to show off their skills in decorative stitchery, in case anyone ever had a need for such work. These embroideries and their sweet slogans — 'Home Sweet Home', 'God Bless This House' — gave the comforting message that the women did not intend to go far beyond their front doors. Until recently these women may in fact have been allowed little else to do but make samplers, so that their complicity in a genocidal expansion of empire was mostly circumstantial. (The Daughters of the American Revolution notwithstanding.) The samplers might be considered as anti-Bayeux tapestries. There are no hostiles lurking about here, and if some savages were massacred down the road, well, 'God Bless Our Happy Home'. Samplers are innocent leisure-time things that offend no one. Everyone likes them. Even if we know that their message is of a treacly domesticity that never existed, we say, "What's the harm? They're nice". And they are nice and truly there is no harm. They are almost heartbreakingly harmless, done to *show* harmlessness. Still, made here in this vicious settler regime, they can give you a chill.

Samplers were done well by definition. Even now there is an iconography to them; the patterns are classic. It is a natural setup for Reichek, who does them as well as those earlier women did, but deliberately re-engages them in her study of ethnography. Reichek doesn't think to farm the work out to genteel ladies for authenticity, she does it with authenticity herself. But by adding to her samplers phrases and images she takes from elsewhere, she subverts them and

makes them go out-of-doors. When she includes the words of Indians it isn't to give those people a voice but to make the samplers talk sass to ethnography — after all, these embroideries themselves must surely appear in some ethnographic study or another.

Back in the 'frontier' days, European women were sometimes captured by Indian groups. Most often they had no wish to return to white society. Reichek rescues these samplers in the same way.

Although the samplers do not speak directly to photography, as the knitting does, I imagine that they do because Reichek seems to have taken photography-as-knowledge as her special adversary. The photograph is too quick to involve much knowledge, she says. The shutter opens and closes, records an image, in less than a heartbeat; too short a time for any understandable human activity to take place. Reichek chooses slow work to respond to photography, work that is known, as I said earlier, *not* to be scientific.

A Kinder, Gentler...

These days ethnography has put on a kinder, more 'progressive' face, and we can all feel better with what Reichek calls "that 'hands-across-the-water' stuff". But the state narrative remains intact, and our destructive assumptions along with it. Don't think that Elaine Reichek's work addresses issues that are over and done with. She is an observer of right now and works as an artist right now, very squarely in the world as it is. Here is something to think about: most of the photos of African-Americans we see are made in the present, to show their 'poverty' or 'criminality' or their 'sinister' presence today. They are shown as having no past. Most of the photos of American Indians we see were made in the past, and they are shown to us to demonstrate that those people are not present.

Such visual signs are a proper phenomenon for artists to address. Perhaps one reason why Reichek's work is sometimes misread is that America has such a strong and hidden simultaneous love and denial for its story about Indians. Some people have so consumed and digested that story they assume she is simply retelling it. Actually she is exposing it for the piece of bad work that it is. Reichek does not let us off the hook, however, by allowing us to say, "Oh, politically correct art". No matter what, the pieces work.



Walter Ferguson (?), *Geronimo at the Wheel*, 1904.

The picture was taken at the 101 Ranch near Ponca City, Oklahoma, while the Apache leader was a prisoner of war at Fort Sill. He was given special permission to visit the ranch for a meeting of the National Editorial Association. He died in 1909 and was buried on the reservation at Fort Sill. The label on this photograph asserts: "He is generally accredited with being the most bloodthirsty Indian warrior of all time."

Geronimo!

The American myths about who the Apaches are, and who Geronimo was, involve such well-worn clichés that it is difficult to re-address the reality. Schoolboys and military men are taught to yell 'Geronimo!' when they jump into the swimming pool or into battle. So at least we can begin by asking why that is. Why don't those children yell some other name? They do not *admire* Geronimo or the Apaches. In the American myth, Apaches are a symbol of inscrutable cruelty. Is Geronimo's name invoked because he evokes American fear — a fear that has been 'conquered'? If so, then the fearsome 'object' has obviously not been conquered at all.

Having begun with a question I cannot answer, I now come to a different but intimately related level of reality. Today, Geronimo's family, his descendants, are leaders of an Apache reservation that is still hard-pressed from all sides, forced to expend resources and energy simply to fight more colonial incursions. We must recognise that Geronimo and his people are not defeated, and that these days are still part of an urgent and desperate situation that demands active solidarity.

Why are you looking at these photos? What do you expect to learn? What do you expect to feel? What do you expect to happen next?

And what am I doing? What do I expect?

I am faced with my usual dilemma. On the one hand, how can I write, carry on intellectual or cultural investigations, when our situations demand activism? And on the other hand, to whom might I address my investigations? How and why can I assume a basic trust in an untrustworthy situation? Am I creating neurotic complexities because of my own confusions and guilt? Am I even needlessly inserting myself in a short essay about a photo of someone else, and so using Geronimo to further my own career?

Reader, as you read, I want you to have similar doubts and recognise a similar need for activism, at a time and in circumstances that should be intolerable to all of us.

In American morality, integrity and intellectual clarity are constantly stifled by a refusal to acknowledge the colonial nature of American Indian nations, followed by the refusal to acknowledge the predicaments and rights of colonised peoples. Is it really possible to take over someone's house, murder most of the family, lock the remaining victims in the closet, and then pretend that it is your own little house on the prairie in the suburbs?

All photographs of American Indians are photographs of dead people, in that their *use* assumes ownership of the subject, which is seen as static, completely 'understandable'. Except, of course, even the tightest system is not completely closed. Geronimo, as an Indian 'photographic subject', blew out the windows. On his own, he reinvented the concept of photographs of American Indians. At least he did so far as he could, concerning pictures of himself, which are so ubiquitous that he must have sought 'photo opportunities' as eagerly as the photographers. Yet even when he was 'posed' by the man behind the camera, he seems to have destroyed the pose and created his own stance. In every image, he looks through the camera at the viewer, seriously, intently, with a specific message. Geronimo uses the photograph to 'get at' those people who imagine themselves as the 'audience' of his struggles. He seems to be trying to see us. He is demanding to be seen, on his own terms.

Perhaps that is why his (Spanish) name is so often invoked. Geronimo established his own 'view' of himself in the American consciousness, so that he could not so easily be 'pinned down'. But also, his people were forced into war with the US (and with Mexico) just at the time when the US was hoping to become nostalgic about its wars against American Indians. The 'Vanishing Redman' was already being promoted.

We should remember, however, that violent persecution had been the lot of the Apaches for a couple of hundred years before those wars of the 1880s and '90s. Geronimo had to have recognised that the tragedies of his life — seeing most of his family murdered — were part of an ongoing atrocity perpetrated by Spanish and then US colonists for generations.

I am going to derail the train here for a moment to answer the 'expert-on-Indians' I hear screaming over my sentences. You are saying, Senor Expert, that the Apaches were bad guys to other Indians, that they raided Pueblo villages, etc. That argument is slimy and immoral. It might have some validity if the colonists had at any time (including now, with the false fight between Hopi and Navajo at Big Mountain) defended any Indian community under any circumstances.

The fact that England is still colonising a part of Ireland does not give me, as a third party, the right to decimate England.

Geronimo had the right to be hopeless and crazy, to be reduced to a passive beggar like so many Indian people at the time. Yet even when he was finally captured, he reportedly said, "So you have captured me; the Mexicans would have killed me". And then he looks at the camera, at the 'audience', and tells us that he will continue to resist.

Many people are surprised at the photograph we are contemplating here. It has not been as widely published as other photos of Geronimo, and many assume that he was killed in battle or died of a 'broken heart' in a Florida prison. This photo does not fit the myth that the US must continually rebuild. Sometimes Indian people are ashamed, or at least embarrassed by it, as though Geronimo were caught being a foolish old man.

We do not want to see the valiant and 'savage' old warrior in a top hat, as though he had given up and accepted 'civilisation'. We do not want to see him in this century. We want him to remain in the (designated) past. Such reactions remind me of a silly *B.C.* comic strip in which a character discovers that clams have legs. "Clams got legs!" he screams hysterically. So "Geronimo can drive a car!"

My copy of this photo is from an unidentified book. (Little in life arrives from pure sources; so much the better.) The text below it explains that Geronimo "obtained pocket money through the sale of photographs of himself..."* *Pocket money*. As though the writer imagines Geronimo as a child wanting to buy ice cream. But it was this century, and Geronimo was old. He had no 'job' (and no home). He needed money.

Reader, although I hope, of course, that these words about the vision and resistance of a great leader might serve in some small way as a constructive act, I am in fact selling them — because I need pocket money. We are seldom offered 'bank' money.

Do you speak a second language? Geronimo spoke at least three: his own, English and Spanish. He was also a strategist and a resistance leader. We can imagine that in 1905 he had his wits about him, and understood more of your culture than you would have understood of his. In this photo he does much more than present his existence in the face of attempts to 'disappear' him. But, as usual, he is not *asking* for anything — not even 'understanding'. Instead, a part of his message here is, as always, a *demand* to be recognised.

* The caption appeared in *Fighting Indians of the West*, by Martin F. Schmidt and Dee Brown, Charles Scribners & Sons, New York, 1948.

In early photos Geronimo is so beautifully and belligerently at home in the chaparral, and he almost always has his rifle ready. (I hope he took that rifle from a soldier, but he could just as well have dressed up as a *vaquero* and bought it in a store.) Later, in the twentieth century, when he is not allowed a rifle or his chaparral, he puts on your hat, takes the wheel, and stares the camera down. This photo makes clear that no matter what had been taken from him, he had given up nothing. This photo is exactly like earlier photos of Geronimo, when he was obviously at war. If Geronimo had been defeated, he would have stayed on the reservation, dressed 'properly' for America's Indian myths.

Geronimo is messing with established reality here. The guy next to him is 'doing the right thing', with his noble pose, his Plains head-dress and pipe bag. Another guy, in the back seat, is doing 'youthful bravado'. Geronimo's action, his stance, is a brilliant intervention. Look at his face getting in your face. He continues to resist, to *maintain*, through changes. Look closely at the other guys. He is solidly and deliberately *set*, in a posture that seems to be attempting to project words, thoughts, at us, instead of known symbols. He is trying to photograph himself, but from within. He is taking a photograph of his thoughts.

It is as though he was using his personal integrity, no matter what the situation, to reach, to challenge our own personal integrity. That implied a profound trust. He was not saying, "I am a human being"; he was saying, "I know *you* are human beings..."

1992

On the Edge of Town

Where are we? We are in the city. The suburbs are part of the city, only not 'downtown'. A small town is the city, always aspiring to 'grow'; if it does not 'grow', it may 'die'.

Our being in the city, citizens, is what makes us civilised. There have been many, but it is hard for us to imagine a 'great sylvanisation', like a 'great civilisation'. Civilisations, cities, build signs and monuments by definition and are then recognised by their signs. The sign of forest dwellers is the absence of monuments.

It is not that nation-states evolved from city-states; nation-states *are* city-states. Lesser cities within the state are complicit in their coercion by the city, and the state has learned better how to manipulate rural areas into the city's service.

But where is the city? It is in the state; that is, it is in itself. That has become more and more true as the political system concomitant to industrialisation (and then post-industrialisation) gained ascendance. At one time New York was a city *on an island*; it was a city with a location in the physical world. In this century even the island itself has been replaced by the Borough of Manhattan. Paris was once situated in a vast and fertile plain. Now it is in France, but France is an invention of Paris.

These removals are the original project of cities. Unlike villages or settlements, cities always establish themselves *against* their environment. Like Gilgamesh's city, they intend rape and pillage in their areas so that they will become strong enough to transcend them. Ideas of transcendence are not 'human' ideas; they are civilised, citified ideas. Europe's Utopian schemes, from industrial 'progress' to Thomas More to Plato, are about the perfect city, perfectly removed from, yet parasitic upon, the Earth. At that juncture begins spirituality, which is a concept in opposition to materiality, or place. It is not too 'outland'ish to make a leap of reason from that and assume that the root of civilised aesthetics is imbedded in the spiritual escapism of transcendence. What is modern aesthetics other than contemplation at a distance for the purpose of transcendence?

Because the 'nature' of civilisation is exclusivity, civilisation imagines only itself and the 'un-civilised'. When it imagines nature benevolently, it produces the Great Outdoors — outdoors: not in my house, not in my city, not protected by my walls. Malevolently, it produces the 'wilderness'.

An agenda has been developed from this: it is to take over the world. When the 'outdoors' and the 'wilderness' become the city's property, it becomes necessary to protect them and possible to appreciate them. The natural world can become a recreational facility.

I will continue that idea later, after an intervention about the specifics of the Americas. Here it is necessary to attempt both a political investigation and a moral one. We need a moral stance, as difficult as that is in the US, where even George Bush assumes a moral stance.

When an American Indian addresses the issues of pollution and misuse of the land, most often someone points out that the American Indian record on ecology is not as perfect as is sometimes suggested. What is thereby presented as a detached, scientific view is in actuality an immoral agenda. It is to excuse the invasion and continued repression of American Indian peoples.

The 'New World' has environmental problems specific to its vicious colonisation by Europeans that cannot logically be made peripheral, nor be considered as problems of the 'past'. The ongoing project of the takeover of these lands is in itself a contradictory project. The 'American family farm' has always been seen as a business, a way of making money. On the other hand, to 'maximise profits' and to allow familiarity is a matter of 'Euroforming' two entire continents.

This is built into the economic and cultural structures of the US. It is no longer deniable — if it ever was — that the American Indian population numbered in the millions before the arrival of Europeans; how, then, is it possible to continue to speak of 'the wilderness', 'the trackless wilderness'?

Early travellers in the Southeast reported semi-domesticated herds of forest buffalo and flocks of turkeys, as well as an abundance of farm produce. There was (and still is) a pretence that no one really lived here before Europeans, and that we who were here were not 'using' the land, that we lived similarly to other animals. But the land also looked 'uninhabited' to Europeans accustomed to the despoliation caused by city life. Yet even today that phenomenon does not usually cause Euro-Americans to analyse their 'cultural heritage'. There is no serious question of advanced technology — simply a question of who the technology primarily serves. There have been

no humans without technology, but Europe developed a political, ideological definition of technology that serves the city/transcendence.

The Sioux writer Vine Deloria Jr. has written that American Indians are the miner's canary — that whatever happens to us first later happens to the country. This might be true, except that the US does not notice what happens to us, and in the short run the US public has always profited by stealing from Indians — land, timber, gold, petroleum (will the reader try to imagine the true history of that illegal state called Oklahoma?), iron, uranium, coal. In the 1980s I was asked to help organise a tribunal on American Indian water rights. Our water supplies on reservations were about to be seriously depleted. Surely, it seemed, here was one area where theft from us would not benefit the American public and that people would see that and support us. This was not true. No environmental organisation, no legal organisation would even listen to our case. Last year the *Nation* magazine produced a special issue for its 125th anniversary, chronicling struggles for human rights through all those years. American Indian struggles were not included.

Do American Indians have a 'vision' that might help this country find its direction? At this time, that is practically beside the point. Alan Michelson, a Mohawk artist, reports that on a panel with white Americans a Christian minister said to him, "You are the people who must now be our guides in how to live in this country". Michelson thought, "You've taken everything else, and now you want to take our wisdom too".

Because of its history, the US developed a cultural arrogance that quickly became a barrier to intellectual thought. There is something sincerely naive about a requirement for answers without analysis, or about analysis without intellectual commitment. Here we most often substitute ideology for intellectuality. There can be no useful perceptions of the US situation, whether in matters of ecology or any other matter, so long as the cultural arrogance arising from theft and invasion of other peoples' lands cannot be intellectually explored. People become complicit in schemes of misleading solutions, for short-term gains.

There is a basic problem in the US from which most other problems come: the denial of reality. The US is not here, within these specific lands. It is in Europe. It is Europe's ghost, and as a pure spirit it is everything Europe would like to be. (I speak of the European states, not necessarily the peoples.) It has brought Europe to the 'New World', where it sits a few inches off the savage, dangerous ground. (American mining companies refer to that ground as the

'overburden'.) There are too many dangerous animals here, and poisonous plants and insects. Surly natives. Why is a chicken egg a generic 'egg' in the US? What exactly makes a turkey egg, quail egg, or duck egg substandard, or less real? Its foreignness — that is, its nativeness. But eggs, like beef, are for Europeans an important symbol of abundance, of the Good Life, and Americans have been willing to turn over vast resources to the industries that produce such 'goods'.

Let me continue with this silliness just a bit longer: as Americans become more 'health conscious' they eat less beef and fewer eggs. They eat more wheat. Pasta made from wheat is good. Maize cannot possibly be the staff of life, only wheat. While many people now see the non-viability of reducing entire continents to cattle ranches, the ecological destruction caused by the overabundance of 'amber waves of grain' — grain that is still too European to be ecologically sound in the 'New World' — can be seen as simply a glitch in a system that is 'goodness'.

The 'Americans', the European settlers, have yet to arrive in their 'New World'. To do so would mean actually to live here, instead of living on imported 'goods'. That, in turn, would entail looking at the victims in the 'wilderness'.

It is also dangerous, of course; who knows what poison ivy really looks like? Better to live safely in 'new' Jersey, 'new' York, or under the protection of the British crown, in 'Virginia', 'Carolina' or 'Georgia'. The American states are political entities. Their boundaries have no geography (except rivers, in some cases). They may be seen on a map only. Without road signs how might you know western Texas from eastern New Mexico? By the governor.

Where are we? We are in the European City. The US is a political/cultural construction *against* the American continent; the US is an un-American activity. It promotes and enforces its un-Americanness by 'appreciation' of America. There has never been a culture that so loved the 'outdoors' as does the US, nor one that has so insulated itself from nature. The civilised concept of the 'wilderness' as land without humans already sets humans apart from 'nature'. Although one must continue to eat nature, and 'inhabit' a part of nature (the body), one may do so guiltily, in expectation of a better world achieved through denial.

If Walt Disney did not exist we would have to invent him. Theme parks are the metaphor for the US. Coney Island, the first theme park, is an extension of Brighton Beach, where the old Punch-and-Judy shows brought the beach and the ocean itself into the city. Now mountains may be skied down, rapids may be rafted down as nature's roller

coaster. The wilderness is thrilling. Our gear and our park rangers provide just the right amount of protection to allow bravery into the thrills — just like taking a fast drive on the open road in a Cherokee Chief.

A problem for civilisation, however, is that Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty holds true for any system. How beautiful when something unofficial happens. Remember when you were young and a wild animal strayed into town? It caused the same shock as would seeing someone walking naked in the city. It is nature where there should be no nature. I expect it is no longer true, but when I was young towns still had edges, no-man's lands, that were not yet the surrounding farms. This was where the city's refuse was casually dumped, so that the edge of town was not a 'natural' place. There lived raccoons, opossums, rats, snakes, bobcats, skunks, hobos who were in fact outlaws (not homeless street people), families of African-Americans and displaced Indians. All of us, shunned by the city, used the city's surplus. I so loved the dumps, where one could find the products of civilisation elegantly, surrealistically juxtaposed with pieces of wood, magic rocks, bones and wild flowers, that they have remained the metaphor by which I define myself.

The city could not see us, could not admit our existence, could not control us. We used it.

There is a painting by Goya of a proud and princely young man in his castle with his large mastiff lying behind him. The dog is tied with an iron chain, but he has bitten the chain to pieces and gazes at the man unfaithfully. Do I just imagine that the dog resembles Goya himself?

We know the world and communicate with the world basically through metaphor. Language is metaphor. Civilisation sells the idea that its truth, its narrative, is literal and real, not metaphoric. Hence it needs to control and deny metaphor. But the metaphors of visual arts are complex and sociable, not controllable. Coyote says, "Aha, this is my natural habitat".

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