THE TRICKSTER SHIFT:  
A NEW PARADIGM IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN NATIVE ART

by

ALLAN J. RYAN

A.O.C.A., The Ontario College of Art, 1967  
B.G.S., Brandon University, 1975  
M.A., The University of Arizona, 1977

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
in  
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Section of Anthropology and Sociology)

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
August 1995

© Allan J. Ryan, 1995
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

(Signature)

Department of Anthropology
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date Aug. 31/1995
ABSTRACT

Over the last fifteen years a select group of professionally trained and politically astute Canadian artists of Native ancestry has produced a compelling body of work that owes much of its power to a wry and ironic sense of humour rooted firmly in oral tradition. More than a critical/political strategy, such humour reflects a widespread cultural and communal sensibility embodied in the mythical Native American Trickster. The present study explores the influence of this comic spirit on the practice of several artists through the presentation of a "Trickster discourse," that is, a body of overlapping and interrelated verbal and visual narratives by tricksters and about trickster practice.

Most of the research for this project took place between January 1990 and November 1991 and involved extended conversations with artists, elders, actors, writers, linguists, curators and art historians in six Canadian provinces. Over 80 hours of interviews were amassed along with several hundred slides and photographs of artists' work. From this body of material 140 images were selected for analysis with well over 100 commentaries and reflections on practice excerpted from the interviews. These verbal and visual narratives have been gathered together under the broad headings of self-identity, representation, political control and global presence.
In light of the highly eclectic and hybrid nature of these narratives, an eclectic and hybrid conceptual framework has been constructed to consider them. Accordingly, a multiplicity of theoretical concepts has been braided together and interwoven throughout the chapters to reflect the complexity, density and interconnectedness of the material. To convey the sense of multilayered communication and simultaneous conversation, quotation and footnote have been used extensively as parallel and overlapping texts. In this they constitute a form of hypertext or hypermedia. More importantly, the text honours and participates in a non-linear process of representation shared by many of the artists.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Note on the Structure of the Text</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1</strong> The Trickster Shift: A New Paradigm in Contemporary Canadian Native Art</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2</strong> The (Re)Creation of Identity: Images of Opposition and Inclusion</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3</strong> Subverting the Systems of Representation: Double-Play in the Gallery and Academy</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 4</strong> Subverting the Systems of Power and Control: A New Semiotic</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterword Coyote's Encounter with Anthropology</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postscript</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURES

Artist, title, date, media, size (height precedes width) and initial exhibition. In some cases the data available or supplied by the artist is incomplete.

fig. 1 Bill Powless, *Beach Blanket Brave*, 1984, acrylic on canvasboard, 51 x 41 cm. (20" x 16"). Exhibited in *Art of the Seventh Generation: Iroquois Symbols on Canvas and Paper*, Roberson Centre for the Arts and Sciences, Binghamton, New York, May-July, 1986.


fig. 6 Bill Powless, "I thought 'we' were...", 1988, pen and ink cartoon. *Tekawennake*, 1988.


fig. 8 Gerald McMaster, *Counting Coup*, 1990, acrylic and oil pastel on matt board, 96 x 116 cm. (38" x 46"). One of sixteen images in *The cowboy/Indian Show*, exhibited at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, February-April, 1991.

fig. 9 Gerald McMaster, *What becomes a Legend most?*, 1990, acrylic and oil pastel on matt board, 94 x 114 cm. (37" x 45"). In *The cowboy/Indian Show*. 
fig. 10  Carl Beam, .....becoming a stamp and all the
thrills thereof..., 1991, photo emulsion transfer,
7.25" x 10.5" (18 x 27 cm.). Colour slide
courtesy Ufundi Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario.

fig. 11  Gerald McMaster, Shaman explaining the theory of
transformation to cowboys, acrylic and oil pastel
on matt board, diptych, 114 x 94 cm. (45" x 37")
(each). In The cowboy/Indian Show.

fig. 12  Gerald McMaster, Kaupois-uk, 1990, acrylic and oil
pastel on matt board, 114 x 94 cm. (45" x 37")
In The cowboy/ Indian Show.

fig. 13  Gerald McMaster, Mamas, Don’t Let Your Babies Grow
Up to Be Cowboys, 1983, graphite on paper, 127 x
97 cm. (50" x 38"). Exhibited in Indian Art ’83,
Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario, May-
June, 1983.

fig. 14  Carl Beam, Self-Portrait as John Wayne, Probably,
1989-90?, photo emulsion steel engraving, 122 x 81
cm. (48" x 32"). One of twelve images in The
Columbus Suite series. 35mm colour slide courtesy
of the artist. A print from the same plate, using
different colouring and titled, Self-Portrait as
John Wayne, forms part of the series (owned by the
Agnes Etherington Art Centre Museum, Queen’s
University, Kingston, Ontario), which was
exhibited at The Gettysburg College Art Gallery,

fig. 15  Rebecca Belmore, True Grit (A Souvenir). 1988-89,
mixed media (sewn fabric with acrylic on canvas
panel, fringe, stuffing), 178 x 183 x 25 cm. (70"
x 72" x 10"). In See Jane Sew Strontium, an
exhibition of non-traditional quilts dedicated to
Joyce Wieland, Definitely North Gallery, Thunder

fig. 16  Carl Beam, Self-Portrait in My Christian Dior
Bathing Suit, 1980, watercolour, 102 x 64 cm. (40"
x 25"). Exhibited in Altered Egos: The Multimedia
Work of Carl Beam, Thunder Bay Art Gallery,

fig. 17  Ron Noganosh, I Couldn’t Afford a Christian Dior
Bathing Suit, n.d., mixed media. Exhibited in
Hard and Soft, University of Sherbrooke Cultural
Centre, Sherbrooke, Quebec, December, 1989.

fig. 19  Carl Beam, *Burying the Ruler*, 1991, photo emulsion transfer and ink on paper, 75 x 104 cm. (29.5" x 41"). 35mm slide courtesy of the Ufundi Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario.

fig. 20  Carl Beam, *Burying the Ruler*, 1991, photo emulsion transfer and acrylic paint on wooden cabinet, 19 x 39 x 15 cm. (7.5" x 15.5" x 6"). AJ Ryan photo, Ufundi Gallery, Ottawa, April, 1992.


fig. 25  Shelley Niro, *The Iroquois is a Highly Developed Matriarchal Society*, detail (frame 2) of above.


fig. 28 Shelley Niro, Portrait of the Artist Sitting with a Killer Surrounded by French Curves, 1991, hand-tinted black-and-white photograph, 29.15 x 37.1 cm. (11" x 14"), full matte shown. Exhibited in Mohawks in Beehives.

fig. 29 Shelley Niro, Portrait of the Artist Sitting with a Killer Surrounded by French Curves, detail.

fig. 30 Shelley Niro, 500 Year Itch, 1992, three hand-tinted and sepia-toned black-and-white photographs mounted horizontally in a single mat. Each photograph 29.15 x 37.1 cm. (11" x 14"). Exhibited in This Land Is Mime Land, Ufundi Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario, December, 1992.

fig. 31 Shelley Niro, 500 Year Itch, detail (frame 1) of above.

fig. 32 Jane Ash Poitras, History 1990, 1990, mixed media. 35 mm colour slide courtesy of the artist.


fig. 34 Lawrence Paul Yuxwelupten, Face Painting of a Woman, 1988, acrylic on canvas?, 99 x 91 cm. (39" x 36"). 35mm colour slide courtesy of the artist.

fig. 35 Lawrence Paul Yuxwelupten, Boy Toy, 1988, acrylic on canvas? 35 mm colour slide courtesy of the artist.


fig. 37 George Littlechild, Just Because My Father Was a Whiteman Doesn't Mean I'm Any Less An Indian, 1987, 76 x 81 cm. (30" x 32"). 35mm colour slide courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec.


fig. 39 Jane Ash Poitras, Fort Chip Sewing Club, 1988, oil. In Fort Chipewyan Breakfast Club.
fig. 40

fig. 41

fig. 42

fig. 43

fig. 44

fig. 45

fig. 46
Lyle Wilson, *Ode to Billy Holm...Lalooska...Duane Pasco...& Johnathon Livingston Seagull* (sic), 1980, etching, 24.5 x 28.5 cm. (9.6" x 11.2"). Exhibited in *Lyle Wilson: When Worlds Collide*, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, 1989.

fig. 47

fig. 48

fig. 49
Jim Logan, *Jesus Was Not a Whiteman*, 1992, acrylic and mixed-media on canvas, 100.5 cm x 84 cm. (40" x 33"). In *The Classical Aboriginal Series*. 
fig. 50  Jim Logan, *The Diners Club (No Reservation Required)*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 89.5 x 135.5 cm. (35" x 53"). In *The Classical Aboriginal Series*.


fig. 52  Joane Cardinal-Schubert, *Contemporary Artifact--Medicine Bundles: The Spirits are Forever Within*, 1986, plaster on wire mesh, oil, graphite, urethane, 68.6 x 38 x 24 cm. (27" x 15" x 9.4"), 104 x 45.7 x 17.8 cm. (41" x 18" x 7"). Exhibited in *Stardusters*, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Thunder Bay, Ontario, November-December, 1986.

fig. 53  Joane Cardinal-Schubert, *Remember Dunbow, Preservation of a Species: Warshirt Series*, 1988, wall installation, oil, conte, charcoal on rag paper, found objects, clear vinyl, wood, 102 x 91 cm. (38.25" x 34.25") each. In *Beyond History*.


fig. 60  Peter B. Jones, *Still Life*, 1990, stoneware, clay, 19 x 50.5 x 46.5 cm. (7.5" x 20" x 18"). Exhibited in *First Nations Art '90*, Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario, 1990.


fig. 63 Carl Beam, *Chronos 2*, 1989, mixed media on plexiglas, 91 x 122 cm. (36" x 48"). In *The Columbus Boat, Phase 1*.

fig. 64 Carl Beam, *How To Ride A Horse Properly*, 1989-90?, photo emulsion steel engraving, 122 x 81 cm. (48" x 32"). In *The Columbus Suite* series. A print from the same plate, using different colours and titled, *Riding Demonstration* forms part of the series owned by the Agnes Etherington Art Centre Museum, Queen’s University. See data, fig. 14.


fig. 66 Gerald McMaster, *Cowboy Anthropology*, 1990, acrylic and oil pastel on mat board, 116 x 96 cm. (46" x 38"). In *The cowboy/Indian Show*.


fig. 71  Jim Logan, *It's A Kodak Moment*, 1991, acrylic on canvas, 91 x 152 cm. (36" x 60"). 35mm slide courtesy of the artist. Exhibited at Leona Lattimer (commercial) Gallery, Vancouver, BC.

fig. 72  Gerald McMaster, *Changing the Guard*, 1983, graphite on paper, 75.5 x 56.5 cm. (30" x 22"). Exhibited in *Indian Art '83*, Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario, May-June, 1983.

fig. 73  Gerald McMaster, *RCMP and Their World-Famous Dogs*, 1983, graphite on paper, 56 x 76 cm. (22" x 30"). 35mm slide courtesy of the artist.

fig. 74  Gerald McMaster, *In His Hands He's Got the Whole World*, 1984, graphite on paper, 55.9 x 76.2 cm. (22" x 30"). Exhibited in *Riel Remembered*, Thunder Bay Art Gallery, July-August, 1985.

fig. 75  Gerald McMaster, *Trick or Treaty*, 1990, acrylic and oil pastel on matt board, 116 x 96 cm. (45.6" x 39"). In *The cowboy/Indian Show*.

fig. 76  Gerald McMaster, *Haul The Quest Was One*, 1990, acrylic and oil pastel on matt board, 114 x 94 cm. (45" x 37"). In *The cowboy/Indian Show*.

fig. 77  Bob Boyer, *A Minor Sport in Canada*, 1985, oil and acrylic on cotton blanket, 187 cm x 122 cm (70.5" x 83.75"). In *In the Shadow of the Sun*.


fig. 80  Shelley Niro, *Red Heels Hard*, (detail), six hand-tinted black-and-white photographs with handwritten text, mounted horizontally in a single mat. Each photograph 8" x 10" (21.2 cm x 26.5 cm). Exhibited in *Mohawks in Beehives*.


fig. 82  Carl Beam, *Calvary to Cavalry*, 1989-90?, photo emulsion steel engraving, 122 x 81 cm. (48" x 32"). In *The Columbus Suite*.
fig. 83  Jim Logan, *Let Us Compare Miracles*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 100.5 x 84 cm. (39.5" x 33"). In *The Classical Aboriginal Series*.

fig. 84  Jane Ash Poitras, *The Virgin Bullet*, (detail), 1991, mixed media collage on canvas, five panels, 60.9 x 45.7 cm. (24" x 18") each.

fig. 85  Ron Noganosh, *Dominus Vobiscum*, 1988, .44 magnum bullets, silver dollar, plastic G.I. Joe doll, wood, velvet, plexiglass, 57 x 57 cm. (22.5" x 22.5"). In *Beyond History*.


fig. 88  Carl Beam, *Semiotic Converts*, 1989, photo-emulsion steel engraving, 122 x 81 cm. (48" x 32"). In *The Columbus Suite*.


fig. 90  Carl Beam, *Chronos 1*, 1989, mixed media on plexiglas, 15 x 122 cm. (36" x 48"). In *The Columbus Project, Phase 1*.

fig. 91  George Littlechild, *I Looked Out My Teepee One Day and All I Saw Was This*, 1987, acrylic on paper, 76 x 56 cm. (30" x 22"). 35mm slide courtesy of the artist.

fig. 92  George Littlechild, *Boarding School Wallpaper*, 1987, acrylic on paper, 56 x 76 cm. (22" x 30"). 35mm slide courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec.

fig. 94  Jane Ash Poitras, *A Sacred Prayer for A Sacred Island*, 1991, detail (of second of three panels), 198.12 x 177.8 cm. (78" x 70"). Exhibited in *Indigena: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years*.


fig. 96  Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, *The Universe is So Big the White Man Confines Me to My Reservation*, 1987, acrylic on canvas, 183 cm x 228 cm (72" x 92"). Exhibited in *In the Shadow of the Sun*.


fig. 98  Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, *Dance Me On Sovereignty, Dance Me Outside Anywhere I Want*, n.d., 249 x 173 cm. (98" x 68"). 35 mm slide courtesy of the artist.

fig. 99  Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, *D.I.A. Secretary*, 1987, acrylic on canvas with plastic wire, 70 x 160 cm. (27.5" x 63"). Exhibited in *Crossed Cultures*.


fig. 101  Shelley Niro, *Judge Me Not*, 1992, three hand-tinted and sepia-toned black-and-white photographs mounted horizontally in a single mat. Each photograph 11" x 14" (29.15 cm x 37.1 cm). Exhibited in *This Land Is Mime Land*.


fig. 103  Bob Boyer, *No E & H Please, We’re Treaty*, 1986?, oil and acrylic on blanket, 127 x 185.4 cm. (50" x 73"). Exhibited at the Brignall Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, 1986.


fig. 108 Peter B. Jones, *Par For the Course*, detail.

fig. 109 Ya’Ya Ts’itxstap Chuck Heit, *The Oka Golf Classic*, 1991, red cedar housepost, 244 x 122 cm. (8’ x 4’). Exhibited in *Okanata*.

fig. 110 Gerald McMaster, *Oka-boy/Oh! Kowboy*, 1990, acrylic and oil pastel on matt board, 94 x 114 cm. (37" x 45"). In *The cowboy/Indian Show*.

fig. 111 Gerald McMaster, *No Life Like It*, 1990, acrylic and oil pastel on matt board, 116 x 96 cm. (46" x 38"). In *The cowboy/Indian Show*.

fig. 112 Bill Powless, 1990, "We’ll just have to finish our game...", pen and ink cartoon, *Tekawennake*, July 18.


fig. 114 Bill Powless, 1990, "What are you going to the party as?", pen and ink cartoon, *Tekawennake*, October 17.

fig. 116  Carl Beam, *Columbus and Bees*, 1989-90?, photo-emulsion steel engraving, 122 x 81 cm. (48" x 32"). In *The Columbus Suite*.

fig. 117  Bob Boyer, *Trains-N-Boats-N-Plains: The Nina, the Santa Maria and a Pinto*, 1991, wall installation, three oil painted blankets and other mixed-media materials. Approx. 549 x 305 cm (18' x 10') installed. In *Indigena: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years*.

fig. 118  Bob Boyer, *Trains-N-Boats-N-Plains: The Nina, the Santa Maria and a Pinto*, detail (central panel) of above.

fig. 119  Bill Powless, "SUPER HERO!", 1990, pen and ink cartoon, Tekawennake, June 27.

fig. 120  Shelley Niro/Anna Gronau, 1993, modified image of Columbus on the invitation to the March 4, 1993 premiere of the Bay of Quinte Productions film, *It Starts With a Whisper*, at the Euclid Theatre, Toronto, Ontario.

fig. 121  Jim Logan, *Unreasonable History*, (detail), mixed media, 100 x 85 cm. (39" x 34"), 1991? In *The Classical Aboriginal Series*.

fig. 122  Jim Logan, *Memorial Blanket for Eddy (My Marilyn)*, 1991?, mixed media, 99 x 73 cm. (40" x 34"). In *The Classical Aboriginal Series*.


fig. 126  Gerald McMaster, *Glasnost*, 1990, acrylic and oil pastel on matt board, 114 x 94 cm. (45" x 37"). In *The cowboy/Indian Show*.


fig. 130  Edward Poitras, "Witness" koshare clown doll, (installation detail), mixed-media. In *et in America ego*.


fig. 132  Ron Noganosh, *It Takes Time*, 1983, mixed-media sculpture, 154.5 x 36 x 49 cm. (61" x 14" x 19"). In *In the Shadow of the Sun*.


fig. 134  Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, *Native Winter Snow*, 1987, acrylic on canvas?, 125 x 184 cm. (49" x 72.5"). 35mm colour slide courtesy of the artist.

fig. 135  Jim Logan, *The Three Environmentalists*, 1991-92?, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152 cm. (72" x 60"). In *The Classical Aboriginal Series*.

fig. 137  

fig. 138  
Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, *The Environmentalist*, 1985, acrylic on canvas, 168 x 213 cm. (66" x 84"). Exhibited in *Indianische Künstler der Westküste Kanadas*, Ethnological Museum of the University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland, 1989.

fig. 139  
Gerald McMaster, *Post-Modern*, 1988, acrylic paint on wood and wire, 35 x 30.5 x 3.6 cm. (13.8" x 12" x 1.4") 35 mm colour slide courtesy of the artist. Illustrated in Ryan 1990: 11.

Postscript  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the following people for making time in their busy lives to indulge my passion for humour and irony, and sharing their knowledge, experiences and images with me. The document is the richer for each contribution.


Also, Samuel Corrigan, Leigh Syms, Robert Baker, Ann Beam, Lynn McMaster, Chel Niro, Mike Schubert, Clint Buehler, Jerrilynn Harper, Terry Martens, Craig MacAulay and the staff at the Tekawennake-New Credit Reporter newspaper. Special thanks to Linda Hutcheon for her theory of parody which became an invaluable concept in structuring this dissertation, and for her friendship and enthusiastic encouragement.

I would also like to acknowledge the members of my doctoral dissertation committee, Marjorie Halpin, chair, Robin Ridington, Bruce Miller and, from 1989-1994 Marvin Cohodas.

This research was funded in part by a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1988-1991.
FOREWORD

The following four essays by this writer have been adapted or excerpted for this document:


For my wife, Rae, and our two sons, Noka and D'Arcy who no longer have to ask, "How many more pages left to write now, Daddy?"
1

INTRODUCTION

That the trickster and the clown have become major metaphors for the artist in this century with its increasing self-consciousness of the creative process is no accident. They have been artists for a long time.

Barbara Babcock, 1975

Clowns are rarely asked what they're up to, and seldom listened to when they're asked.

Barbara Babcock, 1984

All art is political and the ideas that art generates and the images it creates have power....These creative efforts [by Canadian Native artists] are both survival strategies and celebrations of self-empowerment...

Thomas King, 1991

In May of 1989 the Vancouver Art Gallery mounted the exhibition *Beyond History*, a collection of new works in mixed-media by ten Canadian Native artists—Carl Beam, Bob Boyer, Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Domingo Cisneros, Robert Houle, Mike MacDonald, Ron Noganosh, Jane Ash Poitras, Edward Poitras and Pierre Sioui. In the catalogue to the show co-curator Tom Hill (in Duffek and Hill 1989: 5, emphasis added) wrote that "the shared cultural origins and parallel ideologies" of these ten artists "form an aesthetic." In May of the following year Joane Cardinal-Schubert, one of the

---

1 Throughout this document the terms "Native," "aboriginal," "indigenous," "Indian" and "Metis" are used to refer to Canada's original inhabitants. In recent years the term "First Nations" has become a preferred term of self-reference in some circles to underscore claims to a separate identity and inherent sovereign status.
participants in this exhibition, created a whimsical installation in a Montreal gallery commemorating the artists in *Beyond History*. She called it *Art Tribe*.²

With good reason. These individuals—and a select group of others who share the same aesthetic—have much in common. Collectively, they constitute a loose alliance of socially aware, politically active and professionally trained individuals of roughly the same age, who have, over the last fifteen years, exhibited with one another, taught about one another, written about one another, curated exhibits for one another and to some extent influenced one another.³ Not surprisingly, their work often addresses the many social and political problems facing aboriginal peoples today. What *may* be a surprise, however, is the wry and ironic humour that permeates much of their art. Is this part of the aesthetic as well? If so, is it merely the shrewd deployment of a familiar critical strategy, or does it reflect a broader cultural sensibility that would probably be lost on most non-Native viewers (and possibly some Native viewers as well)? Moreover, if such a sensibility is indeed present, would it necessarily

² "We were the stars--elevated--but we were still the "ten little Indians" she (interview, 1991) says. See APPENDIX 1, p. 223 for Cardinal-Schubert's detailed description of this installation.

³ In this, they might be said to resemble a "school" of art rather than a tribe.
manifest itself in the finished artwork? Or might it remain an aspect of practice alone?

These were the pivotal questions that set this study in motion, and led to a series of spirited and illuminating conversations conducted over a twenty-three month period (January 1990-November 1991) in six provinces with various members of the extended "Art Tribe" (seven of whom took part in Beyond History) as well as Native elders, linguists, actors, performance artists, curators and art historians. What emerged from our discussions was the conviction on my part that there was indeed a sensibility—a spirit—at work (or at play) in the practice of many of these artists, grounded in a fundamentally "comic" (as opposed to "tragic") worldview and embodied in the traditional Native trickster.

---

Excerpts from a January 1994 interview with Metis artist Jim Logan have been included in this study as well. See APPENDIX 2, p. 226, for a Record of Interviews and APPENDIX 3, p. 229 for brief biographical notes. Several significant national and international events anchor this period in historical time. Their presence is registered in various conversations excerpted and the works reproduced in this study. Among the more notable: Elijah Harper’s surprising defeat of the Federal Government’s Meech Lake Accord, the Mohawk standoff at Oka, Quebec, the War in the Persian Gulf, the impending Canadian Constitutional referendum, the sweeping success of the film, Dances With Wolves and the approaching 1992 Columbus Quincentenary celebrations which precipitated the exhibitions Indigena: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and Land Spirit Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada to which several artists interviewed contributed. See APPENDIX 4, p. 231 for a brief description and list of participants.
In fact, several artists cited the Trickster as a direct influence on some aspect of their work. Secondly, most agreed there was indeed something that could be labelled "Native humour"—a comic and communal attitude that transcends geographical boundaries and tribal distinctions characterized by frequent teasing, outrageous punning, constant wordplay, surprising association, extreme subtlety, layered and serious reference, common concerns and above all compassion. These qualities are amply illustrated in the verbal and visual narratives gathered together in this study under the headings of self-identity, representation, political control and global presence.

In light of the highly eclectic and hybrid nature of these narratives an eclectic and hybrid conceptual framework has been constructed to consider them. Set out in the following chapter, it begins with Carl Beam's "Trickster shift" then weaves together theories relating to the Trickster spirit, comic vision, "mythic verism," irony, parody, postmodernism,

---

6 Cardinal-Schubert (interview, 1991) says, "With humour, what you might call 'Native humour,' there's always an escape. There's a light part of it that allows you to escape, or take it lighter than it's meant. And it's really a way of acceptance. It's competitive but it's accepted competitive. (laughs) 'You're OK, I'm OK' kind of stuff."

7 Due to technological inadequacies in the word processing programme—it will not break a long footnote and then skip an inserted figure page—each figure page is numbered as "a" following the text page which precedes it, i.e. 4a follows page 4.
semiotics, postcolonialism, sacred clowning and humour in its many manifestations: Native, resistance, black, gallows, toxic, healing. Especially useful for analysis are Gerald Vizenor’s (1989: 13) conceptualization of the trickster as a "doing" not a "being," David Carroll’s (1982: 75 in Vizenor 1989: 15) idea of "little dissident narratives," Gary Farmer’s (interview) description of "toxic humour," Jimmie Durham’s (1986: 1) notion of "turning around...on purpose," and Linda Hutcheon’s (1988: 26) re-definition of parody as "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity." And, of course, Gerald Vizenor’s (1989: 9) concept of "trickster discourse" is of seminal importance.
A NOTE ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

By genetic memory maybe...our minds have the ability to think laterally and not linear.

Jane Ash Poitras, Cree artist

More than invocations of authority, the quotation and the footnote are the means of transforming a monological performance into a dialogue, of opening one’s discourse to that of others. They are also the literate way of interrupting and commenting on one’s own text, of acknowledging that reading and writing, like any cultural performance, involve appropriating, absorbing, and transforming the texts of others.

Barbara Babcock, anthropologist

Hypertext is very different from more traditional forms of text....Reading, in hypertext, is understood as a discontinuous or non-linear process which, like thinking, is associative in nature, as opposed to the sequential process envisioned by conventional text.

John Slatin, computer researcher

This dissertation has been conceived as a "Trickster discourse" (Vizenor 1989: 9), that is, a discourse among tricksters, about tricksters and trickster practice, and as trickster, in the sense that the "trickster is a comic discourse, a collection of utterances in oral tradition" (Vizenor 1989: 191). It is at once open-ended, unfolding, evolving, incomplete. It is a discourse imagined in numerous verbal and visual narratives, and a multiplicity of authoritative voices. Charged with a playful spirit and a "messy vitality" (Venturi 1968 n.p. in Wilde 1981: 133), it delights in multilayered communication and simultaneous
conversation. It revels in surprise connection and "narrative chance" (Vizenor 1989: x). It defies univocal representation.

In the following pages quotation and footnote are used extensively to disburse the narrative voice(s) and reflect the intertextual nature of the discourse. Neither quotation nor footnote should be considered a secondary or subordinate text. Nor should the material included in the Appendix. At various points in the conversation other voices will intersect with the main text. In "a space where texts can talk to each other" (Babcock 1984: 107) non sequitur, song, poem, prose, and personal anecdote enrich and enliven the discourse. In some instances footnotes take the form of extended annotation and may include illustrations. In this they constitute a kind of "hypertext" or "hypermedia"--forms of non-sequential writing and visualizing that until recently were primarily associated with literary studies and computer science. More importantly, the text honours and participates to some degree in a non-linear process of representation shared by many of the artists interviewed.

I promised myself when I got here I wouldn’t try to pull any of this elder stuff on you—like [expounding on] the cosmic wisdom of Native people. I said, I’ll leave that to the elders, and just tell people that I’m a practicing artist. ...In this context, probably, nobody would recognize a shaman if they’d seen one right now. They’re looking for an old paradigm. The Trickster shift, they can’t recognize that thing. Well, I’ve been practicing that kind of stuff for quite awhile—in my own estimation of course—I’m quite an accomplished magician, a real magician.

Ojibway artist Carl Beam, at the opening of the exhibition, Indigena: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec, April 16, 1992

The above remarks from one of Canada’s preeminent Native artists reveal as much about the general public’s understanding of Native shamanic practice as they do its misunderstanding of contemporary Native artistic practice. Having denied his intention to comment on the "cosmic wisdom" of Native peoples, Beam, in characteristic trickster fashion, does just that, but in a most oblique manner. By directing viewers to reject as antiquated a paradigm which sees Native art as necessarily mystical and legend-bound, in favour of recognizing the active spirit of the traditional Native Trickster, Beam affirms a critical link between subversive

---

9 In early 1991, Beam (interview, 1991) was less than enthused about the name, Indigena, considering it harmless and bland, another embarrassing result of diplomatic and bureaucratic decision-making. He likened it to calling an exhibition by white people, Caucasia.
practice, aesthetic production, spiritual truth and cultural wisdom.

Cree playwright, Tomson Highway (1988a), explains this complex relationship in the following way,

In the same sense that Jesus Christ stands at the very, very centre of Christian mythology, we have a character in our mythological universe, in our dreamlife as a people, who stands at the very centre of that universe, and that character is the Trickster. That little guy, man or woman --it doesn't matter because the Cree language doesn't have any gender--who essentially straddles the consciousness of Man and God, translates reality from the Supreme Being, the Great Spirit, to the people and back and forth--without the spiritual health of that figure, I think Indian people are completely screwed.

I think it’s up to us, particularly as artists--people working with spiritual lives, which is essentially what artists do--they’re kind of priests of a sort, they serve that kind of purpose in the culture--without the revival and the bringing back of that essential character, the Trickster--Weesakeejak, Nanabush in Ojibway--I think we’ve had it, we’re up Shit Creek.10

American mixed blood Chippewa author, Gerald Vizenor, one of the most prolific writers of contemporary "Trickster narratives," also locates a comic spirit at the centre of Native cultural identity. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, Vizenor (In Bruchac 1987: 295) says

---

10 In 1986, Highway founded, along with a small group of fellow Native writers, the Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster. Based in Toronto, it sought to "consolidate and gain recognition for Native contributions to Canadian writing --to reclaim the Native voice in literature" (Keeshig-Tobias 1988, 1[1]: 3). That same year, Highway became artistic director of Native Earth Performing Arts, an enterprise dedicated to staging new works by Native playwrights.
Tribal cultures are comic or mostly comic. Yet they have been interpreted as tragic by social scientists...not tragic because they’re "vanishing" or something like that, but tragic in their worldview—and they’re not tragic in their worldview....In a tragic worldview people are rising above everything. And you can characterize Western patriarchal monotheistic manifest-destiny civilization as tragic. It doesn’t mean they’re bad, but they’re tragic because of acts of isolation, their heroic acts of conquering something, always overcoming adversity, doing better than whatever, proving something, being rewarded for it, facing the risks to do this and usually doing it alone and almost always at odds with nature. Part of that, of course, is the idea of the human being’s divine creation as superior. The comic spirit is not an opposite but it might as well be. You can’t act in a comic way in isolation. You have to be included. There has to be a collective of some kind. You’re never striving at anything that is greater than life itself. There’s an acceptance of chance. Sometimes things just happen and when they happen, even though they may be dangerous or even life-threatening, there is some humor. Maybe not at the instant of the high risk, but there is some humor in it. And it’s a positive, compassionate act of survival, it’s getting along.

Not surprisingly, Vizenor (in Bruchac p. 309, emphasis added) identifies a comic spirit as the defining characteristic of contemporary Native literature—the element that provides a work with a sense of cultural truth, or what he calls "mythic verism."

It is the attitude of the characters which gives it the mythic verism and that attitude is comic....It is something that is alive...the way time is handled and resolved, the tension in time, and the sense of comedy or comic spirit through imagination and a collective sense that people prevail and survive, get along, get by. They’re not at war with the environment, they’re not rising above, and there are no subtle references to manifest destiny [and] monotheistic superiority. All of that’s very subtle, but it’s there and I think you can find it and I think we can focus on it and I think we can make a theory of it.
In suggesting that Native literature can be theorized on the basis of the comic attitude of characters, Vizenor seems to be saying much the same thing as Beam when he proposes the "Trickster shift" as a new paradigm for understanding the practice of visual artists. If this is indeed the case, then similar attitudes could be expected to emerge from the conversations with visual artists interviewed for this project. Likewise, one could expect to find a similar worldview reflected in their work.

As a critical paradigm for examining the work of contemporary Native artists, what Beam calls the "Trickster shift" is best understood as process—as creative practice and subversive play whose ultimate goal is a radical shift in viewer perspective (and even political positioning) by "imagining and imaging" alternative perspectives. This is no idle intention. As Mary Douglas (1968: 364 ff.) has noted in her classic study of joke perception, the successful joke imagines the subversion of something formal and organized (a control) by something informal and energetic (that which is controlled) so that the balance of power is changed. The joke "affords opportunity for realizing that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective." "All jokes," Douglas says, "have this subversive effect on the dominant structure of ideas."
It is the practice of imagining and imaging,\textsuperscript{11} and not just the images imagined, that is central to this study. Vizenor (1989: 13) says that the Trickster is actually "a 'doing,' not an essence, not a museum being, not an aesthetic presence."\textsuperscript{12}

If this is the case, then evidence of trickster behaviour may not be present in the finished work (whatever the medium). A "trickster signature," or what I would call "authorial jesture," may not be apparent. In fact, trickster behaviour is seldom overt. A too discernable "trickster signature" would be suspect if, as Vizenor (1989: ix) contends, it is "an

---


\begin{quote}
We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves...The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined.
\end{quote}

Further to this, Louis Owens (1978/1990: 248, emphasis added), writing in the Afterword to Vizenor’s \textit{Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles}, says that the tribal trickster—whether in traditional mythology or in Vizenor’s fiction—has a "duty"

\begin{quote}
to amuse, surprise, shock, outrage, and generally trick us into self-knowledge...challeng[ing] us in profoundly disturbing ways to reimage moment by moment the world we inhabit. Trickster tests definitions of the self and concomitantly, the world defined in relation to that self.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{12} Given the author’s many works of fiction featuring "compassionate trickster" characters, (ex. Vizenor 1978/90, 1987a, 1988, 1991), this statement may seem puzzling. We may ask, with Laga (1994: 78), "How do we make sense of this notion of the trickster, simultaneously a presence and an absence?" I suggest that in this instance Vizenor is simply emphasizing "activity"—that Trickster identity is inextricably bound up in behaviour and defined by performance.
\end{quote}
uncertain humor that denies translation and tribal representations."

While an understanding of the Trickster as a "doing" rather than a "being" is most relevant to the present project, it is important not to lose sight of "that little guy" that Highway locates at the centre of the Native mythological universe. This figure would seem to be a definite "presence," albeit more energetic and peripatetic than aesthetic. Moreover, it is this Trickster whose countless adventures and comic exploits have entertained and educated generations of Native peoples, and whose influence has left a lasting impression on the practice of many Native artists. And it is this Trickster who still serves as a multi-faceted role model, with each artist taking inspiration from those qualities that provide the greatest amount of creative freedom.¹³

In the premier issue of The Magazine to Re-Establish the Trickster, editor, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (1988 1(1): 3) writes

The trickster is a figure found in oral cultures the world over, but he is special and central in the cultures of North America. Among his names here, in Canada, are Glooskap, Nanabojoj, Weesakejak, Napi, Raven, Hare, Coyote. Half hero, half fool, this figure is at once like each one of us and like none of us. Trickster tales are at once admonitions, instruction and entertainment.

¹³ For additional bibliographic references on the trickster literature see APPENDIX 5.1, p. 232.
According to anthropologist, Paul Radin (1956/1972: 155) in

The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology

[the overwhelming majority of all so-called trickster myths in North America give an account of the creation of the earth, or at least the transforming of the world, and have a hero who is always wandering, who is always hungry, who is not guided by normal conceptions of good or evil, who is either playing tricks on people or having them played on him and who is highly sexed. Almost everywhere he has some divine traits. These vary from tribe to tribe. In some instances he is regarded as an actual deity, in others as intimately connected with deities, in still others he is at best a generalized animal or human being subject to death.

Earlier in the book, Radin (p. xxiii) provides a basic personality profile of the Trickster which is still often cited.

In what must be regarded as its earliest and most archaic form, as found among the North American Indians, Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being.

While admitting that "every generation occupies itself with interpreting Trickster anew," since the "symbol which Trickster embodies is not a static one," (p. 168), the author (p. xxiv) nevertheless concludes that only if we view the Trickster as a psychological construct, "as an attempt by man to solve his problems inward and outward, does the figure of the Trickster become intelligible and meaningful." Needless
to say, this is not the conception put forth by Vizenor or Highway.

Radin (p. xxiv) does say that "laughter, humour and irony permeate everything Trickster does [and that] the reaction of the audience in aboriginal societies to both him and his exploits is prevalingly one of laughter tempered by awe," but there is little sense in all this of the Trickster as a "comic spirit" informing a communal worldview. Or, for that matter, informing the author's text. This is deadly (serious) prose. It is little wonder that Vizenor (1989: 187) writes, "social science subdues imagination and the wild trickster in comic narratives" and concludes (p. x) that "[a]nthropologists, in particular, are not the best interpreters of tribal literatures." He is not alone in this view. Barbara Babcock (1984: 102, citing Conrad Hyers 1973: 18) writes

Unfortunately for those who make us laugh, "analysis has a way of failing to participate in the very spirit which it would analyse, and therefore not only involving itself in an ironic self-contradiction, but in a violation and negation of that which it is attempting to do justice."

Once recognized, this is an ongoing dilemma for those within the academy who yet would address the subject.

The trickster qualities generally perceived as "positive" include being: a rule-breaker, boundary-tester, risk-taker, creator-transformer, spiritual, gender-neutral, curious, resilient, indestructible, adventurous, ingenious,
mischievous, playful, earthy, irreverent, cunning, and resourceful, able to live between borders deriving power from alternate realities, surviving by his/her wits, and "prevailing in good humor" in a comic world.\textsuperscript{14}

In many societies, trickster tales were, and still are, used to teach cultural truths—in a non-didactic fashion, of course—to people of all ages according to each person’s level of understanding. No doubt, this would add to the appeal. Referring to the Navaho practice of telling trickster tales, Barre Toelken (1969: 228 ff., emphasis added) writes

[O]ne is struck by the presence both of humour and of those cultural references against which the morality of Coyote’s actions may be judged....[The humour] functions as a way of directing the responses of the audience vis à vis significant moral factors. Causing children to laugh at an action because it is thought to be weak, stupid, or excessive is to order their moral assessment of it without recourse to open explanation or didacticism.

Such an indirect approach to education appears widespread. Recalling her own experience of hearing such stories as a child, Lushootseed Salish oral historian and professor, Vi Hilbert (1983: 198) says

While the stories were told to me in great detail, allowing for my delicate ears, the moral was never, ever explained to

\textsuperscript{14} For those familiar with the genre of Trickster narratives, it is obvious that this is a highly selective list. Character traits perceived as "negative," such as gluttony, deception, narcissism, cruelty or wanton sexuality, while useful for teaching proper social etiquette by negative example, are less likely to impact directly on artistic practice.
me. I had to figure that out for myself and I expect my students to do the same. It is my belief that most of our story tellers followed this practice.

Radin (1956/1972: xxiv) says, "Laughter, humor and irony permeate everything Trickster does." Yet, apart from the obvious entertainment value, the overall importance of these elements is frequently underestimated. Irony, in particular, seems to have escaped the attention of many analysts. This is unfortunate, for an appreciation of irony is not only important to understanding Trickster’s compelling attraction as hero and role model, but, I would argue, to understanding Native culture in general and contemporary Native artistic practice in particular.¹⁸

Irony, like the Trickster, can be extremely elusive—hard to pin down, not easily grasped. Alan Wilde (1981: 1) writes

> Somehow irony manages...to recast itself constantly into new and unpredictable modes. With all the resilience and tenacity of some allotropic element, it contrives both to declare its flexibility, its openness to change, and to retain its essential identity as a characteristic response to the polysemic world we inhabit.

A.E. Dyson (1965: 1) agrees. He says, "Irony is, in its very nature, the most ambivalent of modes, constantly changing colour and texture, occasionally suffering a sea-change into something rich and strange." Being "complex and unpredictable

¹⁸ Luiseno artist, James Luna (in Nemiroff, Houle and Townsend-Gault 1992: 192) says, "I think we Indians live in worlds filled with irony and I want to relate that in my works." See also, Deloria, p. 25, this chapter.
[and] fluctuating with mood and situation" an ironic attitude is therefore "too subtle in its possibilities for any simple definition."

Simple or not, a working definition becomes necessary. But which one? And whose? Quintilian (in Sperber and Wilson 1981: 295) views irony as "something which is the opposite of what is actually said"; Samuel Johnson (in Enright 1986: 5) considers it "a mode of speech of which the meaning is contrary to the words"; Sperber and Wilson (1981: 295) see it as "saying one thing and figuratively meaning the opposite;" and Kierkegaard (in Enright 1986: 3) regards it as "a riddle and its solution possessed simultaneously." Picking up on this notion of double-voice or double-vision, Allan Rodway (1962: 113) perhaps expresses it best, saying that "irony is not merely a matter of seeing a 'true' meaning beneath a 'false', but of seeing a double exposure...on one plate."

Just as the mere mention of the Trickster by a narrator can trigger in an audience "the expectation that this particular performance will cause important ideas to come alive in exciting ways" (Toelken 1969: 225), so too does the presence of the Trickster signal the probability that some aspect of the story will require ironic interpretation. Nowhere is the cultural need for, and appreciation of "ironic competence"--the ability to see a double exposure on one plate--made more
explicit than in an essay by Dell Hymes (1987) in which the author describes an infrequent, yet seemingly significant two-step pattern of ironic verbal exchange which he discovered in the Clackamas Chinook texts collected by Melville Jacobs in the 1920s. Close analysis of "Bluejay and his older sister", a tale in which the Trickster, Bluejay, interprets all of his sister's directions literally instead of ironically, leads Hymes (1987: 333, emphasis added) to conclude that the myth seems to draw upon the two-step pattern to highlight metalinguistic incompetence, incompetence in ironic exchange, and at the same time to entertain and instruct in the consequences of lack of competence. That the pattern is so used in a myth is evidence of its familiarity, even centrality, to the culture. In the myth cultural confidence and ironic competence are intertwined.

"Bluejay and his older sister" is by no means the only tale to stress the importance of linguistic and ironic competence. Dell Skeels (1954: 61) provides two further examples from the Nez Perce in which Coyote "misunderstands Fox, accepting the literal meanings of the words when Fox uses them figuratively.

---

16 Hymes (1987: 297, emphasis added) came to his understanding of this form of irony through an approach he calls "the ethnography of speaking": the need, descriptively, to identify the specific means which serve ironic function in a particular group of speakers, and comparatively, to go beyond identification of irony as an effect to identification of its role in the communicative economy of groups.

17 Søren Kierkegaard (1941: 450 in Babcock 1984: 122) has said, "Irony is a specific culture of the spirit." It would seem that here irony is the specific spirit of a culture.
and each time loses his food." Given the widespread distribution of Trickster tales among Native communities, it is more than probable that "ironic competence" is just as widespread. As for the present status of the two-step pattern of ironic exchange, Hymes (1987: 329, emphasis added) says, "I would like to stress this power of patterns of verbal humor, against difficult and even desperate circumstances, a power still evident in Indian country."


Irony is itself a "distinctive paradigm or patterning of facts, a re-composing in which the fact (e.g. 'having nothing') is seen within the creative presence of a contrary ('and possessing all things')" (Lynch: 14). Irony binds widely separated opposites into a single figure so that contraries appear to belong together. In Trickster chaos and order, sacred and profane, farce and meaning, silence and song, food and waste, word and event, pretended ignorance and pretended cunning, stone-life and flesh life, male and female, play and reality, compose not only an ironic symbol but a symbol of irony.

Trickster's character and exploits embody the process of ironic imagination. His dynamism of composition mocks,
shatters and re-forms the overly clear structures of the world and the overly-smooth images of the mind. In him the double-sidedness of reality reveals itself.

Sullivan (p. 238 ff.) goes on to say that Radin was particularly struck by the ubiquitous amount of social parody and inversion he encountered in the Winnebago texts.

If Wakdjunkaga [the Trickster] shams the shaman, chides chiefly privilege and satirizes social and religious custom ... in gross and absurd ways, he also perverts his own inversions. If he is negation, he also negates the negation. He "wows" us with a penetrating burlesque of all structures and forms, including his own, which parade as permanent, important or impermeable. He parodies his own parody until one gives up figuring out which 'act' is for 'real' and contemplates what Trickster's play reveals: how ludicrous is every vision of life constructed of hierarchies without ironic wholeness or formal arrangements without communication between one form and another. He reveals how static is the vision of life built on earthy corporeality without passage to [the] sacred spirit of metamorphosis.

It is hardly surprising that the interplay of irony and parody so prevalent in traditional Trickster narratives would emerge as a major feature of contemporary Native aesthetic practice. What accounts in part for its current high profile is not so much a growing awareness of Native culture and/or humour—although one would hope this is also the case—as the strategic use of such tropes in recent years by mainstream

---

20 It should be remembered that satire is by definition a hopeful and optimistic mode of critique, in that it assumes the possibility of change in attitude or behaviour. Possessed of an intrinsic moral/ethical dimension, it is an appropriate tool/weapon/strategy for promoting a national Native political agenda.
artists, writers, designers and performers whose works have been designated as "postmodern."

Much has been written about postmodernism over the last two and a half decades. Today, its influence and expression can be seen in virtually every area of cultural production—from architecture to painting and sculpture, from literature to film, music and dance. And more recently, even anthropology. One of the first to describe postmodernism's formal characteristics was architect Charles Jencks (1986: 7) who wrote that "as a cultural movement and historical epoch," postmodernism is fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past....Its best works are characteristically doubly-coded and ironic, making a feature of the wide choice, conflict and discontinuity of traditions, because this heterogeneity most clearly captures our pluralism. 21


The sense of spirited free play that is so much a part of the postmodern ethos was anticipated (and articulated) some years earlier by fellow architect, Robert Venturi. In an oft-quoted passage from 1968 he (in Wilde 1981: 133) said

I like elements which are hybrid rather than "pure," compromising rather than "clean," distorted rather than "straightforward," ambiguous rather than "articulated," perverse as well as impersonal, boring as well as "interesting," conventional rather than "designed," accommodating rather than excluding, redundant rather than simple, vestigial as well as innovating, inconsistent and equivocal rather than direct and clear. I am for messy vitality over obvious unity. I include the non sequitur and proclaim the duality.
In 1985, Sally Banes (1985: 82 ff., quoted in Hutcheon 1989: 9) set out the qualities of postmodernism as they pertained to contemporary dance, although they have broader application as well. Her list includes:

- irony
- playfulness
- historical reference
- the use of vernacular materials
- the continuity of cultures
- an interest in process over product
- breakdowns of boundaries between art forms and between art and life
- new relationships between artist and audience.

Around the same time, anthropologists George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986) were exploring the creative implications of postmodernism for their own discipline, examining in particular, François Lyotard’s critique of the great "master narratives," or "metanarratives," that "organize (bourgeois) society and justify it to itself: religion, history, science, psychology, even art" (D'haen 1986: 213). They (1986: 10) concluded:

> Ours is once again a period rich in experimentation and conceptual risk-taking. Older dominant frameworks are not so much denied—there being nothing so grand to replace them—as suspended. The ideas they embody remain intellectual resources to be used in novel and eclectic ways."

Over the last decade, Lyotard’s book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984[1979]) has been a

---

seminal point of departure for many writers challenging the idea of "an overarching narrative that tells The Story about knowledge and culture" (Olsen 1990: 27). At its core, "postmodern consciousness basks in the proliferation of micronarratives...none of which is [or at least should be] privileged over any other" (Olsen p. 27). When political inequity is factored into the equation, however, it becomes clear that many of these micronarratives are what David Carroll (1982: 75, in Vizenor 1989: 15) calls "little dissident narratives." He writes

Hundreds, thousands of little dissident narratives of all sorts are produced in spite of all attempts to repress them, and they circulate inside and eventually, or even initially, outside the boundaries of the totalitarian state. The importance of these little narratives is not only that they challenge the dominant metanarrative and the state apparatus that would prohibit or discredit them, but that they also indicate the possibility of another kind of society, or another form of social relations.

In "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory" Michael M.J. Fischer (1986: 224 ff.) says

Perhaps nothing defines the present conditions of knowledge so well as irony. Ever more aware, in ever more precise ways, of the complexity of social life, writers have had to find ways to incorporate, acknowledge, and exploit our increasingly empirical understandings of the context, perspective, instability, conflict, contradiction, competition and multilayered communications that characterize reality.

Referring to the work of Vizenor, Momaday and others, Fischer (1986: 224, emphasis added) adds

Recent Amerindian autobiographies and autobiographical fiction and poetry are among the most sophisticated exemplars of the use of ironic humor as a survival skill, a
tool for acknowledging complexity, a means of exposing or subverting oppressive hegemonic ideologies, and an art for affirming life in the face of objective troubles....

Irony and humour are tactics that ethnographers have only slowly come to appreciate, albeit recently with increasing interest....Increasingly attention is being paid to the uses of laughter among ethnographic subjects...[and]...ethnographers are pointing out the rhetorical devices they employ. 23

Native peoples in particular stand to benefit from this belated insight and shift in academic focus. In his book, Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto, Lakota author, Vine Deloria Jr. (1969: 146, emphasis added) writes

It has always been a great disappointment to Indian people that the humorous side of Indian life has not been mentioned by professed experts on Indian Affairs. Rather the image of the granite-faced grunting redskin has been perpetuated by American mythology....

One of the best ways to understand a people is to know what makes them laugh. Laughter encompasses the limits of the soul. In humor life is redefined and accepted. Irony and satire provide much keener insights into a group's collective psyche and values than do years of [conventional] research.

"But," as Barbara Babcock (1984: 102) asks, "can analysis participate in the comic spirit? Can one do what one describes?" 24 At this "experimental moment in the human sciences" Fischer offers a cautionary, "yes." He (1986: 229) writes

23 Cf. Hymes, p. 19, this chapter.

24 Cf. Babcock, p. 15, this chapter.
Considerable potential still exists...to construct texts utilizing humor and other devices that draw attention to their own limitations and degree of accuracy, and that do so with aesthetic elegance, and are a pleasure to read, rather than with pedantic laboredness....Subtlety [however, as in the subtlety of ironic humour,) is a quality that seems often (but not necessarily) to run counter to the canons of explicitness and univocal meaning expected in scientific writing.\(^{25}\)

One of the most prolific theorists of postmodernism, and postmodern irony in particular, is University of Toronto professor Linda Hutcheon (1989: 1 ff.),\(^{26}\) who writes that

postmodernism is a phenomenon whose mode is resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political....In general terms it takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement....[Its] distinctive character lies in [a] wholesale "nudging" commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge....[T]he postmodern appears to coincide with a general cultural awareness of the existence and power of systems of representation which do not reflect society so much as grant meaning and value within a particular society. ...[However,] by both using and ironically abusing general conventions and specific forms of representation, postmodern art works to de-naturalize them.

This process of de-naturalization, or "de-construction" as it is often called, is generally acknowledged to be the primary task of a postmodernist inquiry. It seeks to "undermine the

\(^{25}\) Subtlety (ironic or otherwise) can also be hazardous if misread or mishandled. See, for example, Hutcheon's thorough dissection of the debacle arising from the Royal Ontario Museum's ill-fated 1989-90 exhibition, Into the Heart of Africa (Hutcheon 1994 and 1994a).

\(^{26}\) For a listing of additional related works by Hutcheon see APPENDIX 5.2, p. 232.
authority of signs" and to expose the system of power which legitimates certain cultural representations while prohibiting and disavowing others" (Galbo 1987–88: 40). In his critique of Kroker and Cook's *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*, Joe Galbo (p. 40) goes on to say that the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of postmodern critique and art are the transformative tropes of parody, irony, puns, paradox, the visual techniques of collage and *trompe l'oeil*, and numerous other strategies of discontinuity which by their very reflexive nature force an evaluation.

Hutcheon would no doubt agree, except perhaps to emphasize that what makes evaluation possible at all is the postmodern notion of "the presence of the past" (Hutcheon 1988: 4). By this, she does not mean a nostalgic "return" to the past, but rather a "critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society" (1988: 4). This critical reworking of history Hutcheon considers to be the governing role of irony in postmodernism, best accomplished through creative interaction with parody. Parody she (1988: 26, emphasis added) now defines as "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity." Irony becomes parody's "chief

---

27 For more on "signs" and the process of "signification" see Footnote 39, p. 37.

28 First set out in detail in her book, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Artforms* (1985) this is a particularly useful concept for framing the aesthetic production of contemporary Native artists. See my (continued...)
rhetorical strategy" and "critical distance" becomes the critical aspect of redefinition. Elsewhere, Hutcheon (1985: 6) describes parody as "a form of imitation...characterized by ironic inversion" and an "authorized transgression of convention" (1988: x).

These are decidedly untraditional descriptions of parody, stripped as they are of their more familiar reference to satire and ridicule. But Hutcheon does not so much banish these twin tropes of comedy that have been part of parody's profile since the 18th century, as force them to share the stage with, and perform in the service of, a more contemporary concern for "critical recontextualization." "We must broaden the concept of parody," Hutcheon (1985: 11) says, "to fit the needs of art of our century." In the latter part of the 20th century these needs would seem to converge in the concept of "art as discourse," and in particular, "public discourse." The self-reflexive discourse of postmodern parody is "inextricably bound to social [and political] discourse" as well (1988: 35).

28(...continued)

Because it "seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak to a discourse from within it, but without being totally recuperated by it" (1988: 35), parody appears to have become the favoured mode of expression of those whom Hutcheon (1988: 35) calls the "ex-centric," "those who are marginalized by a dominant ideology" for reasons of race, creed, colour, gender or sexual orientation. The art of the ex-centric questions from the edge--always the inside edge--but it does not seek to destroy. It questions our assumptions about "how we know [and] how we can know" (1988: 54), and asks us to rethink and critique our notions of "history" and "reference" (1988: 46). It is a didactic art which "raises the uncomfortable (and usually ignored) question of ideological power behind basic aesthetic issues such as that of representation: whose reality is being represented" (Nochlin 1983: 118 ff. in Hutcheon 1988: 182).

These are serious questions to be addressed seriously and, as Robert Burden (1979: 135 ff. in Hutcheon 1985: 101) reminds us, parody is "a serious mode." Unquestionably, the ex-centric know that "to include irony and play is never...

---

29 Elsewhere, Hutcheon (1989: 93) says

Parody also contests our humanist assumptions about artistic originality and uniqueness and our capitalist notions of ownership and property. With parody--as with any form of reproduction--the notion of the original as rare, single, and valuable (in aesthetic or commercial terms) is called into question.
necessarily to exclude seriousness and purpose in postmodern art. To misunderstand this is to misunderstand the nature of much contemporary aesthetic production" (Hutcheon 1988: 27).

The thoughts of Umberto Eco (in Rosso 1983: 2-5) are particularly relevant here. Paraphrasing the Italian theorist and novelist Hutcheon (1988: 39) writes

[I]rony may be the only way we can be serious today. There is no innocence in our world...[w]e cannot ignore the discourses that precede and contextualize everything we say and do, and it is through ironic parody that we signal our awareness of this inescapable fact. The "already-said" must be reconsidered only in an ironic way.

As mentioned earlier, Hutcheon’s redefinition of "parody" as "repetition with critical distance" was meant to free the concept of parody from a necessary (and potentially restrictive) association with humour and comedy. While her intention is duly noted, it is hard to deny that humour and a pervasive comic vision are very much part of the postmodern zeitgeist. For this reason their interrelationship deserves a closer look.

In his book Circus of the Mind in Motion: Postmodernism and the Comic Vision, Lance Olsen (1990: 16) says that "postmodern humor has always been around to one degree or another. It is...less a chronological fact than a state of mind that
surfaces at various times and in various places." It is above all an "attitude," a mode of consciousness whose "impetus is to disarm pomposity and power," (p. 17) and whose impulse is a "detotalizing" and "de(constructive" one that "embraces plurality" (p. 34). The postmodern creator then becomes an "aesthetic and metaphysical terrorist, a freetzer in a universe of intertextuality where no one text [theoretically] has any more or less authority than any other" (p. 17). Of course, the concept of equal authority is largely illusory. As Hutcheon (1991: 150) has noted on more than one occasion, postmodernism's "critique coexists with an equally real and equally powerful complicity with the cultural dominants within which it inescapably exists." In short, it "underlines" as much as it "undermines" (1989: 109).

Olsen (p. 19) goes on to say that postmodern humour "delights in its own sense of liberty [and] its own sense of process. Indeed process is everything." But there is a flipside to all

---

30 Vizenor (1989: x) writes that

[t]he postmodern opened in tribal imagination; oral cultures have never been without a postmodern condition that enlivens stories and ceremonies, or without trickster signatures and discourse in narrative chance.

Further to this, Ojibway playwright Tina Mason (1990: 52) says

"I think [the Trickster,] Weesakayjack takes on different identities throughout the centuries. I seriously believe he inhabits Tomson Highway's body right now."

31 Cf. Hutcheon, p. 26, this chapter.
this delight as well. Olsen finds postmodern humour sharing many similarities with absurdist black humour. He (p. 18 ff.) writes

It is charged with a bitterness and cynicism in the face of a world it perceives as undergoing physical and metaphysical erasure. Its irony is acidic, biting, and to use Wayne Booth's term, unstable. However, there is more than destructive absurdist black humor at work in the postmodern enterprise. Beside postmodern humor's dark impetus exists an essentially light impetus. After all, absences may signal emptiness and the lack of meaning, but they also signal gaps that need to be filled and that can be filled in an infinity of ways. In other words, while they may signal the possibility of destruction, they also signal the possibility for construction, a radical freedom, a renewed sense of potential. Consequently, postmodern humor at the same time becomes both a negative and a positive perspective on the world. It simultaneously holds within itself the destructive and nihilistic force of absurdist black humor...and the constructive and affirmative force of creative freeplay.

---

32 Here the term "black humour" refers to a literary movement of the 1960s whose thrust is nihilistic, rather than to the "racial humour" of African-Americans which found a popular audience during that same period. Today the term "black humour" is also applied to jokes about tragedy.

In her book, Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America, Lucy Lippard (1990: 200) writes

In the '80s an increasing number of artists picked up on the black humor that was at the heart of much '60s resistance and on the "decentering" that was projected as the core of antiracist cultural tactics in '70s activist art. Irony and subversion are used strategically to connect past, present, and future without limiting art or audience to one time or place.


34 It is this constructive quality of postmodern aesthetic expression—especially "the critical power of [irony's] double-voicing" (Hutcheon 1988: 39)—that Hutcheon feels many of its detractors have missed.
It should be noted that "black humour" needn't always be considered nihilistic. It may, in fact, suggest the exact opposite—what I would call a "black whole" rather than a "black hole." In "Humor and the Challenger Shuttle Disaster: Joke-Telling as a Reaction to Tragedy," J. Jerome Zolten (1988: 135, emphasis added) says that creators of black humour often seek to transcend the pain and absurdity of reality...by deliberately plumbing the tragic for comic possibilities. The goal is to subvert pain by undermining the seriousness of the subject, very much akin to the advice of Gorgias that in argument, we could "...ruin our opponent’s earnestness with our jocularity." In black humor, reality is the opponent. The black humorist tries to undercut seriousness by painting over it with the comic. The implication is that the external will in some way alter the internal. Since laughing is a sign that "everything is alright," then laughing in the face of tragedy must mean that the healing process has begun.

It is the healing power of black humour that is important here. Healing through humour is a major objective of many Native people engaged in the visual and performing arts today—spiritual healing, cultural healing, cross-cultural healing. And a kind of black humour is not infrequently employed in the process. But what at first might appear to be a nihilistic blackness is more often a spiritual blackness—one that evokes the close and cleansing (but not necessarily comforting) darkness of the sweatlodge. As Tomson Highway is fond of saying, "Before the healing can take place, the poison must first be exposed" (Lyle Longclaws cited in Highway 1989, epigraph). Exposing the poison can be accomplished in many
ways, including the use of what Mohawk actor, Gary Farmer (interview, February, 1991) calls "toxic humour."

That’s a form of humour based on toxicity. You have to laugh because there is nothing else to do but laugh at [the situation], in order to face the reality of it, in order to get past it....If you don’t laugh at it then you can’t deal with it.

When Farmer was interviewed for this project at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, he was in rehearsal for the role of Zachary Jeremiah Keechigeesik in Highway’s award-winning play, Highway’s award-winning play, Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapuskasing (1989). Early in the interview he explained how he, as an actor, together with Highway, as a playwright, strategically use toxic humour (which, in essence, is a form of black humour) not so much to undercut seriousness, as Zolten would have it, but to intensify it.

For us to get to the point in that second act where the stark reality of the raping of Patsy Pegahmagahbow becomes so real...in order to make the audience think about that realistically we had them, systematically, laughing at every possible bad scenario that could ever happen on a reservation. To me that is toxic humour....

I love to make people laugh so that I can turn around and make them think. If they laugh, they’re going in. They’re going deeper. They’re falling for the bait. It’s like you bait it. It’s like bait and you put it out there like a little snare, and they laugh and they laugh, and they’re having a good time and they’re having a good time, and they’re really laughing and all of that information is getting in there. You’re laying all the groundwork for all that information and then you come across with what you’re really [saying]...I mean...the bottom. I mean we’re talking about the bottom. It bottoms out and when it bottoms out.....it stings there. It burns an image in your brain. It just sits there and it’ll sit there for a long time. I’ve seen people come to this play and they just can’t figure it out. They’re moved. Something is different about
them from the time they came in [to] when they leave. There’s something that burns there, an image that burns there, good or bad, it sits there and it makes them ponder about and think about the condition of these people [on the reserve]....

It’s actually, I think, a story of hope....As a human race we’ve all hit the bottom, and now its time to move up to where there is hope in the world. We can turn all this around. It doesn’t have to be like that."

A turnaround of this magnitude would seem to require a fundamental shift in one’s vision. Olsen suggests that embracing a comic vision is mankind’s only hope. To make his case, he cites Don Elgin’s (in Coyle 1986: 221-30) theory of "ecological aesthetics," which in turn is based on that of Joseph Meeker (1974) put forth in The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology. Olsen (p.23) writes

The comic vision "springs from [man’s] conviction that he is a part of the [eco]system and that, unless the [eco]system exists, he has little chance of doing so himself" (Elgin 223). The comic vision reinforces man’s role as survivor and man’s infinitely complex interconnection with life itself. Man is joined with his environment "physically, morally, and intellectually," and he must continually "adapt himself to the complex natural system" (224). Man is not

35 Despite good intentions, not everyone saw this play as hopeful. Or particularly amusing. Toxic humour, by its very nature, is a volatile and (like Wayne Booth’s irony) unstable substance. Native women, especially, were critical of the less than flattering portrayal of their sex in this play, and appalled at the violence enacted on the female trickster, Nanabush. Saulteaux poet/activist Marie Annharte Baker (1991: 68, emphasis added) writes

I have heard of Native women having nightmares for a week or feeling depressed after seeing Dry Lips; myself, I had to fight the downer I experienced....It is a small comfort to see poison. I hope the cure doesn’t kill.

36 Cf. Vizenor, p. 10, this chapter.
above nature in the comic view. Rather he must be at one with it in order to survive.

Olsen (p. 23 ff.) also draws on the views of Edward L. Galligan (1984: 34) who intimates that

[a]t the core of the comic vision...is a subversive impulse directed toward the dominant culture. The comic vision sees life not as work but festival, not as Puritan hardship but as playful pastime....The comic vision loves to pull the rug out from under wishful thinking, egocentricism, affected dignity, silly pedantry, absurd pride, willfulness, and other human follies....And finally, the comic derides any univocal vision. It attacks the inability to see several perspectives simultaneously. It calls for "acute double [or I would argue more accurately multiple]" vision in contradictory circumstances, which are the circumstances most of us live in.

Olsen (p.31) concludes by drawing several comparisons between the comic vision and the postmodern.

Because both the comic and the postmodern attempt to subvert all centres of authority--including their own--and because they both ultimately deride univocal visions, toppling bigots, cranks, and pompous idiots as they go, they tend to complement each other well. Both seek through radical incongruity of form to short-circuit the dominant culture's repressive impulses. Hence, both are simultaneously destructive and constructive. Both represent a survivalist esthetics....Both focus on process rather than conclusion. Both embrace plurality, an abundance of language games, and the idea that the universe is a text that may be rewritten in a host of equally acceptable ways. And both therefore understand, along with Johan Huizinga [1955: 5], that "pure play is one of the main bases of civilization."

Given the degree of accord that appears to exist between the two, it is no surprise that Vizenor (1989: 9) says, "The

37 Olsen’s insertion.
trickster is postmodern"—especially in light of Radin’s remarks on the presence of parody in trickster narratives, Sullivan’s description of the Trickster as the embodiment of "the process of ironic imagination," and Vizenor’s own concept of the Trickster as a "doing not a being," a "process not a presence." The tribal Trickster may, in fact, revel in the opportunity afforded by the postmodern moment. It is no surprise, then, to find Vizenor’s postmodern Trickster engaged in the process of imagining a discourse on tribal narratives.

This engagement is couched in terms of semiotics—what the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce envisioned as a "science of signs"—a "semiotics that locates being in discourse" (Vizenor 1989: 189). Thus, the tribal Trickster is: "a

---


39 The core concepts of semiotics, the "sign" and "signification", were first set out by Saussure in his Course in General Linguistics, published in 1916. Signs express ideas, and thereby participate in a process of signification. Each sign has two components: an acoustic (or visual) component called the "signifier" and a conceptual or mental component called the "signified." As Barthes (1964/1967: 42) points out, the signified is "not ‘a thing’ but the mental representation of a ‘thing’" which comes to mind when a particular signifier is heard or seen. Employing a common "sign system" or communication code, the sender of a message "encodes" meaning in a sign which is then "decoded" by the listener or viewer within the context of specific social relations and processes. Jaques Maquet (1971, quoted in Blundell 1993: 28), has observed that

(continued...)
sign, a communal signification that cannot be separated or understood in isolation" (1989: 189); "a comic discourse, a collection of 'utterances' in oral tradition" (p.191); "chance and freedom in a comic sign...[and] an encounter in narrative voices" (p. 13); "a liberator and healer in a narrative...and a discourse with imagination" (p.187); "a comic holotrope in a postmodern language game that uncovers the distinctions and

39(...continued)
the signified meanings evoked by aesthetic [as opposed to linguistic] signifiers tend to be "multivocal" rather than "univocal" in nature; in other words, they can support several meanings (the signifieds) at the same time without being reducible to a single one.

This multivocal characteristic of aesthetic signification, Blundell (1993: 28) notes, allows for the simultaneous expression of diverse and even contradictory attitudes. When irony and parody are employed the reader/viewer must first be able to recognize the markers of "the encoded presence of 'double-directed' discourse" (Hutcheon 1985: 92) for the work to be perceived as irony or parody. Such markers or clues may be overt or covert, depending on how competent the encoder decides the decoder is, or how direct the intended communication may be.

Of particular relevance to Vizenor's concept of the Trickster as a "communal sign" reflecting a shared worldview, is Jan Mukarovsky's (1976, in Blundell 1993: 27) contention that artforms, as signs, act primarily to evoke attitudes, and only secondarily to convey information. He writes

The understanding that the artistic [and, I would add the Trickster] sign establishes among people does not pertain to things, even when they are represented in the work, but to a certain attitude towards things, a certain attitude on the part of man [sic] toward the entire reality that surrounds him, not only to that reality which is directly represented in the given case.

40 Vizenor (1989: 9) defines "holotrope" as "the whole figuration." I interpret this to mean an overarching metaphor which, in this case, symbolizes a prevailing attitude or communal worldview.
ironies between narrative voices; a semiotic sign for 'social antagonism' and 'aesthetic activism' in postmodern criticism and the avant-garde, but not 'presence' or ideal cultural completion in narratives" (p. 192). Whatever the guise, the Trickster sign signifies a comic spirit actively involved in the creation of everyday communal life.

Despite its predisposition towards deconstruction, postmodernism is generally considered to be politically ambivalent, lacking any partisan agenda or theory of agency (Hutcheon 1991: 70). However, as an advocate of both "social antagonism" and "aesthetic activism," Vizenor's tribal Trickster has for some time been going "beyond the postmodern limits of deconstructing and dismantling existing orthodoxies and...into the realms of social and political action" (1991: 70). A frequent target of Vizenor's contemporary trickster narratives is "the sign 'Indian,' with its predetermined and well-worn path between signifier and signified," (Owens in Vizenor 1978/1990: 250). "Vizenor's aim," says Louis Owens, "is to free the play between these two elements to liberate 'Indianness'." Clearly, the Native Trickster, when conceptualized as "postmodern," can be considered "post-colonial" as well.

"Postcolonial" is a term frequently applied to cultural productions (literary, artistic, theatrical) that address the
present day legacy of colonial experience. By definition, the postcolonial "is a political enterprise insofar as it implies a theory of agency (dismantling but also constructive) and of social change that the postmodern deconstructive impulse lacks" (Hutcheon 1991: 90). In Canada, its expression manifests itself in many varied forms, but is perhaps most "authentic" when articulated by members of this country's aboriginal community. Hutcheon (1991: 75) writes

Native and Métis writers [and, I would add, visual artists] are today demanding a voice, and perhaps, in view of the damage done to Indian culture and people by the French and British colonizers and the process of colonization, theirs should be considered the resisting, post-colonial voice of Canada.

While admittedly "resisting," not a few of these writers and artists argue that, given the many cultural constraints still in place, there is nothing "post-" about their colonial status or voice.

In "'Circling the Downspout of Empire': Post-colonial and Postmodern Ironies" (Chapter 3 in Hutcheon 1991), the author (p. 71) notes that the postmodern and the post-colonial share several concerns, including an interest in history and marginality, and a preference for discursive strategies such as irony. About irony's "double-talking, forked tongued mode of address," she (1991: 73 ff.) says that its

inherent semantic and structural doubleness...makes it a most convenient trope for the paradoxical dualities of both postmodern complicitous critique and post-colonial doubled identity and history. And indeed irony...has become a powerful subversive tool in the re-thinking and
re-addressing of history by both postmodern and post-colonial artists....Irony is one way of...resisting and yet acknowledging the power of the dominant. It may not go the next step--to suggest something new--but it certainly works to make that step possible. Often combined with some sort of self-reflexivity, [such as parody,] irony allows a text [or image] to work within the constraints of the dominant while foregrounding those constraints as constraints and thus undermining their power.

Irony’s ability to undermine political power in particular was examined by Antonin Obrdlik (1942: 712 ff.) in his classic study of resistance humour that arose in Czechoslovakia following the Nazi invasion during the Second World War. The author found such humour (which he labelled "gallows humour") to be darkly ironic, yet hopeful as well. He writes

People who live in absolute uncertainty as to their lives and property find a refuge in inventing, repeating, and spreading through the channels of whispering counterpropaganda, anecdotes and jokes about their oppressors. This is gallows humor at its best because it originates and functions among people who literally face death at any moment....These people have to persuade themselves as well as others that their present suffering is only temporary, that it will soon be all over, that once again they will live as they used to live before they were crushed. In a word, they have to strengthen their hope because otherwise they could not bear the strains to which their nerves are exposed. Gallows humor, full of invectives and irony, is their psychological escape....Its social influence is enormous....[It] is an unmistakable index of good morale and of the spirit of resistance of the oppressed peoples....I am inclined to believe that what is true about individuals is true also about whole nations [and here one could add, First Nations]--namely, that the purest type of ironical humor is born out of sad experiences accompanied by grief and sorrow. It is spontaneous and deeply felt--the very necessity of life which it helps to preserve.41


(continued...)
In North America, perhaps the two most thorough treatments of Native resistance humour are Keith Basso's *Portraits of "The Whiteman": Linguistic play and cultural symbols among the Western Apache* (1979), and Madronna Holden's essay, "Making All the Crooked Ways Straight: The Satirical Portrait of Whites in Coast Salish Folklore" (1976). Drawing on data collected over an eleven year period from the Native community of Cibeque, Arizona, anthropologist Basso documents in great detail the little-known practice of ridiculing "the Whiteman" through joking imitations of his typical behaviour. As a social category and cultural symbol, "'The Whiteman' serves as a conspicuous vehicle for conceptions that define and characterize what the Indian is not," Basso says (p. 5, emphasis added). Thus, by enacting, and demonstrating an appreciation for these joking performances, Apaches reaffirm the worth of their own identity and cultural values. Not

"(...continued)

The person with a sense of humor can never be fully dominated, even by a government which imprisons him, for his ability to laugh at what is incongruous in the political situation will put him above it to some extent, and will preserve a measure of his freedom--if not of movement, at least of thought....It is because of the freedom of thought in humor, and indeed in aesthetic experience generally, that humorists and artists have traditionally been personae non gratae under rigidly controlled political regimes.

surprisingly, "irony abounds and Apaches appreciate it well" (p. 74).

Satirical irony is also the "overriding mood" of a body of "traditional" Salish folklore examined by Holden. Tailored to comment on early post-contact relations, the situational thrust and "artful irony" of the songs and stories went unrecognized by most listeners and collectors who failed to see their own complicity. In one myth recounted, the well known "Bungling host" is both traditional trickster, Bluejay, and offending 18th century visitor. In another, the "Straightener" is both trickster Transformer and fervent missionary. Offering a Native point of view in a rare first-person voice, Holden (p. 293, second emphasis added) says that Salish storytellers mounted

a frontal attack on any privileged position (be it missionary or scientific) and upon that culture in which such positions...are nurtured. Indeed, the implications of this Coast Salish folklore is [sic] to ascribe a radical equality to the myth collector, be he missionary, settler or anthropologist, and the myth teller. It is an equality, in fact, so radical, as to effect a kind of turnabout anthropology, switching observer and observed and setting up a second art of social science over against that belonging to our own traditions.

Intriguing as it is, Holden's characterization of such humour as "turnabout anthropology" and "artful social science" should not overshadow the fact that it is first and foremost an expression of cultural survival. Gary Farmer (interview, February, 1991) explains
Because Native communities have gone through probably the worst situations in North America that any peoples have gone through they had to have the ability to laugh. If they didn’t, they wouldn’t be existing today. So humour has been a means of survival, the only means.... For the last two hundred years they’ve had everything taken away from them, their ability to think, practically. Everything. What language they could speak, what religion they could do, and the things they couldn’t do. It was all set out for them. They couldn’t even make money in order to create a decent living for themselves. All those decisions were taken away from them. The only thing they had was their ability to continue to laugh their way through life because if they didn’t...they would vanish.

Oneida stand-up comedian Charlie Hill (1993: 11) offers a similar assessment in a recent interview in the newspaper, Nativebeat, in which he says

I think it’s our humour that has helped us to survive. When the situation is the most grim, that’s when you see Indian people making jokes about it, just for the survival.

Further to this, in the opening words to her essay, "An Old Indian Trick is to Laugh," Ojibway writer Marie Annharte Baker (1991: 48) states

To be able to laugh at oneself is one of the greatest gifts of an Aboriginal heritage. For even the one who is the teensy bit Indian, the gift of this self-clowning is humungous. Sometimes our laughter is our only weapon. In spite of efforts to declaw, detooth, detail the Coyote or trickster within us, we continue to find something about our oppression as Aboriginal people funny.

Lakota author, Vine Deloria Jr., would no doubt agree with these sentiments. He (1969: 169) concludes a chapter on Indian Humor in his book, Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto, with the words

When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting
anybody drive them to extremes, then it would seem to me that the people can survive.

For Native people Vizenor (in Bruchac 1987: 295) says humour is simply "a compassionate act of survival."

Earlier in the present discussion (p. 35) Lance Olsen, borrowing from Elgin and Meeker, was quoted as saying that "the comic vision reinforces man's role as survivor" in an environment or ecosystem to which he is forever linked "physically, morally, and intellectually." Conspicuously absent from this cobbled-together theory of the comic vision's relationship to survival is any reference to spirituality. (Not so for Highway or Vizenor, see page 9). Perhaps more than anything else, it is the concept of a comic spirit informing the comic vision that distinguishes the Native vision from the one described by Olsen. It is in fact, this comic spirit that makes cultural survival possible.

In "Wisdom of the Contrary" (Dooling 1979) Joseph Epps Brown (p. 55) describes how the traditional Native clown—as "earthly counterpart of the Trickster," (Makarius 1970: 46) --regularly "opens a door, in a very subtle and effective way, into a realm of greater reality than the realm of the ebb and flow of everyday life." This is accomplished Brown (p. 55) says essentially by two means

There is first of all the element of shock. [Sacred] clowns among the Pueblos [of the American southwest], for example, in the context of their ritual dance dramas, engage in,
among other activities, sexual types of display which normally are quite taboo in such societies, and this causes a rupture with the ordinary everyday pattern of life. It does that by immediately catching the attention; it helps the people forget their petty little concerns about the routines of daily life. It shocks them out of that. Secondly, once that awareness, that alertness and openness, has been achieved through the initial shock, then it is possible to communicate on another level through the use of humor....

I see it as a technique to translate the formal rite or to break through it into an area of deeper meaning and deeper awareness on the part of the participant. It is you might say a shattering of the structure of the rite in order to get at the essence of the rite. It seems to ridicule, thus destroy, but it does this so that deeper truths contained within the rite can come forth and reveal themselves.42

In her decidedly postmodern "assemblage" essay, "Arrange Me into Disorder: Fragments and Reflections on Ritual Clowning" (1984), anthropologist Barbara Babcock (1984: 103, emphasis added) affirms this same connection between the sacred and the shocking. She writes

Comedy may be a spiritual shock therapy which breaks up the patterns of thought and rationality that hold us in bondage and in which the given and established order of things is deformed, reformed, and reformulated; a playful speculation on what was, is, or might be; a remark on the indignity of any closed system.

The clown "creates a reflexive and ironic dialogue, [and] an open space of questioning," she (1984: 107) adds. As a

42 Cree artist, Jane Ash Poitras, offers a remarkably similar description to Brown's—albeit, more personalized and impassioned—of the way in which sacred knowledge is accessed through humour. See APPENDIX 6, p. 234, for a description of her experience as a first-time participant in an all-night peyote ceremony conducted by members of the Native American Church.
"sophisticated form of sociocultural self-commentary" and "transcendental buffoonery," pueblo ritual clowning is no less than "irony writ large" (1984: 107, emphasis added). Once again, it seems that "cultural confidence and ironic competence are intertwined" (Hymes 1987: 333)."

Especially relevant to this study—in addition to acknowledging the intrinsically spiritual nature of much of the humour—is Arden King's (1979: 147) contention that the most distinguishing feature of ritual clowns is their ability to creatively interact with chaos and the unknown, that is, their ability to "withstand contact with nonorder." "If clowns survive the encounter with nonorder, then so too may all humans," he (1979: 146) says. " More importantly, through humour they can propose "an entirely new way of structuring

---

43 See Hymes, p. 19.

44 "What happens to him happens to us," Radin (1956/1972: 169) says of the Trickster. So too for the sacred clowns, who represent "each of us at our worst moments and what we might become during our best. Delight Makers [as archaeologist Adolf Bandelier named the pueblo clowns almost a century ago] embody human contradictions and frailties while epitomizing our greatest spiritual aspirations" (McCoy 1988: 15). Hopi poet Ramson Lomatewama (1988: 12) writes that "the clowns are mirrors. Like mirrors, they reflect all aspects of life, the good as well as the bad, the joy as well as the sorrow, the courage as well as the fears. They reflect life as it is, particularly its choices and consequences." For an overview of institutionalized humour mentioned in early ethnographic accounts see Julian Steward's (1931) pioneering work, "The Ceremonial Buffoon of the American Indian," based on the author's doctoral dissertation. For a survey of the anthropological literature on humor in religion see Apte (1985).
human existence... another way of human being" (1979: 147). These abilities, King believes, have made the clown an ideal role model for leaders of revitalistic and nativistic movements.

I would argue that many contemporary Native artists possess these same abilities to interact with nonorder through humour (and irony), and likewise, can, and do serve as leadership role models, for their ability to combat ignorance and imagine other ways of "human being." It is a calling of no small consequence. As the warrior diplomat Third Proude Cedarfair (1978/1990: 15) says, in Vizenor's Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles

The tricksters and warrior clowns have stopped more evil violence with their wit than have lovers with their lust and fools with the power and rage.

In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, Vizenor (1987: 290) himself says, "a comic spirit demands that we break from formula, break out of program, and there are some familiar ways to do it and then some radical or unknown ways. He (1987: 290, emphasis added) adds too that "I think it's a spiritual quest in a way." The visual artists whose works are examined in this study break from formula and break out of program in both familiar and radically unexpected ways. They are major practitioners of what anthropologist Michael M.J. Fischer (1986: 227, emphasis added) aptly calls "the fine art
of the trickster." For indeed, a Trickster spirit unquestionably informs their art which is often "radical in action [and] disruptive in the social and cultural values" (Vizenor in Bruchac 1987: 294). But then, that's hardly surprising. After all, "that's a trickster's business" (in Bruchac 1987: 294, emphasis added).
CHAPTER 2

THE (RE)CREATION OF IDENTITY:
IMAGES OF OPPOSITION AND INCLUSION

We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves.

N. Scott Momaday

[Native] people are going to have to start using their imaginations...and start creating their own image of themselves...to reaffirm what we are.

Shelley Niro

As argued earlier, the principal task of a postmodern inquiry is to undermine the authority of signs to show "how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference" (Hutcheon 1989: 93). For those who view art as a site of ideological struggle, issues of self-representation, self-determination and political empowerment loom large in the foreground. For Native artists and writers as well, it is the sign "Indian," with its "well-worn path between signifier and signified" (Owens in Vizenor, 1978/1990: 250), that is most in need of deconstruction and rehabilitation. It is the sign "Indian," that resonates down through the years in travelers' journals, dime-store novels and Hollywood films; in countless images of feathered braves and savage warriors, solemn chiefs and mystical shamans, lusty maidens and sombre matrons,
alternately imagined as primitive, noble, fearsome, admired, captured, conquered, vanquished and ultimately -- vanished.\textsuperscript{45}

Many of the images that proliferate in the popular media and still punctuate scholarly texts date from the last century, the work of numerous frontier painters and photographers who sought to record for posterity the colourful players in what they perceived to be a quickly passing cultural parade.\textsuperscript{46} In recent years, however, this body of imagery has been criticized for being less a visual document than a collective Euro-American exercise in creative historicizing, one that has left the image of Native peoples languishing in a state of perpetual nostalgia and peripheral existence.\textsuperscript{47} Rectifying this situation has not been easy. As recently as 1988, Saulteaux artist/curator Robert Houle (1988: 60) lamented the fact that few cultural institutions afforded Native artists the opportunity to counter such imagery.

\textquotedblleft Somehow we are not allowed to come into the 20th century. We are not allowed to interpret our own reality, the way our communities respond to everyday life. We are regarded as living museum pieces. This is perpetuated by even the most lavish, most knowledgeable, professional representations of our cultural heritage.\textquotedblright

\textsuperscript{45} For bibliographic references on White conceptions of Indians in literature and film as well as Native response, see APPENDIX 5.3, p. 232.

\textsuperscript{46} For further references on frontier painters and photographers see APPENDIX 5.4, p. 232.

\textsuperscript{47} See for example, Lyman (1982), Truettner (1991) and Lippard (1992).
Despite frustrations over the shortage of exhibition venues, interpretations of contemporary reality were being created at an ever-increasing pace, and finding an ever-widening audience. Moreover, several artists were beginning to playfully exploit the perception of Native peoples as "living museum pieces." Images only recently regarded as demeaning cliches and romantic idealizations were being reclaimed, redeemed and reinvested with new meaning. Over the last decade and a half, Canadian Native artists have become particularly skilled at re-presenting cultural stereotypes in humorous and ironic fashion to reveal, not only their ideological underpinnings, but the way in which historical misconceptions have hindered cross-cultural understanding and interaction. Ideology aside, there is also great satisfaction to be derived from merely portraying the ironies of everyday life and revelling in the element of "pure play." This is no less a Trickster's agenda.

Grand River Mohawk artist Bill Powless is one of those who takes definite delight in pure play and ironic juxtaposition, with seemingly little interest in provoking political debate.¹⁹

For example, the bemused individuals depicted in *Beach Blanket Brave* (fig. 1)²⁰ and *Home of the Brave* (fig. 2),²¹ surrounded as

¹⁹ Powless (interview, 1991a) has said that his paintings are not really "political," but merely poking fun at things to produce a reaction. At craft shows and gallery exhibitions where his works are displayed he particularly enjoys watching the faces of non-Natives who are unsure how to react--unsure whether or not a piece is supposed to be humorous, unsure whether or not they are allowed or expected to laugh or smile. This is obviously one of the pleasures of creating this kind of work.

²⁰ One can recognize in this painting the echo of the earliest depictions of Native peoples, rendered in Graeco-Roman terms. As Fraser Pakes (1985: 4 ff.) has noted, in the images dating from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century the Indian stands before us as an ideal ancient, with a Herculean body type and cast in a classical pose....[In this] Golden Age of Greece revisited...there was no sense of some barbarian culture. All is grace and beauty and order. Indicative of the pervasiveness of this imagery is the fact that, in 1763, a visitor to Rome on viewing the Apollo Belvedere exclaimed, "My God, how like it is to a Mohawk warrior" [Coen 1969: 40]. Also indicative is the portrait of an Iroquois who visited England in 1710 [Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow, one of four "Indian kings" painted in similar fashion by Dutch artist, John Verelst. See Sturtevant 1974: 126 ff.]. He is standing in front of an English woodland backdrop and wearing his blanket in the style of a toga.

About his own painting, Powless (interview, 1991) simply says, "At first glance you see it as being this stately kind of thing, but then as you look at it you see it's just *going to the beach*!"

²¹ Powless says that his love for punning and wordplay, and his desire to say things differently in the titles of his work, derive in part from his background as a commercial artist in the field of advertising where he developed a keen interest in the actual look and feel of words together.

(continued...
they are with the trappings of popular culture—a rubber inner tube, newspaper and Speedo bathing trunks in the former, a can of Pepsi, paper cup and pink flamingo lawn ornament in the latter—are meant to express, more than anything else, Native participation in (and possibly bewilderment with) contemporary consumer society. Yet, both also foreground (visually, and textually in the titles) lingering stereotypes that prevent non-Natives from fully appreciating and accepting such participation. Moreover, Home of the Brave may even be "trying to teach us that Indians have the right to be tacky too" (Green 1989: 66)!

In Welcome to Our Reserve (fig. 3), Powless plays on the tensions between image and text, knowledge and ignorance, and desire and expectation by contrasting the figure of a "menacing" Plains warrior clutching a ball-headed club, with

---

(...continued)

Across the top of the sketch for this painting are the words, "New Wave Brave," while across the bottom is written "Land of the Free...Home of the Brave." Notwithstanding the artist’s comments on the apolitical nature of his work, it is hard to deny a political agenda to a piece whose title puts a wry spin on the last line of the American national anthem, all the more so when the viewer is subconsciously directed to fill in the phrase "Land of the free," and then reflect on the irony of these words as they apply to the present and historical situation of Native peoples.

In this, they work within "the constraints of the dominant while foregrounding those constraints as constraints and thus undermining their power" (Hutcheon 1991: 81).

Powless, in fact, has several pink plastic flamingoes around his own home.
the partially visible lettering on a large sign in the background welcoming visitors to the Six Nations Reserve. On the table in the immediate foreground two small cards identify the reserve by name and invite guests to "PLEASE HELP YOURSELF" to information about the community. "The funny part is," Powless (interview, 1991) says with a laugh, "you help yourself and you see the war club there. 'Try it!,' but it's not supposed to be scary, it's supposed to be a welcome."

Visually, the piece presents an unresolvable paradox, a mixed message that reflects the ambiguity many Native people feel towards cultural tourism. The crux of the problem: in an effort to introduce visitors to the realities of reserve life (thus dispelling stereotypes), it is often necessary to promise colourful dancing and photo opportunities (thus fulfilling the stereotypes). Perhaps more significant and potentially more disturbing than the "welcome/not welcome" juxtaposition is the less obvious tension set up between the imposing image of the Plains warrior and the small text identifying the Six Nations Reserve. So powerful and overwhelming is the sign "Indian" (both visually and metaphorically) that the only apparent indication of the individual’s Iroquoian affiliation is an easily overlooked pattern on the beaded cuffs. In this painting, then, Powless
reflects not only the complexity of contemporary Native identity but the difficulty in affirming it as well.\footnote{54}

In more than one Hollywood movie and racist anecdote, the Plains Indian has appeared not as "noble savage" or "savage savage," but as "bumbling fool," laughable not for a keen sense of humour or comic disposition but for embodying cultural incompetence. Envisioned by a Native artist, however, the same image can be recuperated as a healthy symbol of communal imagination and self-deprecating humour. In cartoons drawn for the local Six Nations newspaper, Tekawennake (figs. 4 and 5) Powless shows how such recovery is possible.\footnote{55} Figs. 6 and 7 illustrate how the image of "the

\footnote{54 In the photograph that inspired this depiction of situational irony, the "warrior" standing behind the table is actually prize-winning pow-wow dancer, Amos Key, a friend of the artist whose appearance in men's "traditional dancer" dress--as opposed to traditional Iroquois dress--regularly enthralled and repelled viewers in the finest Hollywood tradition. Both artist and dancer are acutely aware of this when they travel about together making goodwill presentations on behalf of Brantford's Woodland Cultural Centre, where Powless is employed as artist/preparator and Key is a Native language consultant.}

\footnote{55 Powless has been creating these cartoons for Tekawennake on a twice-monthly basis since the late 1980s. Addressing issues of local concern and community interest--in particular, educational funding and band council politics--they not only feature the Plains Indian stereotype as a generic "Indian Everyman," but a variety of other characters defined as "Native" by their narrow faces, high cheekbones and large noses.}
SO... WHAT DO YOU THINK OF OUR NEW "TRAFFIC LIGHT..." I THINK "IT'S" CUTE!

WELL... IT ADDS A LITTLE COLOUR... TO THE VILLAGE DURING THE SUMMER!

BUT...

"IT'S SURE IS GOING TO GET COLD IN THE WINTER!"

HAVE YOU SEEN OUR POLICEMEN'S NEW UNIFORMS YET?

YES I HAVE... AND I MUST SAY THAT LOVELY SHADE OF BLUE!!....

MATCHES THEIR SKIN NICELY!!
Fig. 6

I thought 'we were going to decide...

Vote on Booze
- Yes
- No

Six Nations Council

Fig. 7

Well, there's a sure sign of spring, Joseph... The joggers are out!

Iroquois Lodge
Lone Ranger’s faithful Indian companion, Tonto,” has also been refashioned to similar ends.56

Seneca curator Tom Hill (interview, 1991) has said that one of the potential dangers of Powless’ ironic paintings is that viewers might perceive them "as painted cartoons as opposed to art." There is, however, little chance of such confusion with the paintings in Plains Cree artist, Gerald McMaster’s 1990 series, The cowboy/Indian Show, even though many of the sixteen works have the look of captioned cartoons writ-large. This, in fact, is part of their appeal, imbuing them with a sense of immediacy and playful spontaneity. In works brimming with outrageous puns, ironic reference and critical parody, McMaster interrogates the "cowboy/Indian" phenomenon—that curious coupling of a minor blue-collar profession with a complete race of people—to recover aboriginal history and

---

56 Far from being an embarrassing screen presence in need of rehabilitation, Tonto is something of a folk hero at Six Nations, having been portrayed in The Lone Ranger television series by local athlete-turned-actor Harry Smith, better known as Jay Silverheels. Despite the generally demeaning status of "man-servant to the White man" accorded this character throughout the two hundred and twenty episodes of the series, Silverheels is recognized for founding "the Indian Actors Workshop in Hollywood in an effort to get more Indian people on the screen and change the negative film image of Indians" (Woodland Cultural Centre 1987: 101).
Once again, the sign "Indian" is reclaimed with a vengeance.

In Counting Coup (fig. 8), for example, the artist examines cross-cultural misunderstanding in the old West by evoking, then reversing, the standard scenario of the stock Hollywood Western. In a whimsical update of an old cultural maxim (or is it ethnographic observation?) lettered on the painting itself, the clever Indian chief outsufsmarts the not-so-clever cowboy-cum-captain-cum-bumbling fool. The deed is registered here in "Cinemascope" framing and captured in "Technicolor" hues. McMaster (interview, 1990) says

It is a winning combination that found immediate favour with reviewers when the show opened at the McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, in February, 1991. For example, Michael Valpy (1991: A13) writing in the Globe and Mail, enthused

Gerald McMaster is the sort of Canadian I would like to see clone himself. He thinks that there are things in the country that are actually funny....This [show] is great. You have something that at once is funny, bridges and draws together two cultures and (with the help of the catalogue) is educational without making the head hurt....Someone, someday, will write an acceptable history book for Canadian schools and be smart enough to include Mr. McMaster's paintings and catalogue notes.

For excerpts from other reviews see APPENDIX 7, p. 236.

In similar fashion Cherokee author Thomas King, in his novel, Green Grass, Running Water (1993: 263 ff.), has a quartet of Trickster-like characters enter a video of an old Hollywood western and "fix" the ending so that the Indians triumph over the confused cavalry. The incident not only recalls Hutcheon's postmodern "critical revisiting of the past," but Vizenor's identification of "the way time is handled and resolved" as a defining aspect of contemporary Native literature.
All Malinca Indian tribes shared certain types of coup, yet each held its own view as to special ones.

fig. 8

What becomes a legend most?
It's a little slapstick...with the "BANG!" thing...it's pretty slapstick. The point here is that the soldiers didn't know what the hell these Indians were all about. "Why are they poking me?" He just picks up his gun and "Bang!, you're dead." Here, it's not "Bang! you're dead," but "Bang! I got you." Europeans saw war games quite differently. War games were to annihilate people not to play tricks on them. For the Indians part of the humour in these old war games was in humiliating your opponent. So here's the subtle humiliation."

Echoing Holden's (1976: 293) description of "a kind of turnabout anthropology, switching observer and observed and setting up a second art of social science over and against that belonging to our own traditions," McMaster (interview) adds

I'm using the Indian looking back at "the Other" because so much has often been the other way [around]. Now I'm saying Indians can also see "the Other." [But] I'm not suggesting for a moment that Native peoples are perfect, because I think they have just as many incongruities in understanding "the Other" as "the Other" has in understanding the Indian.

In What becomes a legend most? (fig. 9), a popular

---

In the "golden age" of Great Plains warfare, acquisition of military honour was often achieved through feats of bravery that involved "counting coup," or touching but not killing one's enemy. The warrior's glory was in the enemy's humiliation. It was tribal teasing on a grand scale. In contemporary usage the word "coup" has political connotations that give this painting added dimension. McMaster (interview, 1990) says, "When I showed this to some people they said 'Coup!, isn't that like taking over a government?' I said, 'yeah, it could be'."

McMaster's double-play on the word "becomes" emphasizes the process of socially constructing and perpetuating the Plains Indian stereotype. This is no less true of Ojibwa artist Carl Beam's ironically titled print, becoming a stamp and all the thrills thereof..., (fig. 10), which offers (continued...)
advertising slogan used to sell fur coats is wryly
recontextualized to comment on the continuing exploitation of
the Plains Indian stereotype in the thriving Indian art market
of the American Southwest. McMaster (interview) explains

I had just come back from Santa Fe where I had an
opportunity to look around at the galleries. It had been
ten years since I had been back to Santa Fe. Before
that...I was in school there [at the Institute of American
Indian Arts]. One of the reasons I was there was to talk
with other artists who had gone through the same experience.
The issue was the school itself. What responsibility did it
have in teaching the artists?

Santa Fe had created a style. People went there with
expectations of purchasing something identifiable with the
area. What was encouraged at the school was...a sort of
"Indian Affairs mentality." "We have to train these Indians
so they can achieve some kind of status and ability to exist
in the outside world. They can't be hanging around on the

its own double vision of the Sioux, Hollow Horn Bear, whose
photograph was transformed by the American Post Office into a
fourteen cent stamp "honouring" the American Indian. The
dubious benefit to Native peoples of such an "honour" is
conveyed in the sardonic title handwritten in white ink across
the face of the dark print.

The Institute of American Indian Arts, founded in
1962, grew out of the Studio painting program begun by Dorothy
Dunn at the Santa Fe Indian School in the early 1930s. The
"Santa Fe" painting style which developed there is
characterized by nostalgic themes and pastoral scenes,
executed in a highly stylized manner emphasizing ethnographic
detail, precisely drawn contour lines, sterile decorative
elements, and the flat application of harmonious and
emotionally neutral colours. As J.J. Brody (1971: 134) has
noted, "Though there was some encouragement of genre scenes
and 'home' subjects, any suggestion of poverty or social
criticism was dismissed as caricature. Perhaps, as a result,
the content of Studio pictures is remarkably idealized and
asocial." For an overview of the major purveyors of this
style see Tanner (1973). For a critique of the Institute's
emphasis on personal expression at the expense of maintaining
continuity with viable Native traditions see Gritton (1991 and
reserves unemployed." The artists were trained to sell their product.

There was a power in the market. It drew students downtown because tourists were there and it was an opportunity to sell. The students and artists from the region began to be drawn into the vortex of the market. You make...what the tourists want. There was not too much experimentation because there was no concern about it. They weren't pumping out artists who were very critical of the material, they were just pumping out artists who could create stuff. It all looked like work that was geared to be picked up and carried away.

The point [in this painting] is a double-edged thing. What is the legend? Is it the style of painting or the image on it? This is a critique of the Santa Fe style and the image of the Indian. There are a lot of artists who do this image, this Indian on horseback. What does it say? It doesn't say anything except "an Indian on horseback." "Be proud of the Indian on horseback."

Of course, the Southwest is not the only region where consumer expectations and economic necessity serve to define the limits of creativity for Native artists.

In the diptych Shaman explaining the theory of transformation to cowboys (fig. 11) McMaster replaces the Hollywood stereotype with the mysterious and more powerful figure of the horned buffalo shaman. It is a pivotal act of cultural affirmation that inscribes Native identity as spiritual and intellectual, in contrast to the secular and shallow cowboys. The absurdity of the premise set out in the title merely

---

"This piece recasts the theoretical inquiry first seen in How do you explain the theory of relativity to a 20-game winner and still expect him to keep his concentration...?", from McMaster's 1989 Eclectic Baseball series. In both cases the artist expresses a concern for communication, dialogue and understanding.
emphasises the gap in cultural knowledge and experience.

McMaster (interview) says

To me a cowboy is a very simple kind of person—he’s got a job in life, maybe to break horses and to round up cattle. It’s not too difficult a life to understand. To be a cowboy isn’t necessarily to be an intellect. It’s manual labour. It’s a skill that doesn’t require too many degrees. You have to have a good knowledge of what you’re dealing with but it’s still pretty limited—"cow boy." And then a cowboy in the movies was always shooting. He was the protagonist, I guess, and the antagonist, of course, was the Indian. Now, that is simple. It’s a simple equation.

But to try and understand the Indian...how do you compare the two? They just don’t compare. "Indian," first of all, isn’t the proper name to include everybody. The Indian, in this case, was supposed to be from the prairies, but when you start looking at what an "Indian" is it’s much more complex. The Indian—whoever "the Indian" is—is made up of several tribes and families and lifestyles. It’s a whole society. So you have this gigantic society equated with a group of people who were just a small segment of Euro-American society. To try to equate an Indian with a job is just not the same. But Hollywood films and books tend to do just that. The point is that it’s so incongruous.

What I did here was to show the incongruity. The life of a cowboy is generally quite profane. Cowboys sit around the campfire and sing songs. The notion of intellectual conversation and bantering isn’t really there. It’s fairly simple. On the other hand, scholars and Native peoples and so many others have tried to understand what a shaman is and nobody can. We get an idea of what he does and who he is. It’s so complex a field—to begin to understand what a Native person is as represented by the shaman. "What is an Indian?" "Well, an Indian is just this guy that runs around on a horse"—the stereotype of an Indian—but he’s more complex than that.

You take one aspect of that—the religious aspect—and then you take a notion of transformation which not too many people understand. The joke here [in this painting] is "What is happening with the shaman?" "You can’t explain it." "How about showing somebody?" Whether or not transformation happens I’m not sure...you’re not sure...nobody is sure. There’s belief and non-belief playing here. Can an Indian do this? Is this possible?
One type of transformation that is possible, and which McMaster is fond of mentioning for its implicit amusement, is the transformation of "Indian" into "cowboy." "It is easier for an Indian to be a cowboy than it is for a cowboy to be an Indian," he wryly notes. Moreover, the metamorphosis need not be from sacred to secular. As if to emphasize this point, McMaster created for The cowboy/Indian Show an enigmatic piece titled Kaupois-uk (fig. 12) commemorating a little known society of cowboys that once flourished among the Plains Cree.

[The Kaupois-uk] was a mysterious group or society that we don't know too much about. Like all societies, they had their own special ways of doing things...private membership. They were a special society of cowboys. I was thinking of that particular society. Perhaps it does exist...I'm not sure. There is [ethnographic] reference made to the society,63 but most of these societies no longer exist. Somehow they were changed forever. Somehow the laws, the outlawing of the religion, effectively meant that these societies would forever be only in our memories.

Perhaps someday the Kaupois-uk may return again. Does anything ever really disappear? I think that there is a notion that things do reappear, that things can reappear in the future in another form, in another way. Something may have a death but it doesn't mean that it can't come back.

In The cowboy/Indian Show the Kaupois-uk do come back, but their return is intentionally clouded. Their appearance in

---

63 In the "Artist's Statement" to this show (Ryan 1991: 20 ff.), McMaster speaks of encountering in Germany and Hungary white European hobbyists who regularly abandon the city to "pitch tipis and dress up in the finest replicated costumes of the nineteenth-century Plains Indian." "It has to be seen to be believed," he says. Still, haven't we seen white people dressing up as Indians in Hollywood movies for years? Where's the surprise?

64 Mandelbaum 1979: 217.
this piece is a private joke dependent on private knowledge, the only ironic marker being the title, spelled out phonetically in the Plains Cree language. Yet the image is compelling. Who or what are these ghostly cowboy-like figures rising from the landscape and silhouetted against the night sky? Were it not for the artist's commentary in the catalogue, and his desire to break down the barriers of ignorance, most viewers would remain mystified. As it is, the piece hints at cultural knowledge that can never be accessed. Nor, perhaps, should it be. And that may be the most important lesson of this painting.

Vern Harper (interview, 1991), the Plains Cree elder who offered words of humour and healing at the opening ceremonies for The cowboy/Indian Show, found an immediate affinity with McMaster and his work. Interviewed several months later he cited some of the reasons for this.

[Gerald] looked at humour in the way I did. He laughed at the things I did [and] he didn't laugh at some of the things I didn't laugh at....He's got the wildness [of the Plains Cree] in him, but he's refined it....[And] Gerald has the coyote spirit in him. I recognized it in him. So he's a trickster, he has some trickster in him. He's cunning.... In Plains Cree, too, maybe it has something to do with

---

"Some years earlier, in 1983, McMaster addressed the historic reality of the "Indian cowboy" in Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys (fig. 13) a large graphite drawing based on a photograph of Metis artist Edward Poitras' grandfather at the age of eighteen. The playfully ironic title is taken from a popular country and western song often performed by Native singers at local talent nights on northern Saskatchewan reserves."
spiritual things. It feels at times we have an inside joke about something....

The thing too with the Plains Cree is riddles, riddles our people used to do. We've lost a lot of that. The riddles teach you to think, to figure things out for yourself. That's what I like about some of his stuff....I still try to do that humour with riddles and stuff. Some will get it right away, others won't, they just scratch their heads. I want people to think, to figure things out, not always have the punchline, create their own punchline, figure out the mysteries of life. Humour is one of the very important parts of the mystery of life. And that's where I identify with him, he has the ability to see things and feel things with humour.

But also, he likes to challenge people and that's what I liked about his work. I picked up on that challenge. That's another thing Indians like to do—challenge each other. A lot of us have been dispirited, but when we get our spirit back we always like to challenge ourselves, not in a macho sense, but in a creative sense....

I think the humour that came with me that night [of the opening] made it magical. [Gerald] put his power in, I put mine, and we made it magical together. That's why it was so good, it came so well, it was magical....Some of the non-Native people came after and said to me just off to the side, "Thank you for the healing."...So it was the humour that was the healing. And I said..."If you weren't open you wouldn't have got it. The fact that you're open, you got it."...I see Gerald's work and the way he looks at things, as a healer.

Like many others of his generation, cowboys have fascinated McMaster since childhood. He (in Ryan 1991: 20) writes

As a youngster growing up on the Red Pheasant Reserve many of my Saturday afternoons were preoccupied listening to such radio programmes as "The Lone Ranger" and "Hop-a-long Cassidy", as well as devouring many western comic books. I'd fantasize about being a cowboy. Having a horse and dressing up as a cowboy was all I needed. Somehow my mother had managed to save enough money to buy me the proper attire—boots and all. Owning a gun, to shoot the bad guys, BANG! BANG! was the other dream I had. Who were these bad guys? Bank robbers, horse thieves, I guess, and ah yes, 'Indians'!
McMaster was not the only Native child with aspirations of becoming a cowboy, nor is he the only Native artist to later reflect on the embarrassment, if not identity crisis such dreams inevitably precipitated. Ojibway artist, Carl Beam, similarly infatuated with cowboys, critically recalls this period in his own life in the print, *Self-Portrait as John Wayne, Probably* (fig. 14). One of twelve photo-emulsion steel engravings in the *Columbus Suite* series, it features an image of Beam as a young child striking a characteristic John Wayne-pose. It looms large above a strip of four smaller photographs, one of which depicts the artist today in his trademark black (cowboy?) hat, arms folded, gaze resolute; another in grade school surrounded by smiling classmates.

---

66 It is the word "probably" that gives the title its ironic and elegiac edge. While provisional in meaning, its inscription in the title is deliberate, affirming in memory a widely shared experience. Oddly enough, in the suite owned by the Agnes Etherington Gallery at Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario, this print is simply titled, "Self-portrait as John Wayne" (Trevelyan 1993, n.p.).

67 Beam is not the only Native artist to emulate John Wayne. Ojibway artist, Rebecca Belmore (interview, 1991) draws inspiration from Wayne's Academy award-winning performance as Rooster Cogburn, the tough and crusty frontier lawman in the film *True Grit*, for the title of her absurdly giant self-portrait-as-a-souvenir-cushion, *True Grit (A Souvenir)* (fig. 15). Created as an angry response to the Ontario Arts Council for using her as a token "Native woman artist from one of the regions," it symbolizes what she learned from the painful experience: "You have to be ready. You can't let your guard down because you gotta be careful in the political art arena." See APPENDIX 8, p. 237, for a fuller discussion of this piece.

68 Comparison with other prints reveals the image of Beam in cowboy gear to be a detail of a photograph of the artist with his mother and infant sister.
The remaining two small photos—of Beam in the guise of "Necroman", the ultimate emblem of transformation through death (McLuhan 1984: 6), and of an Apache Mountain Spirit dancer—allude to the spiritual/metaphysical dimension of Native identity that is all but overshadowed by the larger photograph. It is an apt visual metaphor; the play between signs is a discourse on identity, yet some signs have been vested with more authority than others. Beam (interview, 1991b) says

People may say, "He knows now that he didn't know who he was when he was five years old." But at that time, you didn't see any positive images of Indians doing anything. I didn't want to be the guy getting shot off the horse, dragged through the fucking mud. You had to choose one or the other.  

69 In recent years, Native authors have also addressed this phenomenon with similar irony. For example, in Green Grass, Running Water (1993: 202 ff.) Thomas King writes

By the time Lionel was six, he knew what he wanted to be. John Wayne.
Not the actor, but the character. Not the man, but the hero. The John Wayne who cleaned up cattle towns and made them safe for decent folk. The John Wayne who shot guns out of the hands of outlaws. The John Wayne who saved stagecoaches and wagon trains from Indian attacks.
When Lionel told his father he wanted to be John Wayne, his father said it might be a good idea, but that he should keep his options open.
"We got a lot of famous men and women, too. Warriors, chiefs, councillors, diplomats, spiritual leaders, healers. I ever tell you about your great-grandmother?"
"John Wayne."
"Maybe you want to be like her."
"John Wayne."
"No law against it, I guess."
Over the years Beam has produced several self-portraits—either as self-contained works or components of larger ones, as in the above print. One of the best known of the former type is *Self Portrait in My Christian Dior Bathing Suit* (fig. 16) created in 1980. As a work of "Indian art" it is as cheeky and brazen as the image of the artist it features.

Beam (interview, 1990) recalls

'It seemed the thing that Native people didn't do. Native artists were still doing the grand themes, not autobiographical self-portraits. I like the little personal things, the sketches and experiments of Van Gogh and Rembrandt, and the informal experimental work of Gauguin. *Self-Portrait...* was addressed to the forces of apathy. The handwritten script said, "What have you done? Have you written any poems, music, anecdotes? Have you ever done anything unusual, ordinary or extraordinary?"' I'm

---

70 In 1984 this painting was featured on the cover of the catalogue for the exhibition, "Altered Egos: The Multimedia Work of Carl Beam," originating at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. See McLuhan, 1984.

71 That is, nostalgic and romanticized depictions of Native history and mythology. Particularly pervasive in central and eastern Canada in the late 1970s were the brightly coloured "legend paintings" and serigraphs created by and in the style of Ojibway artist, Norval Morrisseau, whose work was influenced by ancient pictographs and sacred birchbark scroll designs. Morrisseau's surprising market success spawned a number of imitators--"the Woodland school of painting" as it was called by its devotees, "the Woodpecker school" by its detractors--who hoped to share in the benefits of the interest in the "new Indian art." For many people this was "Indian art." See Sinclair and Pollack (1979), Hume (1979) and McLuhan and Hill (1984).

72 The actual text reads

"...autobiographical work done in 1980 to validate my presence and to make sure that the work always remains explicitly autobiographical in nature, even if I have to state it in this way. As far as I'm concerned I'm the artist (among other things) so this is my work. THIS IS MY (continued...)"
surrounded by a lot of bland people who represent the forces of normalcy. They offer advice on your art career—where to market this... Self-Portrait... was not made to sell into the art market. It was made purposely not to sell in the current Indian art market as we know it. I don’t consider it to be a great watercolour. It’s loose and kind of competent. It was whipped off in an afternoon.

In spite of Beam’s typical assessment of his own abilities, this painting helped redefine the parameters of contemporary Native aesthetic practice in Canada. The portrayal of "Indian myths" was rejected in favour of portraying the "myths of the Indian." Images were ironized and politicized rather than romanticized.” More importantly, they were personalized. In this piece, Beam vigorously reclaims the mythic image of the naked savage, infusing it with his own brooding persona and considerable bravado. Clad only in chic designer trunks, in a mocking gesture that calls attention to mainstream society’s preoccupation with celebrity, the artist adopts a defiant warrior’s stance. (Long gone is the John Wayne-pose.) Angry eyes engage the viewer directly, exuding absolute confidence.

72(...continued)
WORK!! I am marking time thru my work (if it serves no other function to anyone else) and if I do this I will say tomorrow, "I was around yesterday, and here’s the fucking proof", "Where’s yours?" babble, babble, verbiage, etc.
.......... Carl Beam, 1980, TORONTO

73 Beam (interview, 1991b) says, "In 1977-78, when I used irony in my work to challenge the notion of 'Indian' I got a response: 'Native people have a sense of humour. They can be sarcastic, almost intelligent at times. That’s a scary feeling. Anytime, they’ll be demanding equality--political equality.'"
It is, in fact, this overt display of confidence, this fierce affirmation of self-worth and personal experience—reinforced in the handwritten text superimposed on the figure—that distinguishes this piece from the many generic depictions of Native people that precede it. Beam (interview, 1991) speaks passionately of the need for other artists to create their own images of lived experience:

In Canada we have Native artists but I haven’t seen anywhere an individual—where a microscope has been taken to a Native individual....We need to show that a Native person could in fact be an individual. This requires a fine focus. Instead of showing "the Indian" again, we need to see the wider focus of being Indian."

74 In a wry example of cultural teasing and intertextual play, Migemag (Micmac) artist, Viviane Gray (interview, 1991), and Ojibway artist, Ron Noganosh (interview, 1991) created "self-portraits" in response to Beam’s painting. These were exhibited together in their 1989 collaborative exhibition, "Hard and Soft" at the University of Sherbrooke Cultural Centre (see Anderson 1990). Noganosh’s piece, I Couldn’t Afford a Christian Dior Bathing Suit (fig. 17) makes use of a full-length nude self-portrait, painted in the early 1980s but never exhibited, which he framed in plexiglas "'cause Carl’s always using plexiglas, eh?." In imitation of Beam, the title is stencilled up the left-hand side and the words "Carl, thanks a lot" written with "little scribbles" on the bottom right. "He does little scribbles all over his [work] so I’ve got little scribbles all over mine," Noganosh says with a smile.

Gray’s piece, Carl, I Can’t Fit Into My Christian Dior Bathing Suit! (fig. 18) consists of two panels (one vertical, one horizontal) hinged at the centre. Affixed to the vertical backboard is a full-length mirror surrounded by postcards of tropical beaches and Indians and Mounties. Across the bottom is written, "CARL, you have a Christian Dior bathing suit. I can’t fit mine! You’re an inspiration but you cause such consternation. We love you." Filling much of the horizontal panel is the traced outline of the artist’s shadow—"I look like a Gerald [McMaster]...buffalo," Gray says—along with a bathing suit and fashion magazines. Compared to Noganosh, "I was very discreet," she adds. Also, (continued...)
A decade after producing the Christian Dior painting, Beam reprised the pose in two almost identical photographs that served as the basis for several works, all bearing the ironic title, *Burying the Ruler* (figs. 19 and 20)." Appearing older and heavier, but no less imposing, the artist stands casually in the midday sun, naked from the waist up save for his signature hat, and holding in his right hand a 12" ruler as if it were a spent or confiscated weapon." Like the earlier Dior

"...continued"
the reason I made it like this was because...it's difficult to make a shadow or put things onto a floor of a gallery. So someone suggested making it into a self-contained case. And I thought, that makes sense because it's like the baggage you have with you, that you carry with you all the time, whether they're [thoughts that are] part of your culture or they're not. They're always thoughts that are part of you.

While Gray's critique of the mainstream beauty myth is easily recognized, (even if her shadow may not be), the reference to Beam's painting is oblique at best and very much an in-joke. The same can be said for Noganosh. Knowing this, the two artists position their twin parodies across from each other in the exhibition gallery to suggest a symbiotic relationship all its own. In February, 1991, Beam had only heard of, but not yet seen these pieces. He nevertheless said, "I might do another piece myself in response to theirs!"

For other versions of this image, see McMaster and Martin (1992, pp. 120-21), Nemiroff, Houle and Townsend-Gault (1992, p. 106) and Rhodes (1992, pp. 7, 21, 28, 29).

The ruler is a particularly potent symbol of political, intellectual and scientific hegemony, signifying, as it does, a certain straightness and rigidity of thought. "Straightness" itself is also used as a metaphor for linear thinking and singular perception, and not surprisingly, all that is un-Indian and un-natural. The straight and narrow is indeed "straight" and "narrow." See, for example, Holden (1976), "Making All the Crooked Ways Straight: The Satirical Portrait of Whites in Coast Salish Folklore," or Coyote's endeavours to fix the unnatural straightness of a river in King (1992), "The One About Coyote Going West."
piece, this too is a memorable (perhaps even archetypal) image of personal conviction and grim defiance, devoid of artifice and pretence yet charged with meaning. Viewers are invariably drawn into a dialogue on matters of global and cultural concern. "A preoccupation with the tensions between Western scientific thought (and its focus on power over nature) and contemporary or past Aboriginal cultures informs much of his work" write McMaster and Martin (1992: 119). Like few other artists, Beam confronts the viewer in a manner that demands a response.

The image in fig. 19 is framed and overlaid with various geometric and analytic constructs, one of which appears to plot personal (emotional?) peaks and valleys over several years. The general direction of the plotlines from left to right across the picture plane is progressively downwards. About this particular piece Beam (interview, 1991b) says,

The title works two ways: It’s useful to look back in the past to consider the imposition of charts, order and other peoples’ ideas, [but] how do you identify with a superimposed grid system and assess the impact of information and charts?

In an earlier conversation with Ian McLachlan (1990: 11), Beam spoke of the limitations imposed by linear thinking on the development of cross-cultural understanding:

Native people are always seen as being back there in an anthropological past. If that’s where they get placed, anything contemporary can’t be authentic. It’s paradoxical that the more linear you are in your thought processes, the
less effective you are at thinking. Well, I don't want that linearity.

In typically understated fashion Beam (McMaster and Martin 1992: 120) put this even more succinctly in his Artist's Statement for the 1992 exhibition, Indigena, at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec. Mounted on the wall to the left of his three-panelled version of Burying the Ruler, the complete statement read:

After five hundred years
people should realize the world is round.

The "cabinet version" of Burying the Ruler (fig. 20) is something of a sly joke, but again, not without serious purpose. Since more people buy furniture than art, Beam (interview, 1991b) reasons, then perhaps he should make his art appear more accessible, more functional! He is of course only half-kidding, viewing the absence of Native design in Canadian furniture as a symptom of a broader cultural malaise and xenophobia.

We need to get rid of the fear of "Native" and incorporate it into the overall fabric of the country, then Canada would be a more exciting place to live in. It could affect architecture, interior design, landscape, dress. Right now, everybody's the poorer for its absence. The connection is rarely made between carpentry/woodworking and art/painting. Those people never meet, even though some woodworkers swear they're artists! The connection between colour, line and sculpture is still made in Mexico and New Mexico.
Not all efforts to depict Native integration into the overall fabric of the country have been appreciated. This is especially true where humour has been used to present a more accurate and naturalistic image. A case in point is the wonderfully whimsical painting *Indians' Summer* (fig. 21) again by Mohawk artist, Bill Powless. Unlike the pieces by Powless examined earlier (Figs. 1-3) which interrogate the stereotype by surrounding it with jarring symbols of popular culture, this piece seeks demystification primarily through inversion of the image itself. Undoubtedly, it is a particularly thorough inversion, viciously undercutting many of the well-known hallmarks of heroic Indian portraiture. To wit: the proud warrior's physique has ballooned to immense, almost obscene proportions; the familiar leather loincloth has become a pair of red bikini briefs; the telltale beaded headband is now a trendy yuppy sweatband; and the flowing feather headdress, an absurd umbrella beanie, its single floating feather a modern day cliché. Gone but not forgotten, are the symbols of status and military prowess--the pipestem, the fan, the decorated hatchet. In their stead is a vaguely phallic summer confection. Melting. Despite such comic turns and transformations, a basic human dignity, and even "nobility" still abide. Divested of all manner of exotic trappings, this

---

"The image of this umbrella beanie must have made a lasting impression on Powless. It reappears five years later on the "Indian brave" directing traffic in fig. 4, p. 56."
self-satisfied image of contemporary reality gently confounds and all but demolishes romantic fantasy.

At least that was the intention. But romantic fantasy dies hard—and not only in the non-Native community. When this painting was used to promote the Indian Art '85 exhibition at Brantford's Woodland Cultural Centre it created a minor furore on the Six Nations Reserve. Witness the following exchange that took place in the pages of the local newspaper, Tekawennake, between "An offended Indian" and Tom Hill, Director of the Woodland Cultural Centre:

May 29, 1985,

Obese is Sick!

To the Editor:

Art is beautiful in many ways, shapes and forms, but the advertisement for Art '85 falls way short of humor creativity suitable only for a freak show. I see nothing but disgust every time I see this dumb looking Indian with his belly blown up like a balloon and his boobs hanging and this stupid umbrella hat on his head. The Indians through the years have been stereotyped as being fat, lazy, illiterate and just plain stupid, even in cartoons. In conclusion, what is this artist trying to prove? This is 1985, the human body is beautiful but obese is sick.

June 5, 1985

"You're right, Obese is Sick"

Dear Editor:

You're right with your headline "Obese is Sick." Also, "the offended Indian" who wrote the letter in the May 29th Teka is correct that the image on the poster also reflects some of the negative stereotypes. The poster image is taken from an original work of art painted by Bill Powless and is included in the Indian Art '85 Exhibition. The painting titled "Indians' Summer" is taken from an original sketch of
an Indian gentleman Bill Powless met last summer at the Festival of Sharing [on Manitoulin Island]. No doubt, Bill Powless took artistic liberties with the portrait by exaggerating the massiveness of the character, highlighting the umbrella hat and melting popsicle and painting the portrait in colours which are unnatural—but all for a reason.

By presenting such a grotesque and irreverent image, the artist is asking the viewer to consider a number of questions. Has our contemporary Indian culture deteriorated to an Umbrella Hat "Indianized" with an eagle feather, an earring and long black flowing hair? The obesity of the gentleman and the melting popsicle are also visual symbols for the viewer to consider. We are so blinded by negative stereotypes which have been created by non-Indians that we ourselves have difficulty looking at ourselves as Indians. For example, some Indian viewers have been convinced that the obese gentleman in the poster is actually holding a bottle of beer as opposed to a melting popsicle.

Our Indian artists have come a long way in 1985 by being confident in presenting paintings in exhibitions which are filled with ideas for the viewer to consider as opposed to pointless images of "Indians in Sioux war bonnets riding off into the sunset." Our Indian artists have now reached international standards, primarily because of their inventiveness and their transmission of ideas with[out] which, to be sure, [their success] could not have been attained. It should be noted, some of the world's greatest art, such as Picasso's anti-war painting titled, "Guernica," [was] so filled with ideas and its image so disturbing to the viewers that Picasso had to leave the country for fear of his life.

Art is not always beautiful. Art reflects reality which is not always beautiful. Bill's painting, which became our poster, is his way of painting reality and pointing out to us our constantly changing contemporary Indian culture. Bill sold the original painting to a prominent art collector in Ottawa and the Indian Art '85 poster was the most sought after poster at the recent Canadian Museums Association Conference in Toronto. The poster is now a collector's item.78

78 Hill (interview, 1991) says there was a lot more public response to the painting than what was reported in the newspaper. "There were calls to our board of governors. I met with people here in person. There was a great deal of concern that maybe the piece was perpetuating the stereotype—an unflattering stereotype. I was quite surprised".
Recalling the commotion this painting created at the time,
Powless (interview, 1991) says

the Indians on the reserve here didn’t like it at all. My
son got...called down....The kids were telling him that
their mother and dad didn’t like it [because] it made people
think all Indians were fat. It was like they wanted the
stereotype of the "noble warrior", slim and trim and nothing
else. (laughs quietly) The white people, they weren’t sure
whether to laugh or not. I could see them. I just liked to
stand...and look at their reactions to seeing the thing.
Some people just broke out [in laughter]--you know, they
couldn’t help it. And some people weren’t sure whether they
were supposed to laugh or not. I could see them trying to
hold it back. I like to watch the reaction to some of these
things.

The artist adds that a poster of the painting was hung in the
local nursing home to remind residents of what they did not
want to look like!

Around the same time Powless created the pencil sketch for

Indians’ Summer he also did a drawing of a Native woman, but
it was several years before he converted it into a painting.

He remembers

I showed [the sketch] to my wife and she didn’t like it at
all. She says, "Women have a different feeling when they
see something like that." So it got me thinking about it.
I thought, "Well, this guy’s comfortable with himself, maybe
a woman too [would] be comfortable." I had her jogging, so
she was kind of working on losing the weight. She had these
spandex pants on.... (laughs)

It was not until 1991 that Powless transformed the drawing
into the painting Runs With Roosters (fig. 22) which was
This time, however, there was no controversy, for at least three reasons: first, the socio-political climate had altered considerably since the mid-1980s. Native peoples from across Canada were now involved in a high-profile struggle for self-determination and self-government, and asserting a renewed cultural confidence at the same time. The woman in this painting is bubbling over with self-assurance and energy; secondly, self-deprecating humour and ironic reference to contemporary subjects appeared more frequently in the Centre’s annual art shows; and thirdly, local residents had become more accustomed to (and accepting of) Powless’s humour through his newspaper cartoons. Still, he (interview, 1991a) was apprehensive:

I thought the Native women would be upset with it. They just kind of panned it I guess, "Let it sit there and it will go away." That was my wife’s reaction. She said, "People aren’t going to like this." But it’s something I wanted to do...rather than the picture of the "Native

---

78 At the risk of diluting meaning through overuse, this image too might be considered "archetypal" in that it embodies an attitude: a comic, healthy and healthful worldview, actualized through active embrace of the moment. (Cf. fig. 7, p. 56, for treatment of the same subject in cartoon form.) Six Nations was not the only reserve where the fitness craze took hold. In 1988, the late dancer/choreographer, René Highway (brother of Tomson Highway), spent three weeks in Thompson, Manitoba, videotaping forty aerobics shows in the Cree language, for broadcast throughout the north on the Native Communications television network. The premise was simple: "We were once a healthy people who have gotten out of shape, and now need to get back into shape."
maiden." Maybe that's what I should have named it.

(laughs) It was given that name [Runs With Roosters] because it was [done] right around the time that [the movie,] Dances With Wolves came out. So it's kind of her "Indian" name. And the Spandex is up to date. I don't know where the stripes came from--the zebra stripes just happened to appear on her as I was working on it....The boobs were kind of small at first so people were saying it looked like Tom [Hill]. So I made the boobs bigger and put lipstick on her. Still they said, "Ah, it looks like Tom in drag!" I think people had a good time with it anyway--they thought it was funny--they thought it looked like Tom. People kept on saying it. They were laughing as they said it.

Hill (interview, 1991) himself says, "Everybody thought it was a hoot, there was not a [negative] response at all." What fascinated him were the people who wanted to photograph the painting, but he thinks "they didn't see the issues relating to it." The issues? Powlless (interview, 1991a) explains

You think of people when they're overweight--they're not happy with themselves--and that's kind of the idea that I wanted to get across here. She's comfortable, happy with herself--[she's] big but there's an inner beauty. It's not physical.

Capturing that inner beauty of Native women on film is one of the major projects of Mohawk artist/photographer, Shelley Niro, whose witty self-portraits and comical studies of family members impart a playful energy and familial affection missing from many archival photo collections. Moreover, her work is a

---

80 In an article that appeared in The Toronto Star following the film's sweep of seven Academy Awards (including Best Picture of 1990) Thomas King (1991: G1) wrote, "I should confess up front that I liked much of Dances With Wolves....I was especially taken by the unexpected humor and joking that imagined Indians as human beings."
welcome corrective to all those humourless depictions of nubile princess, nurturing earth mother, sultry vixen and servile squaw that have long been fixed in the popular imagination. Niro brings these fanciful notions of Native identity into sharp (and sometimes soft) focus to illuminate their deficiency.

For example, in The Rebel (fig. 23)—a hand-tinted photograph of the artist's mother, June Chiquita Doxtater, lounging coyly atop the trunk of the family car, an AMC "Rebel"—Niro skilfully combines, then undermines the Indian princess and the earth mother stereotype at the same time. It is a memorable and engaging image. Native women, especially those in their middle years, have rarely been portrayed with such candour and confidence, nor with such comic sensibility. Niro (interview, 1991) says that her mother loves to have fun and would do anything for a laugh. "She's just very proud of the way she looks, you know." On another level Rebel challenges prevailing definitions of beauty and femininity, while foregrounding the debatable marketing strategy of using sexy women to sell sexy cars. In this, it symbolizes a completely

---

81 An American Motors Corporation model.
alternative perspective on cultural practice. Playfully enticing yet quietly seditious, The Rebel is aptly titled.

Regarding the selection of this photograph for inclusion in the show, Changers: A Spiritual Renaissance, a 1989 travelling

Mohawk actor, Gary Farmer (interview, 1991) says that "indigenous women don’t take themselves near as seriously as indigenous men do...but they take issues more seriously." This may be why he feels "their humour is much more layered." Not surprisingly, curator Tom Hill (interview, 1991) commends Niro’s work for being "so multi-layered," noting that "she’s very knowledgable of what’s taking place right now in her community on all the political issues--on the women’s front, on the Native front, on the arts front."

Niro (interview, 1991) herself has reflected on the process of layering in her work. She says

When I’m working on something, I try not to be intellectual about what I’m doing. I try to keep that right out of it and try to keep down to the simplest of ideas and the simplest reaction. And then as it goes on, it tends to get a little bit layered. And then when I’m finished, it is intellectual. But it doesn’t start out that way. I try not to be a social critic. But when it’s finished--when it’s framed, when it’s matted--then it is a critique. I don’t think I’m really aware of what I’m doing when I’m doing it.

Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham (1986: 2) says that this layering is in fact the defining aspect of a widespread Native American aesthetic.

I believe that the acts and perceptions of combining, of making constant connections on many levels, are the driving motivation of our aesthetic...[T]here is a distinct Indian aesthetic which challenges and interfaces with that of the European.

Humour is part of this aesthetic.

In 1991, The Rebel was featured on a special fold out cover of the Canadian Journal of Native Studies (Vol. 11, No. 2). In light of this, Mrs. Doxtater, if she were so inclined, could legitimately claim to be a pinup, a cover girl and a fold out!
exhibition of work by Canadian women artists of Native ancestry, Niro (interview, 1991) says

[Curator] Shirley Bear was saying that when the jury was looking at the slides, and they saw this picture of my mother, they all said immediately that they recognized somebody in their own family who's like that. I think it's true. It could be British Columbia [or] New Brunswick. [Native] people identify with each other in a way that is kind of fun. So I think it kind of strengthens that unity feeling....

Sometimes [I] go to conferences, and I just find that a lot of people...come together and it feels like an extended family. And they share the same kind of stories. They share the same kind of feelings, humour, in a lot of ways. ...Sometimes it happens in such a way that it makes your head spin...you think, "What's going on here?"

With *The Rebel* Niro affirms and seeks to communicate two critical but often overlooked aspects of Native experience, "pride and fun."

In a lot of my work I try not to stress the down side of Native life. I know a lot of non-Native people stress the poverty and suicides and all the down things, [but] in a lot of my work I try to show that we're not always like that. There is a strong sense of fun. There's something else going on...besides dragging your knuckles on the ground. (laughs)

The artist features her mother once more in *The Iroquois Is A Highly Developed Matriarchal Society* (figs. 24 and 25) a set of three photographs of Mrs. Doxtater seated beneath a hairdryer in her daughter Beverley's kitchen. The image on the left is repeated on the right, creating the impression of lyrical, playful movement. (After all, "the Trickster is a doing not a being.") In another context the title might seem
little more than an impersonal cultural fact," but here it is
given a comic and quite personal reading—one that happily
celebrates an aspect of contemporary Native women's
experience—made all the more so if one knows that Niro's
sister Beverley is the family "hair sculptress." Niro hopes
that such images will encourage the more conservative members
of her own community to free themselves from stoic and
restrictive stereotypes that are not of their own making.

[The title] sounds so serious, and I think sometimes some
people start believing these things they hear and they start
thinking that they have to be so stiff. It is a matriarchal
society, but you can loosen it up a bit too. And it comes
from your mum.\[85\]

Despite the attention generated by her first comic studies,
Niro was not keen on the idea of intentionally creating
humorous photographs, feeling they would surely seem
artificial and lack spontaneity. She much preferred images
that "just happened." Her solution to this dilemma was to set
up a situation where humour would just happen—where the
"artificial" could become the "ironic." To this end, she
enlisted the help of her three sisters, Bunny, Betsy and

\[84\] Cf. McMaster's ethnographic update in *Counting Coup*
fig. 8, p. 58.

\[85\] The simultaneous affirmation and transformation of
Iroquois tradition goes beyond the interplay of title and
photographic images, extending to the framing as well. Here
—but not illustrated in this paper—the pattern of dots
perforating the black matte (by means of a dental drill) not
only picks up the curve of the hairdryer but replicates the
"skydome" and "celestial tree" designs found in traditional
Iroquois beadwork on black velvet and broadcloth.
Beverley, who donned an assortment of tacky 1950s fashions, then mugged for the camera while Niro clicked the shutter—first in the attic of her home, then later in the parks and public spaces of her hometown of Brantford, Ontario. The resulting series of hand-colored photographs was titled *Mohawks in Beehives.*

Like many of the other works in the series, the signature piece, *Mohawks in Beehives I* (fig. 26) is all about "attitude." Niro (interview, 1991a) says the women look like they’re in total control. They have this look about themselves. [There’s] almost a punk rock feeling to it—but they’re not punk-rockers....They don’t look tough but they look..."cool." They’re not pushing people away but they’re keeping their distance.

It is a critical distance, to be sure. With *Mohawks in Beehives,* Niro continues to challenge aesthetic convention and

---

*6* When the series went on display at Ottawa’s Ufundi Gallery in December, 1991, it caught many viewers by surprise. Not everyone knew how to respond to such unconventional images, but Gerald McMaster, in his capacity as curator of contemporary Indian art at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec, bought a complete set of the fourteen photographs for the national collection. *The Rebel* and *The Iroquois Is a Highly Developed Matriarchal Society* were included in the purchase.

*7* Working with images from this same photo session Niro would later extend her titles into narrative and poetic texts, hand-written on the photographs themselves. In *Never Before* (fig. 27) for instance, she skilfully transforms the cool queen bees into members of the graduating class to reflect widespread community support for education, envisioned as the shield (and weapon) in the daily battle for cultural survival. Blending fierce optimism with gritty determination, *Never Before* represents a measure of cultural hope. "It’s serious but it’s funny at the same time," Niro (interview, 1991a) says.
Never before were they so prepared.
Uniformly they picked up the shield
and approached the approachers,
making eye-to-eye contact.
misrepresentation with images that project the same mixture of pride and fun that distinguish *The Rebel* and *The Iroquois Is A Highly Developed Matriarchal Society*. She (interview 1991a) says

In these pictures, I'm not just choosing "beautiful" women. They're just day to day people and they just put on a little bit of makeup and put their hair up a little bit and they're having fun....The people in the pictures aren't necessarily what beautiful women [look] like today....I just like the idea of putting the picture[s] in such a way that there's no shame...and I find [Native] femininity or sexuality is something that's really never shown or talked about or affirmed.

In *Portrait of the Artist Sitting with a Killer Surrounded by French Curves* (figs. 28 and 29), probably the best-known piece from this series," Niro joins her sisters in front of the camera. The "Killer" in the title is a sly reference to the cigarette held by the artist. And the French curves? An allusion to the female form? Or the sweeping arcs of star-like dots on the jet-black matte? Perhaps. But for Niro the French connection is more personal, more immediate: "This is my Oka piece, I guess." More than the affirmation of

---

" Chosen to promote the Woodland Cultural Centre's First Nations Art '92 exhibition, this quartet of "painted ladies" was featured on a poster, T-shirt and catalogue cover. The photograph has since been reproduced along with ten other Niro images in Ryan 1994b.

" For eleven weeks in the summer of 1990 (from July 11 to September 26), armed Mohawk warriors confronted provincial police and the Canadian military at Oka, Quebec, to protest the planned expansion of a municipal golf course and the failure of the federal government to settle outstanding Native land claims. The incident was covered extensively by the (continued...)
familial bonding, or the visual record of tribal peoples "prevailing in good humour" in a comic world, this self-portrait, together with the other photographs in the series, constitute a personal and collective antidote to the numerous images of Mohawk warriors, and women and children under siege that saturated the media for so long. In the fall of 1991 Niro recalls

This [whole series] was really done after a pretty depressing summer, pretty depressing fall, absolutely depressing winter—if you watched the news [on the Gulf War] or read the papers. I don't know about you, but if I feel this way so must a bunch of other people. So this is my way of being able to deal with those sorts of things. Being able to deal with a feeling of absolute dread—the sky is falling—and I felt like I was really being pushed up against a wall. So it's a psychological exercise in (spoken quietly) "surviving."...

And I guess it really comes down to [being] almost like Indian clowns. We're putting ourselves in the position where we're going to make other people laugh. It almost takes on that clown feeling.

Niro's talent for clowning is given fuller expression in her 1992 series, This Land Is Mime Land, in which she explores the dual impact of popular culture and family history on the development of identity—her own identity. To this end, she combines three distinct images in each of the twelve panels comprising the series: in the first frame, an outrageous

(...continued)
national and international media, prompting sympathy protests across the country and around the world. In the aftermath, a profound sadness, as well as anger, pervaded the Canadian Native community. This was especially so for the various Iroquois reserves and communities.
parody of some well-known icon or prominent persona, using herself as the model throughout; in the second frame, a candid shot of a close relative culled from the family photo album; and in the third frame, a stark and simply-posed self-portrait, a product, Niro says, of the images in the first two frames. Her celebrity subjects include such figures as Snow White, Elvis Presley\(^\text{90}\) and Santa Claus. Her method of impersonation is decidedly self-conscious and campy—ironically and hilariously deconstructive, exemplifying the art of complicitous critique.

Niro’s take on actress Marilyn Monroe in \textit{500 Year Itch} (figs. 30 and 31) is one of her most amusing masquerades. As Seattle art critic Regina Hackett (1993: C11) describes it

\begin{quote}
In a 1950s party dress and blond wig, she reprises Marilyn Monroe’s famous scene [from the film, \textit{The Seven Year Itch}], standing on a street grate with her dress rising. The electric fan at Niro’s feet tells us she has been caught in the act of preparing her final prop, exposing not only her method but Monroe’s.\(^\text{91}\)
\end{quote}

\(^{90}\) While Niro satirizes rock and roll, Ojibwa performance artist, Rebecca Belmore, utilizes it to engage "souvenir seekers" in a dialogue on stereotyping and Native identity. "Free me from this plastic," she says, in her song, \textit{I’m a High-Tech Teepee Trauma Mama}. "Let’s talk!" See APPENDIX 9, p. 240, for her description of Trauma Mama’s evolution from art school project to "personal anthem."

\(^{91}\) Elsewhere in her review Hackett (1993: C11) draws a parallel between Niro’s work and that of New York artist Cindy Sherman, who also uses herself to model various personalities in mock-serious situations. The writer, however, goes on to say that Niro’s use of the mythologized self-portrait is nothing like Sherman’s, since Sherman is still exploring identity, while Niro has obviously found hers. "No matter (continued...)}
Were this the only image present in the piece, its effect would be comical but much less pointed than it is when seen alongside the other two photographs. For again, the artist plays with mainstream conventions of glamour and beauty with serious purpose, contrasting idealized notions of (white) femininity with familial images of Native reality. It is an unsettling juxtaposition at the best of times, always an uneasy compromise. As the ultimate media construction of female sexuality—blond, beautiful, and buxom—Marilyn Monroe is no less a symbol of male fantasy within the Native community than without. Likewise, Monroe and her bevy of latter-day clones are deemed no less worthy of admiration and emulation by Native females than they are by non-Native. What, then, are the consequences for cultural identity and self-esteem?

Niro is not the first aboriginal artist to recognize the appeal of such women, or to address the discord they create for both sexes within the Native community. Seminole/Creek/Navajo artist, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie raised the issue in her 1990 photo-collage, When Did Dreams Of White Buffalo Turn To Dreams Of White Women (Archuleta and Strickland 1991: 69). That same year Cree artist Jane Ash Poitras incorporated the picture of a sultry blond into a collage of Native images.

"(...continued)
what guise Niro assumes," she writes, "it's she in there cackling at her own ruses."
more recently in venus myth, a mixed-media work from the classical aboriginal series, metis artist jim logan combined a painting of the ancient statue of the venus de milo (the woman with "the perfect body") with advertisements from women's magazines, and five miniature indian dolls with faces painted white. in a small body of accompanying text logan (in ryan 1994a: 10) writes, "beauty seems to be a secret, kept by those in magazines. so powerful is beauty that my sister wishes she was white and my sons won't look at their own...."

discouraging as these words sound, it is still possible to dilute the power of such magazine imagery. for instance, in works such as monetary blackboard (fig. 33) jane ash poitras (interview, 1991a) "indianizes" and ironizes images of white women by giving them a painted feathered headband. she calls

92 ojibway artist, rebecca belmore (interview, 1991) also broached the subject of white women (and native male fantasy) in crazy old woman child, a site-specific performance at a native friendship centre in northern ontario. in this tragi-comic piece, the stage act of a voluptuous "marilyn monroe-type" country and western singer is used to frame the story of a native cleaning woman's relationship with an alcoholic white widow. according to belmore, the native women enjoyed the performance, while the native men went away mad. see appendix 10, p. 243, for belmore's description of this presentation.

93 in memorial blanket for eddy (my marilyn), another work from the classical aboriginal series, logan makes oblique reference to marilyn monroe, drawing a parallel between her sad and untimely death and that of his father: monroe killed herself with barbiturates and alcohol because she couldn't handle movie stardom; edward logan drank himself to death because he never received recognition as a war hero (ryan 1994b: 13).
this "shamanizing the white guys." It is a wry act of transformation and reverse acculturation that reaffirms the worth of Native identity by turning the white women into "honorary Indians." In this, the power and appeal of difference--white female difference--is symbolically subverted and diffused. Salish/Okanagan artist, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, also "Indianizes" images of white women in his ongoing series of portraits based on photographs from Vogue Magazine. In works such as Face Painting of A Woman (fig. 34) Yuxweluptun (super)imposes a Northwest coast Native aesthetic on the white face of high fashion to literally create a work of ironic double-vision. Moreover, his painting Boy Toy (fig. 35) may be a case of ironic triple-vision with Yuxweluptun "spoofing" Madonna (then reigning queen of pop culture irony) spoofing Marilyn Monroe who may well have been be spoofing the whole glamour-goddess image she helped create. Clearly, there is no closure.

94 There is a certain degree of historical reckoning and revisionism at play here as well, in that Yuxweluptun (interview, 1991) consciously parodies the practice of 19th century painters and photographers who created portraits of (frequently unidentified) Native women. "[They] went out and did Indians so I went out and did white people," he says. "I historically found them. I think that to document it was neat."

95 Yuxweluptun’s painting is based on a well-known LIFE Magazine photograph of singer/actress, Madonna, parodying another well-known image of Marilyn Monroe. Ironically, feminists attacked Madonna for supposedly "setting women back with her 'Boy Toy' charade" (Ansen 1990: 310). "They didn't get the joke," she says. "The whole point is that I'm not anybody’s toy. People take everything so literally....Irony (continued...)
In *Carl, I Can’t Get Into My Christian Dior Bathing Suit!*, (fig. 18), Viviane Gray’s (interview, 1991) wry commentary on the mainstream beauty myth (discussed earlier in this chapter, Footnote 74, p. 70), the Migemag artist imagines herself as an ill-defined shadow on the ground, reflected back to viewers in a full length mirror that at the same time cleverly implicates them in the construction of the image. As an affirmation of self-esteem, the piece is less than direct. In her mixed-media "bust," *Self-Portrait: But, You Don’t Look Indian....* (fig. 36), Gray is much more assertive, claiming the right to creative self-definition, while--through the use of a mirror as protective shield, and even weapon--refusing, not only the ubiquitous "male gaze," but that of anyone else (Native or non-Native) who would impose a limited definition of identity. She explains

> Ever since I was little everybody used to say, "But you don’t look ‘Indian.’" So, it would come in varying degrees. Sometimes I’d argue with them. Sometimes I wouldn’t. And then I got to become older and more confident and it just didn’t matter any more. I thought, "What do I care what they think? They don’t know what they’re talking about." And most of the time it would reflect what they knew about Indians. That’s why I put the mirror [on the face], just so

96 This piece was also featured in *Hard and Soft*, the 1989 collaborative exhibition with Ron Noganosh.
that it gets back to you, what you're saying. You're saying, "But you don't look Indian." If you look in the mirror it's as if to say, "Well, who are you really to say?"

I painted all the plexiglas tubes...the "red roots," and I tried to insert [into them] all kinds of things that were part of me and part of my experience...things like photographs and sweetgrass and lots of feathers and beads and medicines. I had fun making it. (laughing) When I showed it to my son he said, "You’re not going to show those boobs are you?" (laughter) "You need boob protectors." And the fact too that the head is bigger than the rest of the body. You know how Indian people like to tease you... if you go somewhere and you've done something really good or you've done well in something, they don't want it to go to your head. They don't want you to have a big head so they put you down in a way by teasing you." I was always being

"In Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto (1969: 147) Vine Deloria Jr. offers a capsule history of tribal teasing, one of the most distinctive features of Native humour:

For centuries before the white invasion, teasing was a method of control of social situations by Indian people. Rather than embarrass members of the tribe publicly, people used to tease individuals they considered out of step with the consensus of tribal opinion. In this way egos were preserved and disputes within the tribe of a personal nature were held to a minimum. Gradually people learned to anticipate teasing and began to tease themselves as a means of showing humility and at the same time advocating a course of action they deeply believed in. Men would depreciate their feats to show they were not trying to run roughshod over tribal desires. This method of behavior served to highlight their true virtues and gain them a place of influence in tribal policy-making circles.

Recalling his youth among relatives in Saskatchewan, Cree elder Vern Harper (interview, 1991) says, "the Plains [Cree] were great teasers, and I thought it was healthy, and they thought it was healthy. The teasing thing was very important....It was a constant, almost kind of a game, and you had to learn how to go with it."

In a lecture at the University of British Columbia, November 10, 1992, Delaware writer, Daniel David Moses, discussed the teasing of visitors to his home reserve of Six Nations near Brantford, Ontario:

(continued...)
told not to have a big head so...in reality, I'm making fun of myself. But I'm also making fun of the whole social exchange that takes place when people tell you things like, "You don't look this or you don't look that."...So, it's my self-portrait, just as [Ron Noganosh's *I Couldn't Afford A Christian Dior Bathing Suit*, fig. 17] self-portrait is him."

A few days after Gray spoke these words (in a convivial mid-winter gathering at her home in Ottawa that included

"(...)continued"

The first few times I take new friends home to the reserve I have to prepare them, because a large part of how we function is [through] teasing each other. If they're not prepared they're going to feel under attack. The function of teasing, it seems to me, is to help characterize you as an individual. It points out maybe a weakness or maybe just something that's interesting about you. To me, it means they've recognized who you are. A lot of people from mainstream society are used to being under attack. It takes a bit of moving around in their head to figure out what's going on, to be comfortable with it. It can be very funny but it's meant as a gesture of recognition.

This description is very similar to that given by artist, Jane Ash Poitras, of teasing among Arizona peyote ceremonialists. See APPENDIX 6, p. 234).

A slightly different characterization is offered by Gerald Vizenor (1987: 302 ff.), who describes teasing and putdown among mixed blood and fullblood Indians of Minnesota as "hard play in the best sense of the word...a compassionate duel. It wasn't competitive to win or outwit, but it was a duel." He contrasts this with "the play between the colonists--and I would include the government and the Church--and Indians.... [It] didn't lack compassion, but it was manipulative. You wanted to outwit. That was the motivation in imagination. You wanted to outwit either restrictions and bureaucracies or impositions."

"In his painting, *Just Because My Father Was A Whiteman Doesn't Mean I'm Any Less An Indian* (fig. 37), Cree artist George Littlechild offers a similarly indignant challenge to the imposition of identity. His title, like Gray's, also reads like an anecdotal excerpt or textual soundbite from an animated and ongoing discourse on cultural ignorance and cross-cultural education.
Gary Farmer (interview, 1991) echoed the need to engage, yet somehow thwart, the power of ascribed identity:

The stereotypical images are images that are based on some facet of truth, so in order to deal with truth we can't deny the stereotypical images that are there. We have to play into them in order to see beyond them. We can manipulate them like Bill [Powless] does and we must manipulate them. In order to go beyond those images we must create images of ourselves that are more real for us on our terms. And, as artists, we have the power to do that.

Few statements better describe the challenge facing Native artists today.

Also present were Viviane Gray's husband John, Ron Noganosh's wife Maxine Bedyn, visiting Swedish scholar Vanessa Vogel and the writer.
CHAPTER 3

SUBVERTING THE SYSTEMS OF REPRESENTATION:
DOUBLE-PLAY IN THE GALLERY AND ACADEMY

We will play a little trick on the Whiteman; wait and see.

Philbert Bono in the film, Powwow Highway

To me, the strongest thing that Philbert says is that we have to trick them.

Gary Farmer, on playing Philbert Bono

Having the power to manipulate stereotypes, and create images more real than stereotypes (Farmer, p. 94, this document), is of little consequence to Native artists if the power to exhibit such images remains with white administrators of cultural institutions who still value and even promote stereotypes. How, then, does an artist contend with or expose a "system of power which legitimates certain cultural representations while prohibiting and disavowing others" (Galbo 1987-88: 40)? "Very carefully," one might answer. "Very cunningly." In the same way that Native authors use ironic strategies to contest oppressive hegemonic ideologies (Fischer 1986: 224 ff.), visual artists employ similar Trickster tactics to undermine institutional practice and expectation, "breaking from formula and breaking out of program" in ways both familiar and radically unknown (Vizenor 1987: 290). Insight into the conceptualization and actualization of some of these tactics can be gleaned from a
close reading of the "little dissident narratives" that pepper the conversation of these artists when discussing their work. This chapter examines several such narratives and related artworks.\textsuperscript{100}

One of the most memorable accounts comes from Cree artist, Jane Ash Poitras, who was invited by Dr. Patricia McCormick, Curator of the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton, to participate in a 1988 exhibition commemorating the bicentennial of Fort Chipewyan, the northern Alberta reserve where Poitras was born. The Fort Chipewyan Breakfast Club, the satirically-titled and wildly vibrant series of seventeen paintings which Poitras produced for the show, was not at all what the curator expected or, in fact, desired. The problem, as Poitras explains it, was simple:

She was so stereotypic in her thinking....[She wanted me] to do pretty little prints of life in Fort Chip today to celebrate the bicentennial so they could sell them in the museum shop. "The tourists would really like that and see what the Indians are doing today," [she said]. And I thought, "Oh great!, let's show them what the Indians are doing today." But I gave her paintings instead, and the show went over smashingly.

\textsuperscript{100} Apart from any discussions about them, many of the works themselves constitute "little dissident narratives," in that they "challenge the dominant metanarrative [on Native peoples and Native arts] and the state apparatus that would prohibit or discredit them...[and] indicate the possibility of another kind of society and another form of social relations" [and another form of artistic practice] (Carroll 1982 in Vizenor 1989: 15).
Paintings indeed. In this series of intimate community vignettes, Poitras recalls, then vigorously revitalizes, familiar archival images of anonymous Indian families huddled about makeshift dwellings in a timeless locale. Rendering them in rich and vivid hues, she charges both the people and the landscape with a restless energy: community members are seen busily chopping wood, curing fish, feeding stray dogs, and socializing. In this, Poitras conveys something of the cultural dynamics that account for the community’s continued existence. Still, this was not what the curator had in mind...

Here she is, this big, high-ranking curator with a Ph.D.—she did the genealogy in Fort Chip—and she seemed to think of herself as the Fort Chipewyan Mother Theresa, and really what she was was the Fort Chip dunce....[When] I got the show up...she almost didn’t show it...because it didn’t go along with the stereotyping presentation of her show [of historic artifacts] which was right beside that. And mine stole the show anyways. She did a big museum exhibit...a big thing, glass case, and she’s still making us look like a bunch of artifacts....She’s my age and I had such a belief in her....When you think about how the people live in the communities it’s really sad. It’s third world conditions. And that’s what she wanted me to paint about. She was going to turn it into a calendar, and then she didn’t because she still wanted to see...[quaint, romanticized images of] dogs sitting and wagging their tails. She still wanted it to be like a "vision" in the titles....She didn’t want the truth --but she got it!

The truth? Not content to merely rehabilitate stilted archival images, Poitras took the opportunity to add an unexpected critical edge by giving the paintings ironic titles satirizing white society’s custom of institutionalizing leisure activities. Titles such as Fort Chip Dog Show,
(fig. 38), Fort Chip Canoe Club, Fort Chip Sewing Club (fig. 39), and Fort Chip Lonely Hearts Club make it difficult to consider the images without acknowledging, with some uneasiness, their more affluent counterparts in the dominant society. By wryly politicizing her work Poitras (interview, 1990) firmly anchored the exhibition in present-day reality.

The pictures all sold. The people loved it. Oh, they loved it! It was up for a long time....It got a lot of PR and it was written up a lot....It taught a lot of people a lot of things....Intellects from other walks of life came up to me and said, "You know, you’re right, Jane."

It was a commissioned show and I would have never done it unless I was asked by McCormick to do that, but we had to bring it down to her level so that she could understand it, right?...I painted them very pretty....I showed her a couple [and she said,] "Oh, isn’t that sweet." I said, "Yeah, isn’t it just beautiful, look at this nice blue." "Oh, there’s blue in there, oh, you use that so nice." And I said, "Yes, didn’t I," [with] my evil little smile and my little Weesakeejak tail...waving in the wind. (laughs) ... You have [the film,] Educating Rita, this is Educating Pat.

Not only confounding, but foregrounding expectation is one of the major themes of Ojibway artist, Ron Noganosh’s (interview, 1991) sculptural assemblage Shield for a Modern Warrior, or. Concessions to Beads and Feathers in Indian Art (fig. 40).

A lot of people...have trouble with...the kind of work that I’m doing. This ain’t "Indian," right? They’ve got this "IT’S NOT INDIAN!" trip....The shield that I did, the full title is Shield for a Modern Warrior, or Concessions to Beads and Feathers in Indian Art. They’re always saying, "Where’s the beads?" "Where’s the feathers?" "And where’s the leather?" "OK, you want it, here it is!" This is what I’m putting in here....And then, on the front of that [piece is]...part of a hubcap from a Firebird. That’s the Indian’s pony. (laughs) He’s always got an old car or an old truck so he’s gotta get movin’, eh? That’s part of it. [And then,] there was the beer cans. I woke up one morning, I was in a parking lot in Hull. "Where am I? I don’t know."
Too drunk to drive home, I guess." Slept in the car, right? Wake up, rubbing the dirt out of my eyes and I looked down and there's a flattened out beer can. Hmmm. (laughs) So I got thinkin' about it, put it in the car, took it home and I started lookin' for more of them...and that's where that started to come from.

As for the concept of a contemporary shield, it would seem that Carleton University art historian Ruth Phillips (interview, 1991) was an unwitting catalyst. She says Noganosh did that when he was taking my survey of Native art....I always spend a lot of time on Plains Indian shields because I love them....We were doing that part of the course, [and] I was thinking, "What is a shield for a modern Native person?" And he thought, "Well, it's alcohol," and then he put the rest of it together. He does respond, or play off representations that are out there.

What makes this particular piece so visually compelling and socially relevant is the ironic "play off" between flattened beer cans and ersatz warrior's shield. By virtue of irony's peculiar double-vision, Noganosh is able to advance the notion of alcohol as shield and protection without denying its grievous role in cultural erosion. As critical parody, it is a grim semiotic sign of the times--far more than a simple fusion of the "noble warrior" and "hopeless drunk" stereotypes. Traditionally, a shield's protective power was believed to be more spiritual than physical, with the protective spirit(s) frequently symbolized on the shield's surface. So too for Noganosh, who also symbolizes the
protective "spirits," with no less concern for sacred survival. He (interview, 1991) says

It's protection from the technology. It's protection from the society, the foreign society that we're [being]... forced into. If [people] can't deal with the society, they duck out of the reality in alcohol.

Further to this, Viviane Gray (interview, 1991) relates a story told to her by the Anishnabe elder, Wilfred Pelletier:

I remember him saying this once, it really struck me, he [said], "You talk about the drunken Indian, but you know what the drunken Indian is doing, he's protecting himself." ...[If] you're dealing with spiritual powers, if someone is trying to enter your spiritual sphere and harm it, if you're aware of that then you have a hard time protecting it, but if you're camouflaged or if your senses are dulled by alcohol then you're not as aware of what is going on, and therefore that person cannot harm you. I thought, "My God, that's interesting. I never thought of it that way." [He also] said that's why a lot of Indians used hallucinogenics. It was really as a protection so that you distorted your senses, so that you couldn't be attacked from the other side.

While Noganosh (interview, 1991) considers the use of humour and playfulness to be a definite aesthetic strategy--"If they stop and laugh I got their attention, and then maybe they'll take the time to look around at it a little bit more and see what's going on"--it is also a calculated response to the pervasive seriousness (and tragic worldview) that he still sees in mainstream artistic practice and the gallery system that affirms it.

I know a lot of artists and a lot of them are so damned serious. Christ, they're running around thinking they're Michelangelo! What the hell! Running around trying to make the essential art piece--the one that's going to survive,
that’s going to be the next *Mona Lisa*. But, hell...half the people don’t have the dedication to do that kind of work. So how can you take yourself seriously? It’s pretty hard if you’re sitting around planning to take yourself that damned seriously. I don’t think you have time to do any work. (laughs) Hey, have some fun! Shit!, life’s not permanent. Why worry about making *things* that are permanent? I make sculptures. I take them apart. I’ll take a piece off one and use it on another one if I don’t like it or it don’t work.

Noganosh’s rejection of permanence and the sanctity of the art object is also a rejection of aesthetic closure. More often than not, his works are in the process of construction and deconstruction, both becoming and unbecoming. ("The trickster is a doing not a being.") As well, the very practice of recycling found objects to produce "untraditional" (Native or mainstream) "works of art" that are exhibited, collected and purchased, has its own satisfaction--it is another way of teasing the Whiteman. In 1985, Noganosh summed up his creative philosophy in a predictably (un)serious "Artist’s Statement" accompanying works on display at the Ottawa School of Art Gallery:

> These pieces have been created from the deep dark depths of my noble savage brain. Using objects I have found scattered haphazardly across my path in my numerous travels, I have molded them together to bridge the generations of cultural difference and catapult them into the present. By renewing this ugliness called garbage and giving it life and meaning, I am continuing the beliefs of my people who knew that everything has a place and a spirit. I hope that this feeling will be transferred to the viewer.\(^{101}\)

\(^{101}\) In a second "Artist’s Statement", undated and more autobiographical (but no less satirical) Noganosh ponders the prospects of some day becoming a RIC[...]

See APPENDIX 11, p. 245.
In conversation in February, 1991, Noganosh added:

"I find it great that most of the garbage I’m using to make my sculptures with are things that Whitemen have thrown out --white people have thrown out--or the whole society as a whole has thrown out! That, itself, is teasing...because they can sit and make the same thing if they wanted to! (laughs) They don’t have to pay me five grand for it, or ten grand, or whatever they’re paying me."

Teasing the Whiteman can also take the form of private performance and a Trickster’s dance around bureaucratic expectation. At the centre of one such performance is Metis artist Bob Boyer’s painted wall hanging, *The Batoche Centennial* (fig. 41), commissioned to mark the 1985 anniversary of the final Metis military defeat at the Battle of Batoche. In disturbing fashion, Boyer evokes the violence

---

102 Noganosh’s wife, Maxine Bedyn (interview, 1991) offers a more culturally grounded reason for her husband’s creative use of found objects: "I think Native people have very inventive minds, much more so than other people I’ve met. Anyone on a reserve can fix a car or make things go, [things] that people in the city might not be able to do. And Ron is able to take that and apply that to things that he’s making in art and sculpture".

103 During the 1885 North-West Rebellion, Batoche was the seat of the short-lived Metis provisional government established by Louis Riel, who served as president, and Gabriel Dumont, who acted as military commander. It was also the site of a major military conflict between Metis and Indian "rebels" and government troops. When the settlement was eventually overrun the spirit of resistance was broken. Riel was subsequently jailed and later hanged for high treason, while Dumont fled to Montana, later returning under a general amnesty. Beal and Macleod (1988: 1513) write:

"The rebellion had profound effects on western Canada. It was the climax of the federal government’s efforts to control the native and settler population of the West. Indians who had thought themselves oppressed after the treaties of the (continued...)"
of that historic confrontation on a sullied satin ground that is at once a pioneer quilt and a Native starblanket. Framed by four appliqued Union Jacks, the words "O CANADA OUR HOME AND NATIVE LAND" can, with difficulty, be detected on the surface, but there is no harmony in the opening lines of our country's national anthem.

The Batoche Centennial is a powerful visual and political statement, but its production was pure performance. Boyer explains

1985 was the hundredth anniversary of the Batoche whatever it was. I don't call it a revolution or a rebellion or anything....It was shortly after the Conservative government was elected in, and the funny thing [that] happened [was that] they wanted to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of 1885. But I could tell very quickly that it wasn't going to be a popular thing with the non-Indian public. And so I think what [Prime Minister Mulroney] did was he decided to defuse it and say, "Well, this was a time in 1885 when cultures put their mark on Saskatchewan." I don't know what the hell it was, anyways, but they said, "Submit all these designs and we will buy X number of paintings, or X number of work[s]."...Well, I always wanted to do a quilt...so I figured, "This is a good time to do one, and also I'm going to...really go for the jugular with this one and see what these people who are organizing this little thing are going to do."

Now, I saw the production of the piece being more important than the actual piece, in a sense....It was my own little performance that I was doing with the jurying committee and with the government. Nobody except myself was a participant. Well no, I told my friends...around town...and they were all aware of what my little performance was--

103(...continued)

1870s became subjugated, administered people. The most vocal members of the Metis leadership had either fled to Montana or were in jail. It took native peoples of western Canada many decades to recover politically and emotionally from the defeat of 1885.
and that was to put this jury in a position, that I was going to do something that was a quilt... a painted one. It wasn’t something that was necessarily what they were looking for. And I also wanted to go for the jugular in terms of 1885 and what it really meant.

My thoughts were, "What’s this jury going to do?" They may dislike it... but if they say, "No," are they going to knock out... from this show the only descendant from the 1885 Rebellion that they’d asked? And if they do [accept it], are they only doing it because I was the only descendant from the 1885 Rebellion? Ultimately, they decided to accept the submission and the idea for me to go ahead and do it, but during the whole thing it was my own little performance. Taking my own stand and putting them in a position, in a quandary, like, "Do they really want this thing?"

They said they liked it, [but]... one never knows with juries what goes on in their minds and what’s the reasoning behind it. All kinds of strange reactions happen, and some of them have nothing to do with the art.... I think there was a lot of [artists who] just took advantage of the situation and decided to make paintings and sell them to the government, where[as] I thought there was ample opportunity in the circumstance to do something [more].

Clandestine performance is also at the heart of Appropriate. Appropriate, a work created by Jane Ash Poitras for a Vancouver exhibition in the spring of 1991. On an oceanfront beach a few days prior to the show’s opening, Poitras (interview, 1991) described how this piece reflects the type of humour she experienced among Native ceremonialists on a recent visit to the American Southwest (see APPENDIX 6, p 234):

This is an example [of] what I learned in the peyote tent. There’s this big thing going on about appropriation, right, and I go and I think about it, and I think about it, and I go, "Well, what is this appropriation, why am I worried about it?" And then I realized, "Oh, well, I’m thinking consciously, I’m letting them get to me." So I go, "OK, spirits, what is it?" And the answer is this: (drawing in the sand with a stick) [I’ve] got a work of art, a nice work
of art, right, I’ve got a photograph—the spirits showed me this, right, this is what they showed me—I’ve got a photograph, but it’s a photograph I took, and I’ve blown it up really nice, [and] it looks really professional. Nobody in the world knows I took this photograph. So I sign it with a name, and I got the name too in a dream. And it’s "Amy." I’ve got it written down in my "spirit book"—Amy something. I’ll look it up for you. So...I buy Letraset and I put it alongside of the picture, and it’s totally different, and I put it in the middle of my work of art. But everyone thinks that this photograph that I’ve pasted in is somebody else’s ‘cause it’s got a name here. That’s very professional. Then I take my big paintbrush and I go, "APPROPRIATE, APPROPRIATE, APPROPRIATE" across the top. And then I sign my name down here [at the bottom] and I put a few other drawings here. Everyone’s going to look at that and say, "Look at that, 'APPROPRIATE, APPROPRIATE' and she used somebody else’s photograph!" But I haven’t told anyone that it’s my photograph, and I’m appropriating myself! And they’re going to come and say, "Did you ask permission from that photographer to do that?" And I’ll ride it. I’ll let the media ride it. I’ll let all the artists ride it, and I’ll let the secret out later....[But] the peyote people and the shamanic consciousness people, they’ll know. They’ll know me so well, and they’ll laugh—like, you know, when Edward Poitras says, "The Indians know." That’s an example right there.

Whether or not the Indians and peyote people would actually recognize such a ruse, or whether Poitras might have been overestimating public interest in, or sensitivity to, the matter of artistic appropriation is immaterial. It is the Trickster mindset and motivation that are of paramount interest here. And it is the Trickster’s transformative power that Poitras draws on and most particularly relishes when creating her trademark mixed-media collages (see figs. 32 and 33, p. 89). She (interview, 1990) says

I have fun with being a trickster in my work....The Trickster is somebody who is always playing tricks. He’s always doing things. He’s always fooling people, right? So, I’m a trickster. I take this old piece of map, right?
I transform it into a work of art, right? This piece of paper was never intended to be...in a frame on acid-free board, right?...I kind of like the idea of taking stuff, like taking garbage...and making art out of it--transforming it--being a transformer. And in a way that's what tricksters are. They take things and they transform them.

People probably don't realize that but I just recycle. You're taking things from your whole life or your environment and you're putting them in a situation--hanging it up on a museum wall where thousands of people are gawking at it, right?, and going, "Wow!" and they're going, "Ooo!" and all this kind of stuff. And, if you were to tell...people, "Oh, well, I picked up this piece of newspaper off the ground and I threw a little ink on it and I signed it with my name and now everyone's gawking at it and making big profound statements about it."...But because I did it and because it's in this museum frame and it's encased in this glass shrine, right?, they relegate it to a level of greatness, right? Only thing is, it isn't that great! (laughs)

It's just that that's all the talk and the excitement and the fun of it. The fun part is that I can be the Trickster of the artists, right? And be there and say, "Piece of paper, we are going to make you a saint! And we're even going to give you a name! And we are going to...[put]...holy water on you, right?" But while we're [doing] that--we know everyone's going to be looking at it--let's put a few messages in there because now we've got the audience and we can teach them something, so let's...get all the mileage we can, cover all our bases. We not only recycle the paper, we not only get to teach the people, we not only get to...make it a saint and canonize it, we...have fun intellectually bullshitting it [too], right?

Where Poitras and Noganosh take special delight in transforming pedestrian materials into works of art, Salish/Okanagan painter, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun takes similar satisfaction in transforming limited notions of Native art, especially as they pertain to the Northwest Coast. With not a

104 Such a statement can only be understood as rhetorical irony to make a point.
little irony, he radically relocates a "Daliesque" spirit of Surrealism to the Northwest Coast, to rejuvenate a Native artistic practice he perceives as moribund.\textsuperscript{105} By drawing on and blending elements of both aesthetic traditions—the stylized masks and formal design motifs of the coast, the dream-world landscape and critical/political sensibilities of the early 20th century Surrealists—he is able to address through his art the social issues that concern him most: Native identity, aboriginal land claims and environmental destruction.\textsuperscript{106}

Yuxweluptun’s method of engaging the viewer is both sly and effective. The cartoon-like figures that frolic and dance across many of his canvases have an immediate appeal, exhibiting all the charm and child-like playfulness advocated by the French poet, André Breton in his 1924 Surrealist Manifesto (Alexandrian 1970: 48).\textsuperscript{107} A closer look, however,\

\textsuperscript{105} His friend, Glen Woods, calls this "dilly-Daliing around" (interview, 1991).

\textsuperscript{106} An intriguing doubleness should be noted here. Yuxweluptun’s attraction to Surrealist forms and philosophy ("propounding an alternative set of values") parallels and inverts the Surrealists’ fascination with the art of the Northwest Coast and its seeming ability to represent both the conscious and unconscious worlds simultaneously. See Cowling 1978, and Jonaitis 1981.

\textsuperscript{107} In this, his first manifesto, commonly regarded as "Surrealism’s birth certificate" (Atkins 1990: 156), Breton defined Surrealism as "the spontaneous exploitation of ‘pure psychic automatism’, allowing the production of an abundance of unexpected images" (Alexandrian 1970: 48). Artists were (continued...)
often reveals such figures to be involved in less than frivolous activities. In Hole in the Sky (fig. 42), for example, two individuals (one of whom is white) are shown called to behave as "modest recording devices" in the creation of a "super-reality in which all the contradictions which afflict humanity are resolved as in a dream" (Alexandrian 1970: 48).

Reflecting on Surrealism’s influence on his own work, Yuxweluptun (interviews, 1990, 1991) says

I read the manifestos by Dali and the other ones in the early 1900s and I looked at their early sketches, their studies... but I found that I wanted to write my own, paint my own manifestos and... use the art... for educational purposes....

It takes a long time to write a manifesto. I don’t write manifestos, I’m doing them. I think that Surrealism did not cover the political ideologies of other cultures, so that when I say that I [transform] this into a symbolic manifesto then that’s something that’s new.... If you look at the history of Surrealism and how it came about, I think that culturally Surrealism was in Native West Coast design already, imbedded into an intellectual position. I think when we talk about a bear in a symbolic sense it is a "surrealistic" concept—in a two dimensional form or in a three dimensional [form].

Surrealism notwithstanding, one of the most valuable lessons that Yuxweluptun learned while studying Western art history at Vancouver’s Emily Carr School of Art and Design in the early 1980s, was that student work rarely received the recognition it deserved. Planning four years in advance, he quickly set aside several of his favourite drawings for conversion into paintings after graduation. It was a move that required some nimble and tricky footwork:

In my critique I would show what I [had] and then they’d look at my sketchbook and say, "Well, why aren’t you doing this?" [I would say,] "It’s not for this time"... I jumped around and jumped hoops to get around that, and did one or two pieces in a different style to grasp my marks and still graduate with honours without even doing my masterpieces.

(interview, 1990)
gamely (and vainly?) trying to patch the hole in the earth’s ozone layer. In the foreground a sickly and suffering Mother Earth stands weeping in the midst of a clearcut forest. The surrounding stumps, looking for all the world like broken sticks of hard-rock candy, reveal an indelible Native imprint.

For all the emotional impact of such jarring juxtapositions, it is Yuxweluptun’s ironic use of colour that constitutes his most cunning and calculated seduction. His liquid landscapes ripple and ooze and erupt with a terrible and terrifying brilliance. He (interview, 1991) says

You can always go head on at something, and try to wrestle it to the ground and choke it to death as opposed to setting a trap for it, and opening it up and catching it off-guard. ...I use a pretty colour and...the [gallery] context to capture [viewers’ attention]....You bait the worm and see if the fish will bite....Some of the stuff that I deal with, [like] the norm of a clearcut, is very depressing when you start walking through it. The reality, after seeing it so many times, it becomes boring to paint it the way it actually looks....I try to glorify this clearcut, to jazz it up...[so that] when it first hits you, it kicks you in the fuckin’ teeth. [It’s to convey] the shock that first hit me in my memory of it, but over the years the clearcut becomes a norm....Let’s be realistic about it, it looks like somebody nuked this province [of British Columbia] already in the upper Prince George region. I have no disillusion [sic]. I’m trying to jazz it up so people will go, "Gee, does it really look that good out there? Maybe we should actually go out there and take a look at these clearcut zones. Maybe Lawrence does see something out there that we should go out there and really take a look at."

Yuxweluptun’s trans-fusion of Surrealistic lifeblood into the heart of Northwest Coast art not only allows him to address contemporary social concerns, but, as a painter, affords him
the added opportunity to contest what he considers to be the unduly elevated status accorded coastal carvers, especially totem pole carvers. In *Hole in the Sky*, for instance, he playfully constructs a floating totem pole to illustrate the power of Native beliefs: "What kind of spiritual energy can suspend these elements in mid-air?," he (interview, 1991) asks. It is one of several paintings that feature whimsical and idiosyncratic "poles" comprised of precariously balanced individuals and assorted symbolic and geometric elements.

"It's that old trickery/treachery of visual illusions," he says. "I can do things that they can't do."

[Carving] is structured on the wood. It's a very confined structure, but I find reservations a very confined structure so I like to deal with the reality of right now.... [Painting] gives me the option to carve "where no Indian has gone before"...."What's a treaty?"....An Indian carving doesn't explain this. The British Royal Proclamation--"Can you carve it?"...How would you carve a "cut-off land claim"? That's what interests me....Somebody's got to stir this pot....I found that there was a whole set of problems that had to be addressed not within the realm of how Indian art was being made. There was nobody doing it. "How do you carve a land claim?" I was just making a point....I couldn't carve a land claims Royal Commission in a West Coast design. And I go [to the carvers], "Can you guys carve it?" I said, "Carve me a beer bottle, put it on a totem pole." "Carve me a car and call it a Thunderbird." So [my work's] got all these social things that have to be

---

108 The title of the painting itself can also be read as a sly dig at carvers recalling as it does the well-known Tsimshian "Hole-through-the-Sky" pole at Kitwancool, B.C. See Vastokas 1973-74: 128 ff., and Barbeau 1929.

109 See also *Throwing Their Culture Away* (fig. 43), and *Red Man Watching White Man Trying to Fix Hole in Sky* (in McMaster and Martin 1992: 159), a second painting dealing with ozone depletion in the earth's atmosphere.
111
dealt with. There's a lot of area that hasn't been covered and I don't think that you can do it always in wood.\textsuperscript{110}

Clearly savouring the role of renegade activist and maverick visionary, Yuxweluptun aligns himself with the futuristic crew of the Starship Enterprise on the popular \textit{Star Trek} television series. In mock-imitation of the opening prologue he says, "I'm doing new things that nobody's ever done before, \textbf{[to] go where no Indian has gone before."\textsuperscript{111}

Not all "Native" carving on the Northwest coast is carving by Northwest coast Natives. In his playfully-titled 1980 etching, \textit{Ode to Billy Holm...Lalooska...Duane Pasco...& Johnathon Livingston Seagull} (sic) (fig. 46), Haisla artist Lyle Wilson considers the position (and authority) of non-Natives, like Duane Pasco and John Livingston, and those with questionable Native ancestry, like Lelooska, who actively

\textsuperscript{110} At least two Northwest coast artists have proven that it is indeed possible to address such subjects through carving. See Ya'Ya Ts'itxstap Chuck Heit, p. 177, and David Neel, Footnote 178, p. 177.

\textsuperscript{111} Yuxweluptun is probably the first Native artist in North America to exhibit a work created in "cyberspace." A highlight of the 1992 show, \textit{Land Spirit Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada}, was his virtual reality installation \textit{Inherent Rights, Vision Rights} (figs. 44, 45) which evoked the spiritual space of a Salish longhouse. (See Nemiroff, Houle, Townsend-Gault 1992: 220-25). More recently, in \textit{Star Trek: Voyager}, the fourth and latest incarnation of the series which premiered in the 1995 television season, Commander Chakotay, the second in command, is played by Native actor Robert Beltran. As actor and character he too is "going where no Indian has gone before."
participate in the Northwest carving tradition. What, he asks, is their role in shaping this tradition? (Duffek 1989, n.p.) Wilson also questions the status of non-Native scholars like Bill Holm, whose book, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* (1965), has become the authoritative reference on the "northern style" for both Natives and non-Natives. To suggest an alternative perspective, a reverse-image of Holm's bookcover has been incorporated into the print—"turned around on purpose" (Durham 1986: 1) in true Trickster fashion—along with a double image of the artist's "official" government Indian Status card. Walking a fine line that separates these two images of conferred authority is a masked figure, possibly the artist. He appears to be moving with caution through unfamiliar territory.

The use of reversal to advance an alternative perspective can take many forms. Where Wilson employs a mirror-image to reflect on the academic construction of Native artistic practice, Metis artists Edward Poitras and Jim Logan employ a positive-negative strategy to interrogate the exclusive and exclusionary nature of the Western canon. One of the most memorable components of Poitras' *Et in America ego*, a 1989

---

112 Lippard (1990: 202) says that "'turnaround' is a literal synonym for 'revolution.'"

113 This, of course, is a good example of "complicitous critique." Even as Wilson questions the status of these individuals and images, he affirms it by merely acknowledging them.
Vancouver installation that combined elements of Greek and Hopi mythology, was a photocopy of *Et in Arcadia ego*, a painting by the French master Nicolas Poussin, where Poitras "whited out" all the human figures (fig. 47). It remains a stark and telling metaphor. Poitras (interview, 1991) says, "I was trying to alter it in such a way as to take out the 'European' and somehow maybe put in some kind of 'Indian' content."

In truth, he was creating a space for Indian content, for the possibility of Indian content. In *The Classical Aboriginal Series*, (1992-93), Metis artist Jim Logan actually provides the content. With a brush dipped deep in irony, he imagines a Native presence in a myriad of familiar but unexpected places. His brazen appropriation and "Indianization" of more than twenty beloved European masterworks calls attention to their social construction as masterworks, and the ethnocentric nature of their collective vision. Logan (interview, 1994) says

I started thinking about...how I'd been taught to admire Western art....I went through art history in school and was taught how glorious European art was. It seems to be the standard to judge all other art, and I question that....Is it the standard, and [if so,] why is it the standard?...

What makes the masters masters?

He suggests that it may, in part, have something to do with the Judeo-Christian values that much of the art embodies and

---

Des traités rompus ; font-ils pas d'espace un territoire occupé ?
...ou déjà une ambiguïté
linguistique écrits en anglais,
et traduits oralement en
langues indiennes
helps perpetuate. Not surprisingly, many of the images he parodies have Christian or biblical themes. "I picked a lot of those [paintings] particularly because European culture is so influenced by Christianity, [and] that had such an effect on us. There's such a connection there," he says.

There is indeed. In this series, Logan's critique of the combined impact of Christianity and European culture on Native America is as profound a theme as the hegemony of Western art history. At any given point there are at least two, and frequently more, critical/political discourses unfolding together. In The Annunciation, (fig. 48), for example, Logan reworks a scene depicted many times over the centuries, but draws an intriguing parallel between the announcement of Christ's coming birth to Mary by an angel, and the bringing of God's word to North America with Columbus. Linear time is collapsed as both stories are told simultaneously: the angel appears on a New World beach; three ships stand on the horizon.

Logan's version bears a close resemblance to Fra Angelico's 15th century fresco in the Church of San Marco in Florence, Italy. A particularly inspired touch would seem to be the transformation of a curved archway into the sweep of an overhanging palm tree.

This would certainly put a new slant on the old English hymn, "I saw three ships come sailing in on Christmas Day in the morning." Moreover, "the way time is handled and resolved" in this painting recalls Vizenor's comments on those elements which evoke a sense of "mythic verism" in contemporary Native literature. Cf. Vizenor, pp. 10, 216; (continued...)
To illustrate how dissimilar the view from shore might be from that aboard ship, Logan overlays the image of Columbus’ tranquil arrival with a second version of the same event rendered in traditional pictographic style. In the new version the first person ashore is shown brandishing a weapon. The visual tension established by juxtaposing these two perspectives clearly mirrors the historical tension. Still, Logan maintains that this is a "very simple painting." It is a tricky simplicity, for sure. The Annunciation is one of several paintings in this series created especially for Native people in the Catholic faith, where they haven’t seen a lot of imagery where we’re divine, where we are Mary and where we are Jesus. There seems to be a psychological gap. When you’re brought up as a minority looking at all the structure of the Church [and] all the imagery of the Church, and realizing that you’re not there, it leaves you feeling that you’re not supposed to be there--that maybe you’re not as important as the Italians or the Spaniards who happened to paint themselves in these glorious positions of divinity.

About his transformation of El Greco’s The Benediction into Jesus Was Not A Whiteman (fig. 49), Logan says

I wanted [Native people] to be able to see Christ as Indian and have the imagery put in their minds that he could be Indian. He definitely wasn’t Spanish. He definitely wasn’t German. He didn’t look like Salvador Dali’s image of Christ. But if they have the licence to do that then I have the licence to make him Indian! So I made him an aboriginal Jesus.

114 (...continued)

Chrons 1, fig. 90, Footnote 160, p. 163; and Unreasonable History, fig. 121, p. 194, this document.
To make the point, Logan has affixed to the surface of the painting several feathers, along with (in a sly nod towards ecclesiastical enterprise) numerous bingo chips, some of which spell out the name "J E S U S" in English, and others which bear the letter "X," its Cree (and Greek) equivalent. It is a Trickster’s mix of sacred and satiric that is germane to Native spirituality. An aboriginal Christ would undoubtedly be amused.

The same "satirical spirit" (or sacred satire) that permeates the religious paintings in this series informs many of Logan’s more secular parodies as well. It goes to the heart of the Native presence he seeks to affirm. A case in point is the wonderfully witty The Diners Club (No Reservation Required) (fig. 50), his cheeky replay of Edouard Manet’s well-known painting, Le Déjeuner Sur L’Herbe (Luncheon on the Grass). Much of its appeal turns on the delightful gender, racial and (un)dress reversals of the figures in the Manet original. Logan’s punning play on the title is but a delicious bonus, merely adding to the enjoyment, and layering the reference even further.

There are several serious themes interwoven in this painting, not the least of which is a concern for Native spirituality. I wanted to make it contemporary and yet I wanted to show a traditional feel for it also, in the sense that religiously, or spiritually, a lot of our young people are becoming spiritually renewed....That’s why I have a pipe there.
That’s why on their chests you’ll see scars from the Sundance ritual or ceremony.

What may not be so obvious is the homage to traditional Native women that this painting is also intended to convey.

Some of our societies, Native societies, were matriarchal and the woman carried a lot of power within the political system, so I wanted to put that sort of idea in the painting—that the women here have the power....If there’s anybody to be subservient to the other, or lower than the other, or with less power than the other it would be the naked men rather than the clothed women. Clothing seems to suggest power. I don’t know why, but it seems like if you’re nude you’re vulnerable. If you’ve got clothes on you’ve got power.

Perhaps this is why Manet’s painting created such a furore in the Paris of the 1860s; he dared to show a naked woman lunching on the grass with two clothed men. Few people of the time realized that Manet had patterned his composition on a much earlier work, The Judgement of Paris, (an etching based on a study by Raphael), in which all the figures were unclothed (Janson 1977: 16). Logan says that Manet "took the liberty of leaving the female nude and clothing the men. I just reversed that thinking and said, Okay, I’ll put the women clothed and leave the men nude!"

Still, there is more to this than mere playful reversal.

Logan adds

I guess I really wanted to see things as perhaps a woman artist would look at things. I happen to be interested in that sort of view, in feminine art, and looking at what they’re doing in their own art. I look at the National Gallery collection and read that out of the artworks that depict nudes 85-90% of them are women, rather than male.
That, to me, has to be "cured." It's not politically correct. Maybe this painting is more politically correct because the males are nude. These are questions that I often think about.

In the process of redressing (and undressing) history, Logan has also relocated his dinner party to more familiar terrain, the homeland of the Cree on the northern plains. "I made it a Canadian landscape," he says. Moreover, the figures are seen enjoying a Diet Coke (no alcohol, please) and appropriate regional Native foods—a bowl of saskatoon berries—"rather than the feast that they had in the original [painting]."

Like the other works in The Classical Aboriginal Series, The Diners Club combines a healthy (and healthful) respect for Native tradition with a healthy irreverence for European art history. In this, Logan has imagined a Native utopia where past and present are in perfect balance, and cultural inclusion is never an issue. It is a comic vision of no small import. He says:

What I'd like [Native people] to get out of this show [is] a realization that...there is a place for us in the mainstream of whatever field or profession we want to be in—whether it's art, religion [or] dentistry. Whatever you want, we can be there....I want to say the same thing [to non-Natives]....Hopefully, they'll come out with the idea that you can't dominate some body, some people, some thing without it eventually turning on you. In a sense, this work is like a turning point for me personally. I'm not going to take any more teachings without really investigating what's being said. I'm just not going to take to heart what I hear—whether it's from an anthropologist or an art teacher, or anyone....I'm going to have to come to my own conclusions ...and evaluate things myself. This is basically an art education for Jim Logan, I guess.
Just as Logan collapses time to envision a classical aboriginal presence, Blood artist Joane Cardinal-Schubert performs a similar temporal shift to "talk through history" to one of her heroes, the renowned Canadian painter, Emily Carr, who died in 1945. In her 1991 series of mixed media works, *The Birch Bark Letters to Emily Carr*, Cardinal-Schubert pays tribute to the artist she has long admired, while assuming a fictive intimacy with her that grants added significance to the warm and chatty letters she incorporates into each piece. It is a shrewd method of creating an awareness of contemporary Native concerns in the viewer, and no less a means of imagining institutional access and acceptance.\(^{117}\)

\(^{117}\) Acceptance has been hard won. This show might have been mounted much earlier had the funding come through. Edmonton art critic, Elizabeth Beauchamp (1993: 13), explains the situation,

> [W]hile many artists of 20 years standing wouldn't broadcast the news that they'd been turned down—yet again—by the powerful Canada Council, the wily artist turned that indignity into art. When the idea for a body of work based on her long-held fascination with the famous Canadian artist Emily Carr was refused, Cardinal-Schubert promptly wrote a sharply ironic poem and sent Xerox copies across the country. Covertly titled *oh Canada*, it was later published by the University of Lethbridge, Whetstone Press and entered the growing saga of western (not to mention native) alienation from the eastern-controlled Canada Council.

The reasons finally given for turning down an artist who has been included in five nationally focused group exhibitions sponsored by the Council are almost hilarious. According to Cardinal-Schubert, she was told they'd never heard of her. Which kind of makes you wonder if those doing the choosing get out to galleries much. There was also another absurdly patronizing, even more puzzling explanation. Someone from the council remarked to Cardinal-Schubert, "We're afraid if you go to B.C. you may start painting totems." But--

(continued...
Cardinal-Schubert (interview, 1991) says

I think what they’re about is that if I can talk to Emily Carr about these issues then, in a funny way, non-Native people will [respond]: "Well, she’s talking to Emily Carr. Well, Christ, Emily Carr, geez!" Emily Carr is somewhat revered. (laughs)...There’s probably a lot of [other] people saying, "Oh, what the hell is she doing? Why does she think she can write letters to Emily Carr?"—even though Emily Carr is dead, right?—but in the same instance, they’re going to pay more attention....It’s a device to get people to listen, and to pay attention....The neat thing about these letters is that I can ask questions in them. I’m not making statements so much as I’m saying, "What if?" or "What about?" or "Why?"...Because we have so much importance attached to words...we tend to read them--we even read graffiti--so I’m fairly confident that people will read the words.

The text for Beginning of Life (fig. 51), from this series, reads

Dear Emily,

It’s been a while since I’ve written you. Everyone is madly getting ready for the 500th anniversary of the discovery of Columbus of the Americas. This is outrageously funny as the Aboriginal peoples of the Americas were not lost. The increasingly common habit of the media to flood the papers, magazines & the tube with new information about the habits of these ‘owners’ of the New (Old World) World has unearthed some frightening historical truths. Hard to live with such a legacy. I guess you can understand what I mean.

Best
JC-S

117(...)continued
thankfully—it takes more than bureaucratic foolishness to stop a good project and so Cardinal-Schubert got on with it --grant or no grant.

See APPENDIX 12, p. 246, for the poem, oh Canada.
One of the transplanted Old World habits that Cardinal-Schubert finds especially offensive is the institutional capture and collection of cultural property, most notably, Native cultural property that she believes rightfully belongs with the peoples who created it. An added source of continued distress is curatorial insensitivity towards (and mistreatment of) such property, particularly the sacred objects. Living with such a legacy, however, has prompted her to create some of her most poignant and politically-pointed art—works of serious parody, for the most part, that have their genesis in firsthand knowledge and personal experience. For example, an incident that took place in the early 1970s inspired her to later create the plaster sculpture Contemporary Artifact—Medicine Bundles: The Spirits Are Forever Within (fig. 52). She remembers

I was in the Glenbow [Museum] in '73 and [curator] Julia Harrison took me in the back and showed me the collection they had. She opened this cupboard and I went, "Eahhh!" because it was a power bundle and they had taken everything out of it and lined it up on the shelf, and they had little museum numbers on it. Well, [as a curator] that was my job to do that—but with contemporary artworks, not with cultural items. I just went, "How can you have this?" She said, "Oh, well this was done before me." I said, "Can't you do anything about it, like give it back?" So that bugged me. Anyway, when I did this one [piece] I put a hand on it to say, "This is protected." Like a firmness....With the plaster I could make a bundle that nobody could open and take anything out of.

Cardinal-Schubert served as Assistant Curator of Art at the University of Calgary Art Gallery in 1978, and at the Nickle Arts Museum, University of Calgary, from 1979 to 1986.
A much larger project, the six-piece wall installation, *Preservation of a Species: The Warshirt Series*, 1988 (figs. 53-56), was created after viewing historic Plains garments in the storage vaults of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. Recalling her visit, Cardinal-Schubert says

> They asked me: "What do you want to see?" And I said: "I want to see Blackfoot, specifically, warshirts from this period, pre-1880." So they go to their computer and they whip out [data] and they xerox all these cards—acquisition cards with numbers and stuff—and we finally go down and we find the pieces. And they’re all in these map case drawers and they’re all in these plastic bags. But when this museum person is showing them to me the plastic’s really clouded so she’s going like this [pressing] on the beadwork. And I’m going, "Aaehh!" It’s like I’m back looking at the power bundle, looking at them all taken out. I’m just horrified, [but] I just don’t give her a clue that I’m horrified—then she might get careful and not show me anything. So she shows me all these shirts and then I just go out of there with this big impression. And I come back home—it’s a while—and I get this idea [for] these shirts and I want to make them really fragile looking and "helpless." It’s not really fair to give them a human quality but...just really "fragile." And then I would use the lodgepole pine because it’s the part of the home. So you take that and you desecrate it by making it into a cross which is from another culture, another religion, an imposed thing.

Cardinal-Schubert’s six "warshirts," vigorously reimagined on paper, sheathed in plastic and suspended from pine crosses, give new definition to the notion of "repetition with critical distance." With titles such as *Then There Were None* and *Is This My Grandmothers* [sic], they speak eloquently of a culture crucified for the sake of colonial ambition, in the name of colonial religion. Cardinal-Schubert says, "I had a good time making a reasonable facsimile of the real thing. (laughs) Okay, you won’t let me have them, then I’m still going to tell
the story. I want to expose this!" Remember Dunbow (figs. 53, 54) was the first of the series created. While showing a slide of the work in her studio, Cardinal-Schubert explained the personal significance of the appended objects:

That little piece of crochet, that was really the start of these shirts. It was a combination of finding that crochet in my grandmother’s sewing machine, looking at it and going, "I didn’t know my grandmother did this stuff," and thinking, "Gee, if I didn’t have this I wouldn’t know this about her." And then I put that together with, "How do people feel that don’t have their things?" And these things [the original shirts] belonged down on the Blood reserve, right? And they’re in Ottawa and I’m the only one in four days in the whole damned country who comes to look at these things—’cause I register when I come in and there’s no other name. I’m checkin’ the dates. So then that little bit of crochet on there just did something (laughs)—it did a twist. The other things are comical, like there are my kids’ scissors, and there’s a piece of my hair, and there’s [my son] Christopher’s baby spoon, and then there’s [a] round thing there that’s sort of like...the chief’s medal, except it’s disguised because it says "Big Buck" on it. (laughs) I was thinking of "bucks"—Indians being called "bucks"—but it’s a deer head on it, really, and it’s just a cover for chocolate. It’s things I had around.

[And there’s] an old button from the first coat I had...my "going-away coat" when I was first married. [And there’s] a suspender clip and I think there was even a garter in there somewhere. [There’s] an old buckle from an old watch from the sixties, and it says "Remember to Save the Children" on there. And then I had these GLAD twist-ties. It was a way of fastening those babies onto the back—"ten little Indians"—and they’re all black because they have "black lung" for the Lubicon TB outbreak. "Dunbow" is that [Indian residential] school...out here on the Blackfoot [reserve]. It’s another one of Father Lacombe’s little joints.

In Remnant II (figs. 55, 56), another shirt from the series, Cardinal-Schubert ironically recontextualizes the computer data she was given while visiting the national museum. Across the yoke of the garment she inscribes in heavy black pencil
the catalogue information currently deemed relevant to this
cultural remnant. It begins, "PURCHASED FROM CHRISTIES
AUCTION...."

Reflecting on the "Preservation of a Species" concept,
Cardinal-Schubert says

It's a comment on the museum's treatment of Native people,
all this comment about, "Well, these have to be preserved!"
And I came to the resolution--simply by living on that land
I lived on when I was a kid--that things change, they always
change, and...there was a promise in that change. And the
cycle, there was a promise in it....So I don't understand
the meaning of the whole collecting mentality....These
things were taken away from people and were not allowed to
simply die their natural death....

When I tell people about that, [I] equate it like [this]:
If you had a gold watch in your family and you had heard
about this and you knew it belonged to your family and you
went into a museum and there it was, you would be outraged.
You would go, "But that's mine! That's my family's! A part
of my life is missing 'cause I didn't have access to that."
And not only that, but if you take an item like a gold watch
and you show it to an old person they go, "Oh, I remember
when" and this whole text comes out. So I said, last
[spring] in the Intervent the Text [conference], "You
have participated in a five hundred year old book burning of
Native peoples' literature because these artifacts may stand
for a paragraph or more [of] text, or maybe a whole book.
And what you've done is take that away, put it in a museum.
There's no access to the stories that go along with that.
[They're] lost. They don't get passed on because people
don't have the item to trigger them--like a signpost.

In 1989, Preservation of a Species: The Warshirt Series was
exhibited along with the installation Preservation of A
Species: Deep Freeze (figs. 57-59) in the show, Beyond
History, at the Vancouver Art Gallery. As the title suggests, Deep Freeze continues Cardinal-Schubert’s critique of institutions that consign Native peoples to a freeze-dried past, while freezing out those who would propel their culture into the future.

As a former curator with insider knowledge of exhibition practice, Cardinal-Schubert takes great pleasure in flaunting and frustrating established rules and regulations. She describes with relish a discussion she had with the staff of Calgary’s Glenbow Museum concerning an earlier version of Deep Freeze in which oil soaked birds and symbols of drug and alcohol abuse were represented.

They said, "Oh, we can’t display that." And I said, "Why not?" And they said, "Well, you know, a needle." I said, "It’s a toothpick." I started laughing. And then the conservation staff came in, and they had one of those guns where you glue everything down, and I knew this would bug them. And this is like an anti-museum piece—so was the one in Vancouver—’cause I told them they could walk on it and touch everything. So it’s fun. And they saw that needle and they went, "Oh no!" Then they gave me this gun and they said, "Glue it down." And I said, "Why?" I said,

Curated by Tom Hill and Karen Duffek it featured new work in new media by ten of Canada’s best-known Native artists, seven of whom were subsequently interviewed for the present project. Cf. pg. 1 ff.

An equally chilling parody of museum practice is Still Life (fig. 60), 1990, the ironically-titled clay and stoneware sculpture by Iroquois artist, Peter B. Jones, which addresses the callous display of Native human remains, as if they were so much ancient pottery. As Saulteaux artist Robert Houle has noted, "[W]hat the White administrators of our cultural heritage seem to forget [is] that we are still living these cultures" (1988: 60).
"If they steal it I'll just sit in front of the TV and make some more ducks with newspaper." (laughs)

In fact, several components of the Vancouver installation were created from newspaper and tape "because it's so anti-museum and it's so anti-conservationist." The piece also featured two rather ominous-looking black paper kites.

We used to make those kites when we were kids out of newspaper and two sticks--and it's like "Go fly a kite!" But they're also like banners. They're humorous too because flying a kite's pretty innocent, but then you put "ABUSE" on it and it's a double whammy. It's a big surprise....I also did it to interfere with people's perception because it's out of their peripheral [vision]. It's a device I'm using a lot. I notice that I do it to make them feel slightly on edge--like when you can just see something peripherally out of the corner of your eye, then you kind of [suddenly look up] 'cause you don't know if it's going to fall on you or not.

In addition, a video camera and monitor, with the word "ARTIFACT" written on the screen in white paint (figs. 58-59)

Cardinal-Schubert's penchant for physically "deconstructing" and reassembling works in altered form does not endear her to those who invest art objects with a certain sanctity, and who value product over process. Nor does her decidedly "unprofessional" practice of assigning different works identical titles. She says with a grin,

People are going to have fun with all that: "No, this is the one." "No, but it says it's this size." [When I was a curator] I was in charge of the permanent collection and we had a big problem identifying works. If we didn't have the size, the title, the media, we couldn't figure out which works were which pieces. And they all had different numbers on them. So part of that is (laughs) I'm mad at the system. It's funny [but] nobody's going to laugh for a few years.

allowed viewers to experience personal and cultural objectification firsthand. On a nearby black suitcase, the words "CULTURAL BAGGAGE," lettered in the same white paint, provided one of several visual and textual counterpoints.

Dark and pervasive as it often seems, Cardinal-Schubert says the humour is not a strategy. The humour is just there...I can’t do anything about it. It’s been with me for a long time...it’s a part of who I am. And I got into a lot of trouble for my sense of humour, all my life. It always seemed to go too far. (laughs)...If I say something, just a statement about anything, I always put a twist on the end of it I notice.

Not surprisingly, Cardinal-Schubert’s fondness for mischief and counter-convention spills over into her public speaking.

She says

I hate artists’ talks because they’re about the "thing," not about why they made the thing or all the things surrounding the thing, or what’s behind it. (laughs) So I made up my mind that I was not going to talk about any art theory or history or anything other than my own personal thing....I don’t talk about the work so much as experiences I’ve had that would parallel things that I’m doing in the work, exactly the way I’ve been talking to you, Allan....

I do the same thing with these [talks] as I do with my installation pieces. [At the Ontario College of Art] I went up on the stage and I had that "CULTURAL BAGGAGE" suitcase, and I went like this, "Boom!", and everybody went, "Te-he-he-he-he!" And then the first thing I said was really heavy duty. And then they all felt guilty for laughing. And then I said something funny, so then they went, "Oh, it’s OK to laugh." And then there was a point where they didn’t know whether to laugh or not to laugh. Then they decided it was OK to laugh. And after you sort of relax a little bit, when you’ve been speaking a fair amount, then you begin to pick up stuff coming back. It’s really interesting. It’s actually fun. I never thought I would say this about public speaking. "God!" It’s performance, I know it is...[and] there’s no safety net in this kind of stuff.
Each performance, like each installation, is likely to include fragments of earlier ones. In the course of our conversation, Cardinal-Schubert read me the text of one of her favourite and most amusing performance pieces. It summarizes much of her creative philosophy:

I knew things would change. Things have changed, but I have affected that change. I play in my studio. I play in the galleries looking under rocks and logs. I stir things up. I lift things, looking under rotting carcasses. I watch people cleaning the art chickens, spilling out their guts, picking out their hearts, livers and gall bladders, holding them up, turning them in the light, trying to understand how their functions fit into their shapes. I read their reports they write about their discoveries—about their discoveries. Sometimes I enter into the art chicken house. I once came close to being the one whose tailfeathers were all pecked out by the other art chickens, but I acted in an unexpected way. I didn’t run. I turned around to face them, exposing my weakest part, my eyes.

Then I wrote, "I am looking and I am seeing with the eyes you taught me to use." So, I think that’s funny. It’s horrific but it’s funny. When I was a kid I used to watch my mother cleaning chickens.

"Art chickens" aside, probably the best-known museum-critical performance by a Canadian Native artist took place during the winter of 1988 when Ojibway artist, Rebecca Belmore, installed herself as Exhibit 671B (fig. 61), alongside the Trans-

---

122 This statement appears in Cardinal-Schubert’s 1990 installation, Preservation of A Species: DECONSTRUCTIVISTS (This is the house that Joe built), exhibited in Indigena. See McMaster and Martin, 1992, p. 135.

123 An in-joke, "671B" is the Ontario Liquor Control Board’s number for Brandevin, a locally-favoured cheap wine. Belmore (interview, 1991) says that after the performance was written up in the Thunder Bay newspaper, "I went to the shopping mall where everybody hangs out drinking coffee—-all (continued...)
Canada Highway, outside her home town of Thunder Bay, Ontario. Wrapped in blankets and seated within the framework of a mock-display case, she silently proclaimed herself a "living artifact" as the Olympic torch bearer and attendant media passed by en route to Calgary, where the Glenbow Museum's exhibition of historic Native artifacts, The Spirit Sings, was being touted as the "flagship cultural event" of the Winter Olympics.

Many believed the exclusion of contemporary work from the exhibition perpetuated the notion of Native peoples and Native art as quaintly and inextricably historic. A more volatile and controversial issue concerned the exhibition's sponsorship by Shell Oil, a company to whom the Government of Alberta had awarded drilling rights on lands claimed by the Lubicon Lake Cree Indians. Negotiations to settle their claims had dragged on for years and left the community impoverished.

Anthropologist Charlotte Townsend-Gault (1991: 66) writes

The components of Rebecca Belmore's museum installation for the museum without walls--frame, pose, gender, site, audience, and the temperature, punitive only to those who

(...continued)
the people who are unemployed and all the Native people--and a lot of them were laughing 'cause they said, 'Hey, 671B!' So they got the joke." (laughs)

In direct response, Revisions, a counter-exhibition of contemporary Native art curated by Helga Pakasaar, was mounted at the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff, Alberta, during January, 1988. Among the featured artists were Cardinal-Schubert and Edward Poitras. A catalogue to the show was published in 1992.
lack the skills to cope with the Canadian winter--combined to make it more than art-smart and therefore comfortingly co-optable. Mutely eloquent, it fused the apparently stultifying hopelessness of the Lubicon situation with an ironic refusal of a "history" without time, social context, or human beings.

Like Belmore and Cardinal-Schubert, Carl Beam also examines museum practice through critical parody, but in a different manner again. His self-contained shadow-box installations, *Big Koan*, 1989, (fig. 62) and *Chronos 2*, 1989, (fig. 63) ironically recall the form and function of ethnographic displays that locate Native peoples in natural history galleries, there to be endlessly analyzed and theorized along with other carefully classified exotica. A less obvious contrast is created between Euro-American scientific inquiry and Native American intuitive understanding. It is a theme that runs through much of Beam’s work.

The power to make meaning from juxtaposing objects and images is at the heart of Beam’s art, especially his installations. It is a power that derives more from traditional shamanic practice than mainstream art-making. Vizenor (1987: 299) has said, "I’m not a shaman, but I understood the energy." It is a sentiment echoed by Beam (interview, 1991b):

Installation is a shamanic activity--the technique is shamanic. It emphasises object placement and how objects dialogue with one another....Things have a power in and of themselves. Any [traditional] teacher would know about that, and any western philosopher would acknowledge the idea of a peculiar emanation. The task of the artist is to set up a dialogue between objects. The underlying premise is
that, if you do this thing properly, it will elicit the exact response that you want from people. If you don't do it properly, all you're setting up is something interesting which has no special direction.

What Beam enjoys setting up most, whether in the form of mixed-media installations or their two-dimensional counterpart, are visual puzzles that challenge and engage the viewer. They are rarely lacking in direction. He says

The works are like little puzzles, interesting little games. Nobody can live with an unconstructed puzzle before them. It's a nice game. Other people don't present puzzles, they're preachy. I care about what people ultimately think. ...My work is not fabricated for the art market. There's no market for intellectual puzzles or works of spiritual emancipation. I play a game with humanity and with creativity. It's superior to indoctrination....My works are a series of notes to oneself, they're autobiographical. They let viewers in on the game of interaction...the game of dialogue. I ask viewers to play the participatory game of dreaming ourselves [as] each other. In this we find out that we're all basically human.

With such an affinity for intellectual gamesmanship it is no wonder that Beam finds the concept of "koan" appealing. It appears in the title of fig. 62 and several other works. Beam himself sees it as "something that subverts

---

125 Beam's twenty-piece Koan Series, 1986, was featured in the Canadian Museum of Civilization's 1988 travelling exhibition, In the Shadow of the Sun, and is illustrated in colour in the German catalogue to the show. See Hoffmann, 1988, pp. 382-83.
and forces you to look where you’re going while walking, as you proceed through life."

The critical revision of ethnographic representation evident in the installations discussed above, is given more overt, even hilarious expression in the photo-engraving *How To Ride A Horse Properly* (fig. 64) from Beam’s *Columbus Suite* series. His irreverent and ironic reimagining of the 19th century anthropologist, Frank Hamilton Cushing, is certainly "something that subverts." It is a picture of sweet revenge. Commenting on this print, curator Amy Trevelyan (1993, n.p.) writes

Cushing and his fellows collected thousands of examples of Native material culture and put them on display, wholly out of context, in the columned stone vaults that were the Natural History museums of that era. There, the objects were ogled for hours by easterners—exotic evidence of a strange and mysterious vanishing race. In this photograph, Cushing was demonstrating the dress and gear of a Dakota Sioux warrior. Removed from the context of a scholarly text, it becomes ridiculous, if not perverse in its feeling—a grown man on a hobby horse and almost nude, an adult playing Cowboys and Indians with his clothes off.127

126 Elsewhere titled, *Riding Demonstration*. See fig. 64, list of figures, p. v.

127 More recently, this image has been recontextualized in a book of cartoon drawings by Zuni artist, Phil Hughte (1994: 102). The caption accompanying *Reminiscing Cushing* (fig. 65, this document) reads: "An elderly Zuni is reminiscing about Cushing and some of the funny things he did. He is talking about the time Cushing dressed as a Plains Indian and had his photo taken."
Not only is Cushing made to look foolish and misguided—all the more so when his image is viewed alongside the faces of revered 19th century resistance fighters, Big Bear, Louis Riel, Geronimo and Sitting Bull—28—but, by extension, the entire practice of science (social and otherwise) is once again brought into question. The time-lapse photo-study of an elk running across the bottom of Beam’s print is a fleeting reminder of technology’s inability to capture the true nature of the beast. Or, for that matter, any other beast.

Trevelyan (1993, n.p.) adds

How much more do you really know about him after scientific examination, dissection and analysis? Can you talk to him? Does he speak to you? Is what you have learned more valuable or useful than the kind of fundamental knowledge garnered by Native peoples that not only involved the ability to utilize each part of the animal to support their existence, but included a sense of their own relationship to each species and to all of nature.

As will be recalled from the last chapter (p. 66 ff.), both Gerald McMaster and Carl Beam shared a boyhood fascination with cowboys, which eventually led McMaster to create The cowboy/Indian Show series, and Beam to include Self-Portrait as John Wayne, Probably in his Columbus Suite. There is a further similarity between the two series as well. McMaster’s painting, Cowboy Anthropology (fig. 66), is no less forceful

---

28 In his article, "In Our Own Image: Stereotyped Images of Indians Lead to New Native Artform" (1989: 34), Mohawk artist/curator Rick Hill discusses how old studio portraits of defeated warriors have in recent years become important symbols of "the contemporary Indian desire to retain cultural values for the next generation."
fig. 66
nor sly an indictment of academic activity than Beam’s How to Ride A Horse Properly.

Cowboy Anthropology has the look of a page from a field study notebook enlarged for closer scrutiny and analysis. At first glance the seemingly random assortment of textual fragments and quick sketches of cowboy attire suggest the practice of anthropology as it might be applied to the culture of cowboys, as it might be practiced by an Indian anthropologist. This would be a novel reversal of a traditional anthropological endeavour—the study of Indians—but novel reversal is not the principal theme here. Critique is. And it is a hard-hitting critique that turns on ironic use of language. The word "cowboy" is not posited as a potential object of anthropological inquiry, but as an accurate description of the inquiry itself. McMaster (interview, 1990) says

In a lot of books about Native peoples there are rarely personalities in there. It’s the study of "Man," not the study of individuals. It’s the study of the structures. And this whole notion of "informants"—it’s always a one-sided exchange. "Come on, give me the information." What is there in return to give back? Here [in this painting] is the notion of "the cowboy" going in there....This is the notion from the Native perspective--this insensitive person

---

129 The image includes a body of handwritten text excerpted from A.E. Hoebel’s textbook, Anthropology: The Study of Man. It reads: "The student who cannot put aside all chauvanistic [sic] ethnocentrism can never become a first-rate cultural anthropologist" (1972: 28).

130 Having practiced a form of "turnabout anthropology" in his painting and writing for some time, McMaster earned an MA in the discipline from Carleton University in 1994.
using our information. Native peoples are very guarded about what they...say to anthropologists.

[But] there's a range of anthropologists. I think there are good to bad, sensitive to insensitive. There's a certain group of interpreters. Again, there's this notion of the power structure, of control and scientific interpretation. ...In the middle of this century it was the Indian agent who wielded the power. He's the one who got you admission to the reserves. Somehow there was never control by the Native people themselves. There was always the gun there. Whether it was pointed at somebody's head or whether it was invisible, there was still that notion of power.

What I'm hearing from anthropologists recently is: "Our profession is in jeopardy but, at the same time, it can be a source of assistance to a lot of Native peoples." The issues that seem to be raised most often at this point are litigation and land claims. What I'm concerned about is that I think anthropologists should be open for criticism. "Anthro-apology" [lettered on the painting]--I think it has a lot of meaning. So you take criticism...you apologize for what you've done....What's the next stage?...Does anthropology up and disappear? Does it continue? What's the next stage of development in anthropology? How is it going to deal with the subject? How are Native peoples going to be dealt with from now on?

An even more subtle critique of anthropology and the social sciences is played out in the cosmic drama depicted in the first panel of A Sacred Prayer for a Sacred Island (fig. 67), the mixed-media triptych created by Jane Ash Poitras for the 1992 exhibition, Indigena. In a generous act of charity befitting a compassionate Trickster, the artist portrays a quartet of winged shaman spirits descending from the heavens into the lower world on a sacred mission of recovery. The "object" of recovery, it turns out, is a party of renowned academics (among them, Ruth Benedict, Emile Durkheim and Edward Sapir) whose collaged photographs are shown encircled
by "shields" of personal and professional identity. With a wry grin Poitras (interview, 1991a) says

They’re saving the souls of these famous anthropologists because at least we owe them that for what they did for us. It’s the most humorous piece. If you want your humour, it’s there. If that isn’t a Weesakeejak at work what is it? The Indians get it, the ones who know their traditions and their teachings. [Ojibway artist] Norval Morrisseau, if he saw this he would giggle.¹³¹

Like McMaster, Poitras is not yet ready to give up on anthropologists, nor dismiss their positive contributions. Luckily, they/we are not considered beyond redemption (though definitely in need of it). Like McMaster, Poitras offers anthropologists an opportunity to atone for past mistakes and work more closely with Native peoples towards mutually beneficial goals.

Deirdre Evans-Pritchard (1989: 91) has written

Anthropologists have often been unaware of pointed critiques of their own behavior. They can be oblivious to "native"

¹³¹ Celestial intervention with similar humbling intent is also the subject of Cree singer Buffy Sainte-Marie’s 1974 composition, Moonshot. The lyrics read:

An anthropologist, he wrote a book
He called it "Myths of Heaven"
He’s disappeared, his wife is all distraught
An angel came and got him

Off into outer space you go my friend
We wish you Bon Voyage
And when you get there we will welcome you
And still you wonder at it all

Poitras’s piece also recalls, if unintentionally, the quartet of trickster elders whose mythic adventures and benevolent actions feature prominently in Thomas King’s 1993 novel, Green Grass, Running Water. See Footnote 58, p. 58, this document.
opinions of them, partly because people naturally avoid criticism and partly because social scientists expect to observe indigenous cultures in context—not to be observed. In this sense, fieldworkers are tourists and the two share characteristics that become the butt of Indian jokes and stories that ridicule collectomania.

The author goes on to cite one such story collected by Barre Toelken (in Lopez 1977: xi ff.). It is a little dissident narrative of the coyote kind:

On the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon, some people tell a story about a wandering anthropologist who came across a coyote caught in a trap.

"Please let me out of this trap; if you do, I’ll give you lots of money," the coyote said.
"Well, I’m not sure. Will you tell me a story, too?" asked the professor.
"Sure I will; I’ll tell you a real, true story, a real long one for your books."

So the anthropologist sprung the trap, collected a big handful of bills from the coyote, and then set up his tape machine. The coyote sat, rubbing his sore legs, and told a long story that lasted until the tape ran out. Then he ran off.

The anthropologist went home and told his wife about what happened, but she wouldn’t believe him. When he reached in his pocket to show her the money, all he came out with was a handful of fur and dirt.

And when he went to play his tape for the other professors, all that was in the machine was a pile of coyote droppings.132

Evans-Pritchard says, "Replace the tape recorder with a camera, and one has a tourist" (1989: 92). She could just as

132 This story is now arguably as much a part of anthropological oral history as it is Indian folklore. Peter Blue Cloud’s recent coyote caper, Anthropologitis, (APPENDIX 13, p. 247) and Thomas King’s One Good Story that One (1993: 1-10) may yet achieve the same mythic status in contemporary literature. Vine Deloria Jr.’s devastating satire, Anthropologists and Other Friends (1969: 78 ff.), may be there already.
easily have said, "Replace the tape recorder with a camera and one still has an anthropologist." Like tourists, anthropologists are visitors to Native communities, and often guilty of the same irritating habits and consumer mentality. Mohawk artist Rick Hill has observed (1989: 35), "Nearly all Indians have been asked to 'pose' for a visitor's camera, and the visitor leaves with his personal image of 'real, live Indians.'" In the same article Hill writes,

"Every Indian community has loads of funny stories about the tourists they had tricked, and...the photographs which scholars published despite their claims to the contrary when they asked for permission to photograph. Stories about White photographers entered tribal oral histories and the camera became the latest weapon to be used against Indians. ...The camera was an intrusion on Indian life. The photographs were taken for outside interests, by outside people, outside of the needs of Indians themselves.

But not always. In "Burlesquing 'The Other' in Pueblo Performance" (1989: 71), Jill Sweet describes an incident in which a Pueblo clown borrows a visitor’s camera to reverse the usual photographic process. "The clown became the tourist with camera while the tourist became the photographic subject."\(^{133}\) In the pen and ink sketch, The Tourists (fig. 69), and the pastel drawing Strange Rituals, (fig. 70), Mohawk artist, Bill Powless accomplishes similar playful reversals. No less effective a piece of "trick photography" is Jim

\(^{133}\) Maidu artist Harry Fonseca’s iconic image of Coyote in the pueblo (fig. 68) would seem to capture the spirit of this act perfectly. Those familiar with pueblo ritual will also recognize the sly sartorial reference to the watermelons carried about by the fun-loving koshare clowns.
fig. 70
Logan’s ironically titled painting, *It’s a Kodak Moment* (fig. 71), which cleverly foregrounds the camera’s complicity in the process of visualizing "Otherness."

In all of the cases discussed in this chapter, Native artists have challenged the representation of aboriginal "Otherness," contesting institutional structures that define aesthetic practice too narrowly, and regard Native culture paternalistically. Working from within the structures themselves, the artists seek to question assumptions and expectations (what Vizenor [1989: 188] calls "terminal creeds") utilizing "the transformative tropes of parody, irony, puns, [and] paradox...which by their very nature force an evaluation" (Galbo 1987-88: 40). At the same time, they have advanced alternative representations of both art and culture, and introduced a sense of play into places where once there was none. All this "turning around on purpose" is a "trickster’s business."
CHAPTER 4

SUBVERTING THE SYMBOLS OF POWER AND CONTROL: A NEW SEMIOTIC

Coyote went east to see the PRIME Minister.

I wouldn't make this up.

And the PRIME Minister was so HAPPY to see Coyote that he made HIM a member of cabinet. Maybe YOU can HELP us solve the Indian problem?

Sure, says that Coyote, WHAT'S the problem?

When Elwood tells this story, he always LAUGHS and spoils the ending.

Thomas King

The previous two chapters have examined various comic and ironic strategies employed by Native artists to counter outdated notions of "Indianness" and outmoded systems of cultural and aesthetic representation. The following chapter explores some of the ways in which political power and oppressive government policy have been contested and critically deconstructed. The artists' critique is at once playfully poignant and darkly satiric; an indictment of historical indifference and bureaucratic insensitivity, fuelled by anger, yet tinged with a cautious optimism and
hope. Once more, parody and ironic recontextualization emerge as favoured modes of expression; and titles have never been so pointed. Not surprisingly, "toxic humour" is much in evidence. In fact, many of the images, both verbal and visual, seem intended to "sting, and burn in your brain, and sit there for a long time" (Farmer 1991).

Still, toxic humour comes in varying strengths. Authority and power can be challenged in ways exceedingly sly and subtle. In 1983, Gerald McMaster created a set of three graphite drawings on paper---"the postcard series"---which chronicle the travels of "Indian Joe", a figure conceived as an archetypal Trickster/tourist who, like the artist, eventually journeyed to Ottawa. There, in typical tourist fashion, he sends postcards home to friends, each inscribed with a personalized

---

\[134\] As noted earlier (Footnote 20, p. 21), satire is, by its very nature, a hopeful mode of expression in that it allows for the possibility of change.

\[135\] See Farmer, p. 34.

\[136\] McMaster (interview, 1990) says the series was based on the idea of expanding your horizons through experience, and perhaps through experience you learn things. I think that Weesakeejak was like that, and...this is perhaps what Indian people should be doing as well...They can't go travelling all the time but I think, perhaps, based on this notion of the Trickster, and travelling and experiences, you're just not reserve-bound. You should be going out all over and meeting other Indians or anybody, and perhaps things might change....Travel, open up your mind to different things and then you may have a different perspective on life. You're going to go through a lot of mistakes but that's where you begin to learn. And that was the whole notion of Trickster.
message, and a "Trickster signature". His postcards, however, are like no others. They are not the usual capital fare. The images they bear do not celebrate dominion or ethnic exclusion, but instead imagine symbols of the country as it could be, the nation as it might be.

In Changing the Guard (fig. 72) an especially apt and layered metaphor, an officer in the Governor General's Foot Guard is envisioned in braids, and wearing a scalplock in place of military ribbons. Behind him, the Houses of Parliament form a stately backdrop. Similarly, in RCMP and Their World-Famous Dogs (fig. 73) four of the five members of the military police force credited with bringing law and order to the West have their hair in braids. They are all aboriginal. Suddenly, the popular "Indian and Mountie" souvenir postcard is rendered passe by the "Indian as Mountie" version. More than the mere fusion of difference, or the echo of the "Indian cowboy," these images imagine erasure of racial and cultural hierarchy.

---

137 The "friends" in this case are the actual individuals who commissioned the drawings from McMaster. Here, the line between fiction and reality is effectively blurred.

138 Subtle as these visual modifications are, there is an even more elusive subversion of cultural privilege at work (or play) in the postcard's scripted message. Indian Joe's casual reference to having his picture taken by Yousuf Karsh, the internationally known Canadian photographer of celebrities and world leaders, not only imagines acknowledgement of Native achievement but inclusion in the inner circle of political decision makers as well. It is a picture compatible with that created by Thomas King in his poem Coyote Sees the Prime Minister (1990: 252), reproduced at the top of this chapter.
It is not for nothing that the Cree elder Vern Harper (interview, 1991) says McMaster "has the Coyote spirit in him." 139

This analogy can be extended even further. In light of the three critical portraits of Sir John A. Macdonald that McMaster has produced over the years (plus one of Sir Wilfred Laurier), the title of Thomas King's poem *Coyote Sees the Prime Minister*, would seem to be an appropriate description of this aspect of the artist's work. As the country's first prime minister, and the man who introduced the legislation creating the oppressive Indian Act of 1876, 140 Macdonald is a

---

139 Cf. Harper, p. 64. Both McMaster and Maidu artist Harry Fonseca (fig. 68, Footnote 133, p. 138) employ the Trickster/tourist concept as a comic metaphor, but to somewhat different ends. While Fonseca personifies or gives physical form to a cultural attitude, McMaster imagines this attitude in action, portraying the subtly altered state of the world resulting from such action. In this, McMaster is possibly closer than Fonseca to Vizenor's concept of the Trickster as a "doing" rather than a "being." This is perhaps a minor distinction, if, as Kenneth Burke attests (in Hymes 1979: xvi), attitude is "incipient act."

140 In the three decades following the establishment of the Dominion of Canada in 1867 Native peoples were subjected to a series of increasingly repressive and essentially racist acts of federal legislation meant to facilitate the process of "civilization." The most comprehensive of these was the Indian Act of 1876 which amended and consolidated many of the earlier laws respecting Indians. As a consequence of legislation, Indian identity was arbitrarily defined, questionable treaties were concluded with Indians in the west, divesting them of much of their land and forcing them onto reserves, cultural practices affirming Native identity (such as the Sun Dance and the potlatch) were declared impediments to progress and subsequently banned, elected band councils were imposed to subvert traditional leadership, private
potent symbol of power and control.

In 1985 McMaster portrayed him twice in the series Riel Remembered, a set of fifteen large graphite drawings on paper commissioned to mark the centennial of the North-West Rebellion.\textsuperscript{141} The most distinguishing feature of these works is the use of proportional distortion to bring a fresh perspective to the subjects of archival photographs. It is a particularly good example of Hutcheon's concept of "repetition with critical distance." In His Hands He's Got the Whole World (fig. 74) is perhaps the more memorable of the two Macdonald portraits in this series. It depicts the Prime Minister with the large floppy feet of a circus clown and a head so small as to lack the ability to perceive the world rationally, let alone apply sound judgement. In his right hand Macdonald holds an orb symbolizing the power he failed to exercise wisely over the peoples of the west. The title of the piece reverses the order of the words in the title of a popular gospel song to suggest that Riel was not the only leader suffering from delusions of divinity.

\textsuperscript{140}(...continued)

property was introduced to counter communal ownership, residential schools were established to promote mainstream values, and local Indian agents were given authority over reserve management and monies. The Indian Act was not amended again until 1951 (Surtees 1988).

\textsuperscript{141} See Podedworny, 1985. Cf. Boyer's Batoche Centennial (fig. 41, p. 102) which commemorates the same event.
McMaster's third "official" portrait of Macdonald, Trick or Treaty (fig. 75), is a much sharper critique of both the man and his office. Included in The cowboy/Indian Show, it depicts Macdonald as a dishevelled joker with a greasepaint smile. He could be a midway huckster, a vaudeville comedian, or a standup comic on a bad night. He is not a Right Honourable sight. Viewed against a garish backdrop, he banters with unseen patrons as glitter dust floats through the air. His words of polished insincerity are unceremoniously thrown back in his face in a symbolic "Act" of aboriginal defiance.

In the fall of 1990, a few short weeks after the barricades at Oka were dismantled, McMaster (interview, 1990) discussed Macdonald's legacy and the issues that gave rise to the creation of this painting. In words both disarming and at times disheartening, he said

I think a lot of Native peoples, even today, would have just as much of a problem with this guy and his policies as they did in the past....[He was] sort of a Mulroney. The attitude on policy making is perhaps quite similar and the disregard for the people. I think that politicians always have some kind of personal desire that isn't reflective of everybody. They're supposed to be our representatives but in the end they become very self-centred. In historical terms Macdonald was very much for the expansion of the eastern government out west...connecting up with western Canada. He is just one person Native peoples had to deal with historically.

142 Canada's Prime Minister when this conversation took place. For Native images of Mulroney, see Waitress (fig. 100, p. 173), The Same Old Shit (fig. 102, p. 174) and The Final Solution (fig. 104, p. 175).
What I did here [in this painting] was inspired by a poster of Jack Nicholson as The Joker [in the film Batman], so it became very Halloweenish—with the colours, "trick or treat." I felt that "TRICK or TREATY" was actually the same word, or had the same implications. Whether they signed it or not—and a lot of Indians never did sign a treaty—it meant the same thing. There was never any advantage at all to Native peoples. It was all to their disadvantage. "You’re damned if you do and damned if you don’t!" I think that there were no treats at all! So I saw it as a cruel joke.

This is what it’s about in real terms—that Native peoples were always damned and they always will be. Even as hard as we fight, it’s going to be difficult, no matter what....I think there’ll be a lot of fights forever. Nothing’s ever going to be resolved and I think people have to accept that. They sort of accepted their fate when they signed the treaties. Sure, "as long as the grass grows and the sun shines"—that kind of rhetoric—those are ideals, but in reality it never seems to work that way. It’s like every day’s a Halloween.

Another thing I was going to say about this [painting] is that it kind of represents a lot of the right wing conservatism that seems to be a popular movement today around the world. At the same time, as a result, you find there’s a tremendous backlash against marginalized people—everybody who is "ex-centric" or outside this range. This includes Indians, Native peoples. There’s a big fight on. It includes censorship and other controls.

There’s this notion of maintaining traditional values within a certain group of people. There’s a conformity—so everybody on the margin is suffering because of that. There’s no opportunity to be individual. I think, within that, Native peoples have always been facing that situation...of assimilation, of acculturation...right from the time of contact. You could not be Indian. You could not speak your language. There was pressure to conform to the rest of Canada. The Indian Act is the legislation that says that. You’ve got to become "Canadian"—whatever that is. You no longer should be speaking your language and practicing your religion. That’s the same kind of rhetoric that’s being spoken today by right wing conservatives, and it’s a concern. It has always been for Native peoples, and I think that Macdonald actually represents that situation. Native peoples have always tried to resist, and in resisting they’ve faced a lot of consequences.

Now, when you think about Native peoples and what political party they trust, well, they trust no party. In the end,
the political parties seem to be all the same, just because the official representative of any political party that comes into power is still the Department of Indian Affairs. And, of course, the Department of Indian Affairs is such an incompetent lot when it comes to dealing with Native affairs that it's ridiculous. And so, there's still all this notion of control of Native peoples. I guess there is a sense of fatalism within that notion. Will anything ever change? I'm only a fatalist in the sense of my generation because I believe that for the next generation and succeeding generations there are possibilities for change. My hope of course is that each generation will come to understand.

I think Canadians, in general, are quite ignorant of our history. And whatever history we know about Canada is obviously one-sided, for God's sake!

In trenchant words and images, McMaster provides a view of Canadian history from the other side. Perhaps no work in The cowboy/Indian Show challenges the official version of this history more forcefully and directly than Haul the Quest was One (fig. 76). The cleverly constructed trilingual pun in the title would seem to add credence to Deloria's assertion (1969: 147) that, for Indians, "[t]he more desperate the problem, the

---

143 In his book Wordarrows: Indians and Whites in the New Fur Trade, Gerald Vizenor (1978: 9) suggests that trickery is the only viable method of dealing with such bureaucracy. He writes, "The Bureau of Indian Affairs [the DIA's American counterpart] has been wished dead more times than evil, but colonial evil is better outwitted than dead because someone would be sure to create a more depraved form of tribal control."

144 Cf. Michael Valpy (Footnote 57, p. 57, this document) on the use of McMaster's paintings and commentaries for the teaching of Canadian history.
Much of the punning and wordplay that occurs in the titles of artwork in this study seems to be firmly grounded in oral tradition, and, as such, is as central to an understanding of aboriginal culture (and humour) as the practice of teasing. In a recent interview with Gary Farmer, author Thomas King (1993b: 4) described Native humour as being characterized by

[v]ery bad puns and lots of them and having to hear the same jokes over and over again. I think the majority of Natives in Canada, if they’re not bilingual, they come pretty close to it. Some are even trilingual. It means you can play with language. And because many of the communities still have a strong basis in oral storytelling, play with language, punning, joking is crucial to that thing we call Native humour. I couldn’t define it for you and I’m not even sure that I could say ‘There it is and there it isn’t,’ because it’s sort of a participatory thing....I got friends out in Lethbridge, [Alberta,] who tell the worst puns, jeeze, just some of the worst puns and some of the worst jokes. But there’s a kind of communal spirit to those things. We all know what he’s going to say. But we all have a good time, probably because we come together in communities. We like that play with language; we don’t care how many times we hear it. But for non-Native communities, you hear a joke once, it’s kind of boring, you don’t want to hear it again. You want to hear something new. Always something new, always something new.

King is by no means the first to call attention to Native punning and wordplay. In a 1968 article citing the emergence of Native humour as a potent force in American civil rights activism, anthropologist Nancy Oestrich Lurie (1968: 202 ff.) noted the publicizing and utilization of the kind of humor which has always typified Indian life but was usually unknown to non-Indian Americans. To me, this humor is more than minority humor and evinces an older tradition. It is strong on puns, word play in general, and stunning juxtapositions of seemingly unrelated concepts and contexts, reminiscent of the witty irony found in treaty journals of the nineteenth century and texts of certain kinds of narrative legends.

McMaster’s trilingual pun in Haul The Quest Was One recalls in particular the wonderful triple pun at the centre of a comic story recounted by Wilson and Dennison (1970: 26 ff.) in Laughter: The Navajo Way. See APPENDIX 14, p. 248, this (continued...)
1990) says

The original How the West Was Won was, of course, a famous movie. You can see "the West" in different ways—western culture, western Man, the west as the almighty, the right, the righteous, also the west of the imagination, and the west as seen in the movies.

As for the French connotation in the title, I just used the French term [for "west"]. And then "Hau!" is the Lakota greeting for "Hello!" I was picturing this group of people coming...massive numbers of people coming out as settlers, as ranchers, as missionaries, as law enforcement officers, controllers, keepers of the power. And the guy in the front—it's almost as if he's wearing a gold shield on his chest, a chest protector, armour—[he is] perhaps representing the army. The three figures in the front represent the power structure—missionary, law enforcement, politician or army. Opening up the West for settlement...I think perhaps it was seen as a mass invasion, certainly from the Native perspective...not really understanding what was happening.

It's the same thing with the people in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Rumania who really did not know what was happening when armies invaded their countries almost in the middle of the night in the 1950s. They didn't know what was going on. I think the Native peoples were in the same situation—they didn't know what was going on.

[In the painting] they're all facing you and coming at you...automatons. You kill a few, well, there are more coming. There's no end. It's very threatening.

In a sense, this painting has a Canadian tone to it. In the 1860s it seemed that life was fairly peaceful with the Indians, the Métis and the settlers. It wasn't Canada yet. The government of the day in eastern Canada was attempting to join the east with the west...to try and create the country of Canada which was distinct from the United States. There was a realization that the eastern government of Macdonald was attempting to push westward, to expand, to appropriate lands, and to control the peoples out there, particularly the Natives and Métis. Life seemed to be OK for awhile until this greed for power and expansion of the east out to the west.

\(^{149}(...continued)\)

document, for their explanation of the complex wordplay in this narrative.
"You can no longer have the individuality or freedoms. We’re going to make it ONE. We’re going to connect it up with British Columbia and make it one Canada." The "west" was the only block to that, and all the Natives were confronting that notion of expansion.

Bob Boyer’s ironically titled blanket painting *A Minor Sport in Canada* (fig. 77) also offers an alternative perspective on the opening of the Canadian west, graphically portraying the violence and bloodshed that inevitably result when one society attempts to superimpose its values and lifestyle on another. Here the attempted superimposition and obliteration are both metaphorical and starkly literal.\(^{146}\) The violence is palpable, the "double cross" undeniable. Critical distance is achieved through radical recontextualization of the Union Jack, once the proud emblem of the British Empire, now a discredited symbol of imperial domination vilified on a painted "Indian" blanket.\(^{147}\) At the same time, this piece provides a veiled critique of prevailing attitudes in contemporary Canadian minor sport that impact directly on Native youth. It is a double-vision that affirms the presence of an unjust and inequitable past.

\(^{146}\) Cf. a similar approach to similar ends in Boyer’s *The Batoche Centennial*, fig. 41, p. 102.

\(^{147}\) Boyer has long enjoyed the idea of "selling blankets back to the white man," and, in fact, his vividly painted blankets, combining Plains Indian beadwork designs and contemporary colour-field concepts are among the most sought after of his creations. No doubt, he was particularly pleased and not a little amused at the irony when *A Minor Sport in Canada* was purchased by the National Gallery of Canada.
Boyer (interview, 1991) recalls that the painting started out as various responses. My friends and I had been talking over several situations. Indian kids in the States, to be on a basketball team they generally have to be twice as good as a white kid. Indian kids are often discouraged by the system. To get through the school system, often times, the Indian kid in school has to be twice as studious, work twice as hard. And I know from experience, because for a while I was a hockey scout for junior hockey teams, and I’ve had coaches say to me that they wouldn’t have any of those damned "wagon-burners" on their teams. So again, in order to prove a point, an Indian kid in hockey has to work very hard....I’d been talking to [Mohawk artist] Rick Hill on a similar thing....At one time he was coaching a lacrosse team from Six Nations and they tried to get into the Ontario Lacrosse League and they wouldn’t let them in.  

I’d also been...doing some research on the Northwest Rebellion and I noticed that it was young white soldiers [who were] coming out west to take up arms against the "savages" out west here--

And because this is on tape I have to put "savages" in quotation marks--and I’m using "savages" from their point of view, not my point of view. Tapes never know what you’re talking about.

So these young white soldiers who believed they were going to be fighting savages were jumping on the trains in the trainloadfuls for adventure--for "sport"--[in] the same way that those young guys used to come out on trains to venture out for sporting, for hunting animals. And there’s many pictures. We know about the slaughter of the buffalos but we also know of the slaughter of other animals. We’ve all seen pictures of turn-of-the-century hunters with hundreds of ducks hanging on strings, twenty-five deer hanging from racks and so on. That’s the sport: slaughtering and so on.

Taking, always taking. Always assuming. And in the States it was the same way. The United States cavalry, they left

---

148 Boyer spoke about this painting earlier in the fall at an exhibition of his work at the Edmonton Art Gallery (see Phillips, 1991, Shades of Difference: The Art of Bob Boyer), only to read on the plane trip home of an Indian team from Thompson, Manitoba, who were prevented from playing in a tournament in Quebec City. "So there you go!," he says. "My words weren’t even dead in Edmonton and I was getting on the airplane and there it was again."
the east coming out west....It was sporting for them too--
to come out west to be a jaunty thing--to come out and shoot
Indians. So this whole approach to Indians has been...from
one point, where it was a sport to come out and kill
Indians, and mistreat Indians and destroy the habitat of the
animals....That kind of sporting thing still occurs today
[but] nowadays they just apply different tactics and make it
very difficult. It's very discouraging for Indians to try
and do anything because every time you turn around there's
somebody putting a wet blanket over everything.

[In the upper corners of this painting] you can see the
"Indian flag" in there which is almost whited out, but not
quite. It's going to come back. Even with the pipe [shown
in the lower corners], when I did that I was thinking one of
these days they're going to try and take away the pipes....
As a matter of fact that almost happened already. In one
incident we were going to have a pipe ceremony for the
Museums conference--the Task Force [on Museums and First
Peoples] that was here in the springtime--and because no
smoking was allowed in the building one of the secretaries
was not going to allow the elders to have a pipe ceremony.
But I went to the president of the university...and he very
quickly told her to shut her mouth and let things go on. So
there you go, you see.

Boyer employs the Union Jack once more in Government Blanket
Policy (fig. 78) appending it this time to an image of the
Stars and Stripes now "turned around on purpose" for another
view of history from the other side. He says

I was thinking "blanket policy for Indians"--everyone always
says a "blanket policy." So the blanket policy of course is
to overcome Indians. And one of the easiest ways to
overcome Indians is with policies from the government. It's
frustrating for Indians. Policies, policies--they're always
changing them, manipulating them.149

149 On the subject of irony Boyer says

I've always...seen the irony in a lot of things, and so I
suppose I can see the irony in my own paintings (laughs) and
the irony in the titles....The titles, actually, are not
really meant to be "humorous."...It's not my intention to be
a "one-line zinger" kind of guy...I want people to meditate
(continued...)
The fusion of flags in this piece shrewdly signals the presence of parallel policies towards Indians.

The original treaties were signed with the Americans and with the British. And those treaties were meant really to protect the white people, not to protect Indians. That's why the Indian world's [tipis are] turned upside down under the flags. [The black letter "X" is for] the black spot on the North American continent brought by the white people. That's their black mark they laid on this continent. [The three red figures on the sidebars represent] horses....I like horses, I come from a horse-loving background...[but] I see the horse as a symbol of destruction of Indian culture, 'cause it was on the backs of those horses that Europeans came. On the backs of those horses the cavalry and the RCMP came. Indian culture survived very well without horses. Did very well.

149 (...continued)

Naming a painting is sort of like when you know you're going to have a baby....You spend maybe up to nine months thinking about what you're going to call that kid based on all kinds of experiences, sometimes relevant, sometimes non-relevant. But during that whole process of the nine months people...spend a lot of timing considering, "What's the name of this kid going to be?" But nothing really gels until you actually do have the kid. So, that's sort of the process: It kind of occurs, and it's sort of growing, and at a point in time when the painting is about done...you end up with a title.

150 Given the context, the black letter "X" could be read as the Greek letter Chi and symbol for Christ. Cf. Logan's use of this symbol in Jesus Was Not A Whiteman (fig. 49, p. 115). It could also be interpreted as the Native signature on so many early treaties. Or the Trickster signature on a contemporary visual document interrogating such treaties.

151 Flags feature prominently in Boyer's Batoche Centennial, A Minor Sport In Canada, and Government Blanket Policy as symbols of colonial intrusion and sovereign authority. For Boyer and many other Native artists the national anthem is an equally potent symbol of alien rule and contested allegiance. For this reason, the text to O Canada is often fragmented and recontextualized in a decidedly subversive fashion. Cf. Boyer's Batoche Centennial (fig. 41, p. 102), Joane Cardinal-Schubert's poem, O Canada (APPENDIX (continued...))
The infamous military campaign waged by the U.S. cavalry against Plains Indians in the latter half of the nineteenth century is the subject of Small Matters (fig. 81, detail), a literally and emotionally compact installation by fellow Metis artist, Edward Poitras, that was included in the 1989 exhibition, Beyond History.\(^{152}\) The title, with its oblique, yet double-edged reference to the "small matters" of Indian resistance and eradication, highlights, much like the title of Boyer's A Minor Sport in Canada, the grossly diminished (if not inhuman) status accorded Native peoples at this time.

\(^{151}\) (...continued)

12, p. 246), Shelley Niro’s Standing On Guard For Thee (fig. 79), and Red Heels Hard (fig. 80, detail), both of which depict the artist’s three sisters clowning and highkicking their way about the base of a monument to the controversial Mohawk chief, Joseph Brant. The latter work includes a moving poetic commentary which unravels one line at a time in handwritten script beneath the six horizontally-mounted photographs. The text reads,

Behind us stands a monument to the late great J.B.
he brought us from Upper New York State,
from the Mohawk Valley.
Carried in his jewelled bag and blown into the wind...
we grew as Maples, Oaks and Pines
along the banks of the Grand
We followed that yellow bricked road
and clicked our red heels hard
but this is where we will stay forever
and for thee stand on guard.

In his densely layered painting Oka-boy/Oh! Kowboy (fig. 110, p. 177) Gerald McMaster plays with the opening lines of both Canadian and American national anthems, while Bill Powless, it will be recalled, gives the last line of the Star Spangled Banner a new twist in his Home of the Brave (fig. 2, p. 53).

\(^{152}\) Originally conceived in 1988 for a group exhibition of small scale works in Regina, Small Matters was recreated in 1989 for Beyond History in Vancouver, and again in the summer of 1991 for a show of the artist’s work in Finland.
Describing this piece in the Beyond History exhibition catalogue, co-curator Karen Duffek (Duffek and Hill, 1989: 33) writes, somewhat dispassionately

A series of four small fence-like enclosures nailed into the gallery wall, it presents separate "pieces of history" as memorials to the victims of ethnocide. Each wire box contains a crumpled page of text from [Dee Brown's] Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, a book chronicling the displacement and extinction of Indian tribes in the United States. Beneath each box, in white letters, is a specific historical reference: "Summer Snow," "The Trail of Tears," "Sand Creek," and "Wounded Knee;" the first includes a list of tribes that have vanished like snow before a summer sun. While these memorials are reminiscent of the picket fences that often encircle Native grave markers, the use of wire and nails also suggests entrapment--this history cannot be escaped.

Small Matters is deceptively simple. The artist's selective use of printed text, which, by virtue of its small size requires a close reading, along with his cool and calculated application of white lettering to a white wall, not only evinces a minimalist aesthetic sensibility but a subtlety found in the shrewdest Trickster practice as well. It is the absolute antithesis of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's seduction of the viewer with colour, but with decidedly similar intent. In this instance, conceptual brilliance displaces chromatic brilliance. Poitras (interview, 1991) says, "It's like a little ambush. It's an amenable piece but with big content."

Indeed. Underplaying the importance of the conceptual component he adds, "probably the only creative act in there is trying to crumple [the page] in such a way that you could still read it."
It is an especially critical act, as it is only in reading the strategically foregrounded passages that the terrible and tragic historical ironies are revealed—none more forceful or poignant than the "Wounded Knee" component (fig. 81) which incorporates the final page from the final chapter of Dee Brown's haunting book. The visible text (1972: 418) reads:

dead Indians were left lying where they had fallen. (After the blizzard, when a burial party returned to Wounded Knee, they found the bodies, including Big Foot's, frozen into grotesque shapes.)

The wagonloads of wounded Sioux (four men and forty-seven women and children) reached Pine Ridge after dark. Because all available barracks were filled with soldiers, they were left lying in the open wagons in the bitter cold while an inept Army officer searched for shelter. Finally the Episcopal mission was opened, the benches taken out, and hay scattered over the rough flooring.

It was the fourth day after Christmas in the Year of Our Lord 1890. When the first torn and bleeding bodies were carried into the candlelit church, those who were conscious could see Christmas greenery hanging from the open rafters. Across the chancel front above the pulpit was strung a crudely lettered banner: PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO MEN.

In conversation in February, 1991, Carleton University art historian Ruth Phillips said of Poitras

153 The slaughter of an estimated three hundred Sioux (more than half of them, women and children) at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota, on December 29, 1890, brought a bloody end to a half century war waged by the American government against Indians for possession of the American West. In 1973, Indian activists inspired by the courage of their ancestors occupied the same site for seventy-one days in an armed standoff with federal agents. Ironically, a century after the 1890 massacre the macabre photograph of Minneconjou chief Big Foot lying frozen in the snow—the ultimate Indian victim—is arguably as much a symbol of cultural survival and tribal tenacity as any studio portrait of Sitting Bull or Geronimo. See, for example, Unreasonable History (fig. 121, p. 194, this document) and The Death of Big Foot, both in Jim Logan's Classical Aboriginal Series (Ryan, 1994).
I think he's the blackest humorist of them all. To me, his work is dark to the point of depression, but for that reason, it's among the strongest of all. I think he's important to your study.

Whether Poitras is the blackest or the bleakest of humorists is debatable, given the work by some of the other artists in this chapter. He does, however, bring to this study and to the practice of aesthetic trickery a degree of conceptual sophistication that has few rivals.

The same juxtaposition of faith professed and faith practiced that imbues the Poitras/Brown "Wounded Knee" collaboration with so much ironic intensity is evident as well in Carl Beam's sharply-titled Calvary to Cavalry (fig. 82) from his Columbus Suite of engravings. The artist's pairing of an early Crucifixion scene with an archival portrait of five Native men is no less pointed, nor searing a commentary on the harrowing missionary/military alliance than that of Poitras. Yet, even here Beam finds unexpected common ground in human history. He (interview, 1991b) says, "What people miss is that Christians themselves were persecuted at one time. Viewers would make that connection if they understood their own experience."\(^{154}\)

\(^{154}\) Metis artist, Jim Logan, makes a similar analogy in his painting Let Us Compare Miracles (fig. 83) from The Classical Aboriginal Series. Set against a pastoral backdrop (in this case, a faithful reproduction of a popular beer label) the early Christian martyr, St. Sebastian, is portrayed as a suffering Native shot through with arrows. Logan (interview, 1994) however, says the comparison is one of recovery rather (continued...)
The practice of Christianizing through force while colonizing through faith is also addressed by Jane Ash Poitras in her five-piece painting/installation *The Virgin Bullet*. In the fifth, and by far the most disturbing panel (fig. 84), an appropriated image of the Virgin Mary--again characteristically depicted as an idealized white woman with pale skin, deep blue eyes and luscious red lips--is framed by a border of painted red crosses, four of which (positioned directly above the Virgin’s head) are overlaid with metal shell casings pointing downward. Like the title of the piece itself, it is a distressing (yet riveting) elision of imagery. Like a volley of gunfire or a hail of bullets frozen in mid-flight, the shells presage impending disaster. Across the bottom of the painting, two shield figures barely conceal the names of two such disasters inflicted on Native peoples, "THE TRAIL OF TEARS" and "THE SAND CREEK MASSACRE", both memorialized by Edward Poitras in *Small Matters*.

Echoing the Metis artist’s comments on his own installation, Jane Ash

---

154(...continued)

than suffering: Just as St. Sebastian made a miraculous recovery from wounds inflicted for his spiritual beliefs, so too, Native people are beginning to recover from wounds incurred over a century of alcohol abuse.

155 Cf. Jim Logan’s *Annunciation* (fig. 48, pp. 114) which portrays a similar theme.

156 See Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1971) for an account of the Trail of Tears, the forced removal of Southeastern tribes to lands west of the Mississippi in the 1830s, and the Sand Creek Massacre in which more than one hundred Cheyenne women and children died in an unprovoked attack by the Colorado militia in 1864.
Poitras (interview, 1991) says of The Virgin Bullet, "It's a small piece but it's a powerful little piece." Amen.

No less powerful, and for many of the same reasons, is the shell-shocked rosary Dominus Vobiscum (fig. 85) by Ron Noganosh, which also makes use of bullets (.44 magnum shells carefully laid out in a velvet-lined display case) to question ecclesiastically-sanctioned violence, not only against Native peoples but all peoples. It is one of those deeply affecting images most likely to "sting and burn in your brain and sit there for a long time" (Farmer 1991, p. 34, this document).

In a description laced with toxic reference Noganosh (interview, 1991) says

It's visually appealing but there is a hell of a lot going on in it. It actually started with a Jacques Cartier [silver] dollar. That was the scapular medal I put at the top. And then I made the rosary...beads out of bullets, because of the wars--about fighting the Indians, fighting all kinds of wars. And then, of course, GI Joe's hangin' on the cross because of the senselessness of war, if you want. It's set out in a heart shape because they used to do that in the mission schools. And sometimes they'd shape them into praying hands....I liked the heart, it went better with the bullets. I had a hell of a time getting the holes in the plexiglas to look like bullet holes. I tried shooting it with a .22 and every time I shot it would just shatter. Tape it up. Shoot it. Blow it up. So I finally drilled it and hit it with a ballpeen hammer and, "Hey, perfect!" (laughs) It's actually .22 casings that hold the plexiglas into the wood. And it's made out of walnut because when they gave medals away for bravery or killing people you got a nice little walnut case with a medal in it....[For the cross,] those are flattened out bullets and melted. I was trying to make it all out of metal but it wouldn't work. I

---

\(^{157}\) A commemorative coin issued by the Canadian Government to honour the raising of the French cross in 1535 on newly "discovered" Indian land.
I couldn’t get them to flow properly. I had to mount it on wood.¹⁵⁸

What might be easily overlooked in the above little narrative on moral and spiritual bankruptcy is the brief mention of mission schools, the church-run residential schools where, for several decades, countless Native children were subjected to the most heinous forms of physical and psychological abuse. In Dominus Vobiscum the affecting placement of a child’s toy soldier on the cross only hints at the extent of personal violation and suffering that took place.

In contrast, Carl Beam’s Forced Ideas in School Days (fig. 87) is a more pointed and personalized indictment of the people

¹⁵⁸ Dominus Vobiscum is not the only work in which Noganosh interrogates clerical practice through critical modification of plastic figures. In his playfully irreverent sculpture Daryl (fig. 86) the artist ironically inverts historic convention, cloaking a symbol of ecclesiastical authority in a robe of Native spirituality. It is a "little dissident" act of cultural reclamation as profound as it is playful, a further example of what Jane Ash Poitras calls "shamanizing the white guys" (cf. p. 90). Noganosh (interview, 1991a) explains:

Again it was a play on words. They had a show at [Galerie l’Imagier...and their theme one year was "strawberries." So I did a [piece]...about an Ojibway legend where [it says] that if you ate a strawberry you’d end up in the holy land, but if you didn’t I guess you went to the other place—"You’re hell bound and gone!"...That’s the bishop or the pope, he’s the strawberry....So this is a Native interpretation of how to get to heaven. (laughs) It was called Daryl because the Expos were in the playoffs that year! (laughs) Good old Daryl Strawberry! They had [the legend] pinned up on the wall at the opening so people would know it. So it wasn’t a complete [in-joke].
and policies that allowed residential schools to flourish. Not surprisingly, both the humour and images in this piece are decidedly dark; and the handwritten script exceedingly caustic. A grey pall hangs like a shroud over memory—and this print as well. The smiling students seen earlier in Self-Portrait as John Wayne, Probably (fig. 14, p. 66) are the central focus here, their innocent souls the prize in a spiritual battle symbolized by contrasting images of a cross-crowned dancer (also from ...John Wayne, Probably) and a cross-bound Christ (from Calvary to Cavalry, fig. 82, p. 157). A thin line extends from the artist’s encircled face in the crowd to the panel of text on the left. It reads

the artist as a young captive in an insane world of fools who will go down in history as the most perverted humans ever to walk on the face of the earth...the truth unfolds slowly but surely like a tide almost,...

The text continues on the right:

FORCED IDEAS in School Days

.....I remember all my friends and I going to church every day because we were supposed to change from being Native to non-native, probably never white..........and yet, in spite of severe brain-washing everyone did remain native....I’m sure Christ would have enjoyed that.

Recalling these days and the creation of this print, Beam (interview, 1991b) said in conversation

I can’t remember anybody being any less Native. I did a piece where I said something like, "I’m sure Christ would have found this pretty funny." It’s hilarious--like changing a dandelion into a rose--the idea that you can "de-Indianize," that you can "Christianize."
Like many others of his generation, Beam is still troubled by a multitude of unanswered questions about the philosophy behind such schools. He continues

There's got to be a certain irony in speaking English, French and Latin. Why couldn't they have appended Ojibway? And Ojibway history? Why couldn't there have been one enlightened priest? It's stupid—as if there was already proof that speaking Indian was a handicap to speaking English. The irony is to mask it in a spiritual mode. If they told me I was in prison when I was a kid it would be easier to accept. But a Roman Catholic boarding school? How could that be? There must have been another motive—but I can't locate what that motive was.

You can't really change anybody. You shouldn't. What for? I remember the powder blue catechism book:

Question: "Who made us?"
Answer: "God."

Question: "Where is God?"
Answer: "Everywhere."

There would have been no need for indoctrination. Isn't he here too? They were violating their own principle. The fundamental reason for the downfall of religious education is that it degenerates rapidly into indoctrination. A concern with higher spirituality doesn't involve race. 159

In a telling statement that suggests how Beam and his fellow "graduates" have been able to put the past behind them and get on with their lives, to the extent that this is possible, the artist adds

If we're to believe the psychologists and psychiatrists, a lot of people that go through traumatic experiences blank out details—they draw a blank. It's the mechanics of the mind. Basically, I've had a good life.

159 In the context of such schools, the phrase "Suffer the little children to come unto me" (Luke 18: 16, The Holy Bible) may be understood in a sense never intended.
In recent years, Native peoples have deliberately, but cautiously begun to recall those traumatic experiences of their youth in order to heal the long-festering wounds. It is part of an ongoing process of communal recovery. And humour, no matter how cryptic or toxic, has proven to be one way to expose yet still maintain some distance from the pain and the anger. It would seem to be a necessary stage in the critical process of recovery.

In the photo-emulsion engraving *Semiotic Converts* (fig. 88) from the *Columbus Suite*, Beam reflects on what he and his classmates may have lost and may never know as a result of their schooling experience. Ian McLachlan (1990: 12) writes that in this piece Beam

re-appropriates a group photo of fellow survivors of the harsh residential school he attended at Spanish River, all of them adults now, laughing and smiling, the past modified by nostalgia, but still organized into the inevitable rows of the official school photograph. And over them he places a large and threatening traffic light. There is no specific message to the piece, but out of the cross-referencing there comes a sense of danger that those happy-looking people might not have been able to fully escape. We learn the signs of a dominant culture so thoroughly that even when we think we’re free, we may be expressing other people’s meanings rather than our own—semiotic converts, in other words.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Beam frequently uses this image of a traffic light, ironically labelled in a manner reminiscent of scientific dissection and analysis, to symbolize technological control of human behaviour through the imposition of the concept of linear time. As such, it can rightly be considered a self-reflexive warning signal. The brief text accompanying this image on the cabinet in fig. 89 reads: "Semiotic Shift gradual so that no one knew what was going on..." Easily read (continued...)
As Trevelyan (1993: n.p.) has observed, "the [added] reference to dripping blood and decay [in this piece] suggests the horrible mistakes made, as well as the danger of cultural deterioration due to attitudes and policies" that still persist.

Few policies were enforced in residential schools as stringently and severely as conformity—of appearance, language, behaviour and belief. In his paintings, *I Looked Out My Teepee One Day and All I Saw Was This* (fig. 91), and *Boarding School Wallpaper* (fig. 92), Cree artist George Littlechild dilutes the power of memory (both personal and cultural) by transforming destructive patterns of childhood experience into playful patterns of acrylic decoration. It is a cunning act of historical confrontation that creates as many spaces for healing as it does for critique. Both are certainly necessary. While never a boarding school student himself, Edmonton-raised Littlechild has been deeply and directly affected by the experience. In his book of paintings

143(...continued)
as a commentary on the process of cultural loss, these words could also describe the "Trickster shift" and the subtle subversion of systems of power and representation (cf. *Burying the Ruler* cabinet, fig. 20, p. 71). As a mock-museum display case contrasting cultural ways of processing knowledge, *Chronos 1* (fig. 90) recalls Vizenor's contention (pp. 10, 216, this document) that "the way time is handled and resolved" and "the tension in time" are elements that contribute to a sense of "mythic verism" in Native literature. The same argument could well be made for the visual arts. (Cf. *Big Koan*, fig. 62 and *Chronos 2*, fig. 63, p. 130).
and commentaries for children, *This Land Is My Land* (1993: 18), he writes

Indian children coming to the school were torn away from their culture, their language, their traditional ways, and their families. My mother and all her brothers and sisters went to these boarding schools, and so did my grandparents. They grew up without their families and never learned how to raise children of their own. Many boarding school survivors died on skid row of alcoholism, including my mother.

Like Littlechild, Jane Ash Poitras was also raised in the city of Edmonton, Alberta, yet educated in a climate remarkably like that of reserve Indians. She (interview, 1990) says

I went to school [at] Sacred Heart in Edmonton. It was sort of like a convent school. It was kind of a residential school. It was for immigrant and Native kids. They threw us all in together and we were all going to be transformed into nice little Catholics. I grew up in an immigrant mixed neighbourhood. If you were Indian, Chinese, immigrant, and couldn’t speak the language very good, you got thrown into this special school which was apart from the major school and the nuns taught you and they had all different rules for you guys because you guys were...backwards, right? We were..."heathenized." So they "unheathenized" us and it was all kind of...disgusting!...The Indians say they weren’t allowed to speak their language in these residential schools but they did the same thing to the immigrant kids, ‘cause I grew up with the immigrants on the skid row area in Edmonton and they weren’t very nice [to any of us].

A vivid memory from this period, and possibly the one leaving the most indelible imprint on her artwork, is the image of her teacher at the blackboard:

I just thought about when I was a child and, gee, we spent all of our time for twelve years looking at a blackboard. Looking at this black thing written on [with] white chalk. ...One thing that’s really neat was just the idea, when I was a child, "God, would I ever like to write on those blackboards!" But, you know, the teacher would never allow you. Only reluctantly she would allow you. And you were
only asked to write on the board when you had permission and, boy, it was a neat feeling. But you got to watch her write on it all day long! (laughing) Right? See her do those nice aaas and those nice numberrrs. And see the teacher put down the notes and all that.

As an adult, and a practicing artist, Poitras has usurped the teacher’s position of authority to create her own "teaching blackboards"--a series of mixed-media collage/paintings inscribed with symbols of her own language, her own history, and her own experiences living in a multi-cultural world. (See fig. 93, Family Blackboard). The work is a clever remedial exercise in viewer (re)education as well as a crash course in contemporary Native culture. Poitras says, "You look at the work and what does it do? People look at it and they go away and it’s taught them something." Reflecting on the series in a recent television interview, Poitras (in Gilchrist 1995) remarked with a smile

It was a wonderful twist and a wonderful irony and a wonderful way of transforming a feeling of submissiveness into a feeling of power.

In an earlier discussion of the piece Monetary Blackboard (fig. 33, p. 89) it was noted how Poitras frequently seeks to diffuse the power and appeal of white women by "Indianizing", or as she says, "shamanizing" their images by giving them painted feathered headbands. When that white woman is Queen

---

161 Cf. History 1990 (fig. 32, p. 89) and Monetary Blackboard (fig. 33, p. 89).
Elizabeth II, as she appears on the face of Canadian currency (fig. 93, *Family Blackboard*, and fig. 94, *A Sacred Prayer for a Sacred Island*, detail), it is colonial power that is contested, as well as the imperial legacy of consumerism and materialism. It is an exceedingly subtle gesture that not only ironizes the whole picture, as Archuleta (1989: 60) has rightly noted in her curatorial commentary on *Family Blackboard*, but more importantly, it also politicizes it.

Poitras (interview, 1991a) says

Royalty come over [to North America] and they give them headdresses and you see their pictures in the paper with little headdresses on. And [they] give them mukluks, and that's all just for show. But they don't really know what it really means. So it's all kind of artificial and it's made trivial, something so important like that. And I think that's all really hokey. So [this is] "hokey art." I'm being hokey back. They put me in nice little white gloves and nice little church hats and church dresses, [see fig. 33, p. 89] so now I'm putting them in nice little feathers and headbands and mukluks. (laughs)

Feathered headdresses and beaded mukluks are not the only items presented to royalty. When the Duke and Dutchess of York visited Alberta's Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Heritage Site they were given a painting by Joane Cardinal-Schubert. The artist (interview, 1991) recalls with mischievous amusement her meeting with Prince Andrew and Lady Sarah Ferguson

I had a plexiglas pin on that I'd done one of my little paintings on and she was asking me about it...and I just stood there. I didn't curtsy. I didn't do anything. I just stood there and I looked at them and they looked at me. And then finally Andy stuck his hand out and he said, "How do you do?" And I said, "How do you do?" She said to me,
"You can be sure that your painting will occupy a very prominent position in our home." And I said, "Right!" "Right above your davenport?" And we started laughing.

The same royal couple figure in another "little dissident narrative" related to the writer by Rebecca Belmore in February, 1991.

I have this beaver house dress...called Rising to the Occasion [fig. 95] and it was worn for a performance called Twelve Angry Crinolines. What happened was on July 17, 1987 Prince Andrew and his new wife Fergie came to Thunder Bay, and so twelve women in Thunder Bay were asked to interpret an "angry crinoline" and we did this silent parade on the streets of Thunder Bay. And as "First Lady of this Land," I got to lead this silent parade. Other women were wearing things like—one was wearing a nuclear explosion on her head; another woman was wearing a gas mask with a wedding gown and carrying dead flowers—different kinds of weird costumes. And the whole performance was based on the idea—back in March of that same year a scandal in Britain broke out where it was discovered that the Queen Mother had five cousins who were mad, who were insane, and were locked away in an insane asylum. And some journalist dug up the dirt and made big news for awhile. And this woman, [Lynn Sharman, the performance co-ordinator]...was making the analogy that women artists suffer the same as the five cousins, the five mad cousins. So it's [about] how difficult it is to be a woman artist in a man's world...and the erasure of Native women's art history, [how] it's non-existent, etcetera. [The beaver house symbolizes] Canada, (laughs) North America. So there are those little trinkets and trade goods stuck in the beaver lodge with pictures of Lady Di and Prince Charles with bits of birchbark woven into the [bramble]. And the headpiece is two braids which are sticking up just to signify the anger (laughs) and the wheel is my umbrella—the invention of the wheel, civilization—and there's two fine bone china breastplates on the chest.162

---

162 Rising To the Occasion was subsequently dismantled by the artist, then recreated as a mixed-media sculpture for the touring exhibition Interrogating Identity, originating at the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University in 1991.
In a sense, Belmore’s involvement in the Thunder Bay parade inverts the all too common government practice of parading colourful Indians before visiting royalty, while ignoring the darker realities of reserve life. In *The Universe Is So Big The Whiteman Confines Me to My Reservation* (fig. 96) Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun illuminates the darkness, ironically foregrounding the avarice and racist policies that have consigned (and confined) Native peoples to lives of desperation and despair on meagre fragments of their former homeland.\(^{163}\) Symbolizing aboriginal unwillingness to accept the status quo (and ascribed inferior cultural status), a figure in the bottom left hand corner of the painting is shown on the verge of leaving the reservation—perhaps forever, perhaps for awhile, perhaps for an adventure (like McMaster’s Indian Joe, or the wanderer, Weesakeejak),\(^{164}\) or perhaps for a chance to do battle with the mandarins in positions of power and control.

Just such a scenario is envisioned by Yuxweluptun in *Leaving My Reservation Going to Ottawa for a New Constitution*,\(^ {165}\) (fig. 97). Undaunted by the task ahead, a lean and lanky Redman politician heads for the nation’s capital carrying a briefcase

\(^{163}\) This is a good example of irony’s ability to foreground constraints as constraints in order to undermine their power. See Hutcheon (1991: 73) and p. 41, this document.

\(^{164}\) Cf. McMaster, Footnote 136, p. 141, this chapter.

\(^{165}\) Previously exhibited as *Leaving My Reservation, Going to Ottawa*, the artist (interview, 1991) says that this longer version is the proper title.
labelled "Indian Government." Littering the ground around him are symbols of a suffering people; while behind him, stretching to the horizon, are miles and miles of government files on Indians. In the sky above, a rainbow, and the promise of a better day. The extent to which bureaucratic reform is required is wryly symbolized by Yuxweluptun in his mixed media "portrait" D.I.A. Secretary (fig. 99) which questions the inordinate number of blonde, blue-eyed white women in the employ of the Department of Indian Affairs. As conveyors of critical correspondence and important government funding, Yuxweluptun (1990) reasons that even such women as these are frequently afforded more power than the chief of an Indian band.

---

166 The articulated arms and legs of this cartoon-like figure recall the wooden puppets employed in traditional west coast theatrical productions. The same analogy, however, bespeaks the dangers of becoming a political pawn and a puppet of the ruling party.

167 In Dance Me On Sovereignty, Dance Me Outside Anywhere I Want (fig. 98) Yuxweluptun imagines a similar scene, complete with government files and promising rainbow. A distinguishing feature of the figure in this painting is the gaping (though not distressing-looking) hole through his chest--reminiscent of the "Hole-Through-the-Sky" totem pole discussed earlier, (Footnote 108, p. 110)--signifying the less than complete recognition of his identity as an autonomous First Nations citizen and his continuing status as an involuntary ward of the federal government. Needless to say, this is no dancing matter. The title playfully extends the title of a popular book of "Indian" stories, Dance Me Outside (1977), by the controversial author, W.P. Kinsella. In 1994 the book was the inspiration for a critically received feature film of the same name by director, Bruce McDonald.

168 Cf. Yuxweluptun's other portraits of white women, figs. 34 and 35, p. 90.
The journey for justice portrayed by Yuxweluptun in *Leaving My Reservation Going to Ottawa*... has a distinct parallel in the artist's own life. In 1992, he travelled to Ottawa twice to participate in major exhibitions at two prestigious venues—*Indigena* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and *Land Spirit Power* at the National Gallery of Canada. In each instance, Yuxweluptun spoke (verbally and visually, textually and graphically) to the issues of cultural self-determination and ecological responsibility. His passion for these matters is explained in part by a second more personal parallel with the warrior diplomat depicted in the *...Going to Ottawa*... painting: both of his parents were for many years actively involved in Native political organizations. Yuxweluptun comes by his concern naturally; it's a family tradition. His late father Ben, he regards as his mentor. Yet, in the beginning, even he did not recognize the familial and vocational continuity, prompting the artist (interview, 1991) to explain it to him in the following way

> I said that I finally got my briefcase but it's a crayon box. The relationship is different. He had documents in it. I have photographs. We spent years talking about politics. It's embedded into you. My father was very sharp about teaching me about politics. Politics, it's in your blood. I grew up going to the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs' meetings and AFN [Assembly of First Nations] meetings. Even

---

169 Carl Beam and Mexican expatriate, Domingo Cisneros, were the only other artists to have work in both shows.

170 In a chance meeting with the artist's father at a gallery opening in 1991, I raised the subject of Native humour. He thought for a moment, then said it was "very .....subtle."
when I was older I went to them. It's interesting...all aspects of it, but as an artist it’s even more interesting because I can read documents, and I can analyze things.... Every year it’s a new history and it has to be documented somehow. [I'm] not doing that gauntlet of Indian art galleries. Somebody has to document self-government now. ...It’s taken [my father] a long time to realize that a document can be closed and put into a file, and put into a book, and thrown into a library. And the pages can be lost, or the pages can be taken out, and words can be extracted from things and taken out of context. At least if you write something down in painting form, you can have a visual [impact]. You can’t hide a painting. You can’t put it into a big book. You can’t close it.

From an early age, Yuxweluptun observed (and absorbed) the subtly subversive strategies employed by Native politicians when dealing with government bureaucrats. At the same time, he also witnessed master orators in action. He says

You learn that spokesmanship. You watch great spokesmanship—"it’s a flavour of language, of Indian language. [You watch] somebody that...addresses a Department of Indian Affairs official in a Native language and totally alienates him in his bilingual reality. He has his French and he has his English and he still can’t deal with this Indian who’s talking Indian to him. And so it shocks [him] into that reality that [he is] talking to an Indian. It’s saying, "Who’s going to conform to who? Do you understand me when I’m talking in this Native language?" And you get six or seven Natives doing that in one room to a Department of Indian Affairs official, and he’s sitting there [listening to] these different languages, [and] it becomes this whole platform that is different, making the point that you’re dealing with different types of Indians. We’re not all the same just because we may have a reasonable facsimile of a brown colour of skin. We do have different cultures. We are different kinds of Indians. It’s kind of neat. It was a good tactic as far as I was concerned.

In addition to vocational and tactical continuity, there is also directional continuity. Yuxweluptun says, "I like talking to the odd chief and meeting them and talking to
people about the things that are going on so we have a common
direction....I like to have that continuity."

Of course, continuity has a darker side as well. Earlier in
this chapter in his discussion of John A. Macdonald (p. 145
ff.), Gerald McMaster suggested that then Prime Minister Brian
Mulroney was merely the latest in a long line of political
leaders to display a general disregard for Native peoples.
Mulroney’s disinterest is in fact one of the more significant
themes in Shelley Niro’s painting Waitress (fig. 100).
Inspired by an upsetting personal experience of racial
discrimination, Niro imagines a situation where the artist-
as-waitress is now "in a position of power." Personifying
national indifference to Native concerns and to all that
Native peoples have lost, Brian and Mila Mulroney are seen
dancing the night away against a backdrop of flaming Iroquois
masks. It is a highly charged little dissident narrative.171

171 No less compelling a narrative is Niro’s account of
producing this painting. It is a moving story of creative
catharsis and the transformative power of humour and art. See
APPENDIX 15, p. 249 ff.

Cultural insensitivity and governmental neglect are addressed
as well in Niro’s photo-triptych Judge Me Not (fig. 101) from
her 1992 series This Land Is Mime Land. Incorporating a self-
portrait as a judge, (a Native woman judge), a photograph of a
family member attending a protest rally on Parliament Hill,
and a second self-portrait unadorned by artifice, Niro not
only foregrounds Native political concerns but legal policies
that often affect aboriginal women directly and adversely.
Like Waitress, Judge Me Not not only imagines empowerment,
but Native women’s empowerment.
Mulroney is also the subject of Ron Noganosh's less than subtle figurative sculpture *The Same Old Shit* (fig. 102), which graphically portrays government paternalism and the withholding of funds from Native bands (symbolized by the coins in the figure's left hand). He is implicated as well in a blanket painting "performance" by Bob Boyer which affirmed the special economic status of Treaty Indians. Boyer (interview, 1991) explains Mulroney's unwitting involvement

This one [fig. 103] is called *No E & H Please, We're Treaty* --"No Education and Health Tax." And that one I found very interesting because it was borrowed. Brian Mulroney borrowed that one when he had his international finance conference. And I don't think he even knew what was going on, but there it was hanging right behind the...head table. Whenever they had the sessions they decorated the wall and they were talking about international finance and so on [and] there's my statement about Treaty Indians behind there with the finance thing. So Mulroney and his cronies became part of a performance piece there for me.

Noganosh portrayed Mulroney once again in a devastating critique of the federal government's handling of the 1990

---

172 More than political critique, "Brian on a Stick", as Noganosh affectionately refers to this sculpture, can also be considered a contemporary expression of scatological humour long associated with tricksters and ceremonial clowns. Referring to the realistic feces in the figure's outstretched right hand, Noganosh (interview, 1991a) says, "I bought it in a joke store...on Bank Street [in Ottawa]. There's two old ladies behind the counter, and I said, 'Well, I'm looking for a fake turd.' She said, 'All the shit's over there!'"

173 The title of this piece is a play on the name of the popular British television show *No Sex Please, We're British.*
Many Native people were enraged (and sickened) by the government’s hardline stance on negotiations and the decision to send in Canadian army troops and tanks to replace the provincial Sûreté du Québec (SQ). Noganosh gives voice to that rage in his chilling mixed-media collage *The Final Solution* (fig. 104). He (interview, 1991) explains

"I had an old photograph of the Reichstag in the Second World War with masses of swastikas. Hitler, Goering and somebody else are coming up the steps towards the camera, so I cut Hitler's head out, put [Prime Minister] Mulroney in there, [Quebec Premier] Bourassa's on one side and [Indian Affairs Minister] Siddon is on the other side. And the Queen's looking over Mulroney's shoulder. Now there's railroad tracks that go off in the back and those railroad tracks are leading into Auschwitz....It's a collage, a composite. I've blown it up to four feet by six feet and it's mounted against camouflage cloth. I mean, that's my reaction to Oka....There are some pieces that I do like that. There's humour in there but it's pretty black humour. These are the people who, right at the moment, are controlling what is happening to Indians. And they're acting just like Nazis. And there's the Queen pussyfooting around looking over his shoulder saying, "Gee, Canada's doing alright; look at how they're treating...my Red children." The Great White Mother!"

---

174 Cf. Footnote 89, p. 85. For an insider's account of events that unfolded at Oka and Kahnawake during the 78-day standoff in 1990, see *People of the Pines: The Warriors and the Legacy of Oka* by Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera (1991) and *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), the two-hour National Film Board of Canada video written and directed by Alanis Obomsawin.

175 One is reminded here of a comment by Louis Owens (1983: 142) on humour in the novels of Blackfoot author, James Welch: "As Jesus Maria says in John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat*, it is a funny story, 'but when you open your mouth to laugh, something like a hand squeezes your heart.'"
In a four part pastel drawing with the pointedly direct title, *FUSO: Tanks for the Memories* (fig. 105), Bob Boyer registers his own disgust with the government’s actions at Oka. In what must be regarded as one of the subtlest of subversions, the artist has included in each of the panels a small and almost imperceptible letter in the tersely obscene title, "F U S Q", an expression that surely testifies to the tenacity and infinite mutability of Native oral tradition! Like a muffled scream or a smothered cry, the scattered text is all the more potent when (and if) detected. Like Edward Poitras, Boyer too is past master of the "subtle ambush."

Not surprisingly, the Oka crisis provoked a great deal of emotional and embittered response from Native artists across Canada who wished to demonstrate their support for, and solidarity with, the Mohawk peoples.\(^{176}\) The proposed expansion of a golf course onto sacred Mohawk land was treated with especially acrid wit. Three of the most striking examples are *Life On the 18th Hole* (fig. 106), Kwakiutl artist David Neel’s silk-screened portrait of the Mohawk warrior known as

---

\(^{176}\) In May/June, 1991, Ottawa’s Saw Gallery exhibited *Solidarity: Art After Oka*, a small collection of works by aboriginal artists created during the standoff or immediately after it. (See Curatorial Statement by Lee-Ann Martin, 1991.) In August/September, 1991, Toronto’s Workscene Gallery and A Space mounted a much larger show, *Okanata: An Interdisciplinary Exhibition examining the events and emotions of the Mohawk Summer of 1990*, which featured the work of forty-six artists, both Native and non-Native. In February, 1992, it travelled to the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario.
"Lasagna" (with its grimly decorative border of "ten little soldiers" reversing the imagery of "one little, two little, three little Indians" in the children's nursery rhyme); Par for the Course (figs. 107 and 108), Seneca/Onondaga sculptor Peter B. Jones' ceramic interpretation of a masked warrior/guerilla golfer (with his skull-capped golf clubs slung across his back in a bag with a wampum belt strap); and Oka Golf Classic (fig. 109), Ya'Ya Ts'itxstap Chuck Heit's red cedar housepost figure (with golf ball eyeball and rifle shell casing in hand) that challenges Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's contention (p. 110) that Northwest Coast carvers cannot address contemporary issues in their work.

Gerald McMaster's painting Oka-boy/Oh! Kowboy (fig. 110) included in The cowboy/Indian show, is not so much a response

---

177 In a particularly entertaining allusion, Elizabeth Leiss-McKellar (1992, n.p.) writes, "These soldiers stand with nightsticks like tap dancers in a chorus line."

178 Further to this, in the spring of 1993 the Vancouver Museum mounted Spirit of the Earth, an exhibition of masks by Kwakiutl carver/photographer, David Neel, which deals with a variety of current socio-political concerns. The show includes pieces with names such as Oil Spill Mask, Ozone Mask, Clearcut Mask, Chernobyl Mask and a stunningly dramatic Mohawk Warrior Mask. A photograph of Neel's Mask of the Injustice System, from this series, is reproduced in McMaster and Martin (1992: 70).

Oka Golf Classic, the intentionally ironic title of Heit's cedar housepost, acquires further, albeit unintentionally ironic overtones in light of the program set out in a flyer for a 1989 "Pow-wow in Paradise" in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. A scheduled feature of the week-long event was a "Mohawk Masters" Golf Tournament at Mahogany Run.
to the Oka standoff—although it obviously is—as a disturbing illustration of history seeming to repeat itself. It is one of the most layered and textually complex paintings the artist has created. He (interview, 1990) explains

I did this one just as I was reading all the news that was coming out of Oka. Here, the cowboys are the soldiers or the Sûreté du Québec....The large figure represents the Mohawk Warriors...just one figure...[symbolizing] the outnumbering of these Warriors at the time...nine to one. These people were targets....The media seemed to create the divisiveness between "soldiers" and "Indians." I began to think, OK, it could be like the cavalry again. They’re coming in with bugles to the rescue...saving the community...saving everybody. But, "What community?" is really the question. In the end, you don’t know who the army was saving. It was probably everybody, yet you don’t read it that way.

In the painting, the text was the first thing. Then I built around it. I listed a number of ways that "OK" could be presented. Those two letters can be used in different ways. "Oka" and "Oka-boy" were references to the Warriors. "Oh! Kowboy" referred to the soldiers, the contrast that I was looking for. I was playing on different levels. Is everything "Okay" now? Will everything be "Okay" after this? Can the communities ever be the same again? Has this event created a relationship that can never be mended?

"Oki-napi" is a Blackfoot greeting to a friend. It means "Okay, things are cool." "O Kanada" and "O kant u see" refer to the two national anthems—Canadian and American. If you go back to Akwesasne, the reservation that straddles the border, a lot of the problems emanated from that region. And "Oh! Kowboy"...I was listening to a song called "Mon Cowboy", "My Cowboy", by [the Quebec singer,] Mitsou. It’s in French. "Oh! Kowboy" is a friendly reference to a cowboy..."Oh! what a big guy"...or "Ohhh!...you’re my cowboy!"

What McMaster does not mention specifically is the perversely playful border design which freely and numbingly repeats the words "OKAOKAOKAOKAOKA..." over and over again like a broken record or an endless protest chant. The painting’s cheerful colouring merely heightens the horror.
In *No Life Like It* (fig. 111), a second painting in *The cowboy/Indian Show* inspired by the Oka crisis, McMaster reflects on the romance and racism of "Indian fighters," both in and out of uniform. He says,

In this piece I was asking these questions: Why are people joining the army? Is it this "cowboy and Indian" thing again, where "we've got to do something about this 'Indian problem'?" I quoted the army's announcement...in *Maclean's* magazine:

Applications to join the Canadian armed forces were 32% higher in Aug. than the same month a year ago. Spokesmen attributed the increase to the army's involvement in the Quebec Mohawk crisis...

Then I drew this big camouflaged helmet and on the helmet I drew feathers. The feathers were crossed out like notches. The crosses could indicate two things: they mean "notch marks", like "scalp marks" in the old days--"the only good Indian is a dead Indian" kind of thing...which has larger ramifications--or they could be bandaids...in other words, helping somehow. In the complexity of the situation this summer the army actually was a saviour to some Indian people. Some Indian people were actually glad they came in.

What gives *No Life Like It* its incisive edge is McMaster's additional reference to a distressing incident of racially-motivated violence in the Montreal suburb of LaSalle which is given a deft and unexpected global reading. A brief explanation: in a gesture of solidarity with their comrades at Oka, Mohawks at the Kahnawake Reserve near Montreal mounted a sympathy blockade of the Mercier Bridge, a vital link between the communities on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River and the city of Montreal. In late August, a rioting mob of non-Natives stoned a convoy of sixty cars carrying more than one hundred Mohawk women, children and elders across the
bridge in advance of an anticipated military attack on the reserve. One elderly man was struck by a rock thrown through an open car window and later died. McMaster continues

At the bottom of the painting I have four rocks, and the comment there...is a double-edged sword. At the Berlin Wall the rocks represented a kind of freedom, whereas at LaSalle, shit!, they were being stoned to death! Is that irony? I don’t know. Yeah! [And] "No Life Like It" is, of course, from the army’s advertisement on television. What’s the adventure?179

Over the course of the long summer and into the fall, Mohawk artist Bill Powless monitored Native reaction to the standoff in a series of cartoons appearing in the Tekawennake newspaper (figs. 112 and 113).180 None is perhaps more potent or critical than fig. 114, which targets the angry residents of Châteauguay, Quebec, who came out night after night with beer and binoculars to taunt those entrenched behind the barricades

179 At the August 16, 1991, opening of the Okanata exhibition at the A Space Gallery in Toronto, (See Footnote 176, p. 176), Rebecca Belmore staged a performance titled August 29, 1990, which dealt with the rock throwing incident at LaSalle. In a brief description of the piece she (interview, 1991a) says, "There’s a white sheet drenched in blood and it’s violent and there’s a twist of humour: it begins and ends with the words, ‘There’s nothing like getting up in the morning and reading the newspaper!’"

180 Re. fig. 114: In response to Iraq’s invasion of oil-rich Kuwait in 1990, a multinational military force spearheaded by the U.S., launched the largest air and land attack since World War II to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. The Conservative government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney sent Canadian forces to take part.
Fig. 112

Fig. 113
OHSEKEN COSTUME SHOP

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO THE PARTY AS?
A WARRIOR?

E-E-E!!

ZEE IGNORANT SAVAGE!!

THAT'S THE SCARIEST COSTUME I'VE EVER SEEN!!

I AM FROM CHATEAGUAY AND PROUD OF IT.
In the wake of discussions that saw the conflict come to a negotiated, if somewhat chaotic, conclusion on September 26, 1991, Native peoples across Canada began to reflect on the implications of the event for the future of Native/non-Native relations. While opinion was sharply divided on the seemingly "un-Canadian" and "un-Indian" use of violence to call attention to outstanding grievances, there is no denying that the incident unified aboriginal peoples (both at home and abroad) in their denunciation of yet another indignity perpetrated by what they perceived as a militarily superior but morally impoverished government of colonial interlopers.

In retrospect, McMaster says the conflict at Oka was not just over a nine-hole golf course. I think that was the success of it. I think that's what Native people across Canada are in some way or another joyous about. They were glad it happened. Native peoples in the Americas and a lot of indigenous peoples around the world thought "Alright, underdog!" So...there were some positive sides to that.

In the weeks and months that followed the standoff, it was nigh on impossible to separate the legacy of Oka from the larger legacy of European exploration and conquest that was fast becoming a major focus of media attention, with the impending international celebrations of the Columbus

---

¹ Like McMaster's No Life Like It (fig. 111), this cartoon was actually produced after the confrontation had come to an end. The issues which prompted the crisis have still not been resolved.
Quincentenary in 1992. For aboriginal peoples in many parts of the world the anniversary of the arrival of the ancient mariner credited with ushering in the Age of Colonialism seemed a time more appropriate to "decelebration" rather than celebration.\footnote{182} What, in fact, was there to celebrate--save for survival? And, as Saul Terry (1990, n.p.), President of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs succinctly put it, "We're tired of surviving. We want to live."\footnote{183} For Native people in the arts, the challenge of 1992 was to convey such sentiments to the general public with conviction yet without causing alienation. Not surprisingly, humour and/or irony figure prominently in some of the more imaginative solutions.

Take, for example, Seneca artist/curator, Tom Hill's illustrated lecture on Columbus at the South Street Seaport Museum in New York City in June of 1991. Hill (interview, 1991a) says

I did [it] with a real tongue in cheek because I knew Columbus, (laughs) to the Americans, is like a cultural hero. So I thought, "How am I going to touch on this thing? It's like making fun of God, to Americans, and here am I doing it right in the middle of Wall Street. Like, how do I

\footnote{182} In 1989, long before the public hoopla began in earnest, Ottawa's Saw Gallery mounted the exhibition Decelebration, featuring the work of Native artists Shirley Bear, Lance Belanger, Domingo Cisneros, Peter J. Clair and Ron Noganosh. See Maracle and Fry, 1989.

\footnote{183} The line of text added to David Neel's serigraph, Life On the 18th Hole (fig. 106) for a fundraising poster whose sale would "contribute towards the just recognition of our Aboriginal Title and Rights and a just settlement of the land question in Canada (Terry, 1990, n.p.).
get them even to think about my ideas or my notions?" Of course, I did it with a slide presentation and tried to tie it all together, but it worked because I did take a sense of humour to it—but based on some very serious notions. Like, the moment we'd get laughing I'd drop a line [like], "It hasn't changed that much, you know, I'm just reading about Brazil--Indians being shot in their fields," [or] "New York Times has just reported...," or "Time Magazine has just done this ...," and constantly bounc[ing] them back through it. There was one lady [who] came up to me after I made that talk, she said, "I felt like a ping pong ball, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth." But she said, "I'm glad I fell on your side, as the ping pong ball," which was a relief because that's where I really wanted them to go. Which is neat. She said, "You convinced me that we've got to rethink some of these things."^184

[The lecture] was to comment on an exhibition called First Encounters, and I was presenting the Native voice here, but also my main objective was to [say], "Let's use this time to rethink this, these ideas. Are we prepared to change? And if we don't change what does it mean? And if we do change what does it mean?" So that was basically the objective of that gallery talk.

The text of Hill's lecture appeared in revised form in the September, 1991, issue of the Woodland Cultural Centre's quarterly magazine Wadrihwa, accompanied by a wry pen and ink parody by Bill Powless of Sebastiano del Piombo's famous painting of Christopher Columbus (fig. 115).^185

---

^184 The ping-pong analogy recalls Rebecca Belmore's characterization of Tomson Highway's Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing as an emotional roller-coaster ride and a wild and frightening play that "bends your head around the corner" (interview, February, 1991). Cf. also Joane Cardinal-Schubert's serio-comic approach to public speaking, p. 127.

^185 David Gates (1991: 29) suggests that the lettering on the original painting identifying the individual as Christopher Columbus "was probably added, years after the fact, to a portrait of some long-forgotten Italian nobleman." Be that as it may, the image has over time been invested with considerable historical authority.
An adaptation of the same portrait appears in Carl Beam’s *Columbus and Bees* (fig. 116) from his *Columbus Suite* of engravings which, in turn, forms part of his much larger body of work *The Columbus Project*, begun in 1989 and completed in 1992. In *Columbus and Bees*, what may at first seem to be merely a curious, even comical juxtaposition of images, acquires added dimension when understood as the symbolic pairing of a European passion for exploration and discovery with a parallel compulsion for analysis and classification (not to mention exhibition) of that which has been discovered. That the objects depicted in the lower section of the print are the physical remains of once living creatures is no small

---

186 See Beam and Young, 1989, and Rhodes, 1992. It will be recognized that over the course of this document several other engravings in Beam’s twelve-piece *Columbus Suite* have been discussed: *Self Portrait As John Wayne, Probably* (fig. 14, p. 66), *How To Ride A Horse Properly* (fig. 64, p. 132), *Calvary to Cavalry* (fig. 82, p. 157) and *Semiotic Converts* (fig. 88, p. 163). Reflecting on the series as a whole, Beam says (interview, 1991b), in predictably understated fashion, "I tried to start a rumour that there was something meaningful going to come out of this." In a somewhat more expansive appraisal he adds

The idea was to address some of the larger issues over the past five hundred years. Technology is pretty well covered [here], but I’m not qualifying it as good or bad. There are some real faces, the major European players, the underlying issues. It’s a little compact group of works—a little snapshot for somebody who dropped in from another planet. That was a good series because it did all that stuff with great skill, finesse, masterfulness of the medium, and it was fairly generic. I’ve never seen work like this any fucking place!
Columbus and bees are seen again (along with several other familiar images) in Beam's works on canvas included in the 1992 exhibition **Land Spirit Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada**. The show also featured a version of **Burying the Ruler**, his ironically-titled and politically pointed self-portrait that appears in different form (but with the same title) in the Canadian Museum of Civilization's **Indigena**. In both venues, (but especially the latter, given the focus, "Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years"), the piece contests the authority of "post-Columbian" history with visual candor and acerbic wit. Not to mention economy of form. In the case of **Indigena**, it is an economy reflected in the pithy "Artist's Statement" posted on the gallery wall beside the actual piece—as concise a dissident narrative as the image it complements. Cited earlier in a somewhat different context (p. 73) the statement is worth repeating

---

187 Cf. Beam's **Big Koan** and **Chronos 2** (figs. 62 and 63, p. 130), and **Chronos 1** (fig. 90, p. 164). Also, **Still Life** (fig. 60, Footnote 120, p. 125) by Peter B. Jones.


189 See p. 71 ff., regarding other versions of **Burying the Ruler** (figs. 19 and 20). See also McMaster and Martin (1992: 118 ff).
After five hundred years
people should realize the world is round

In the same exhibition Bob Boyer adds a (not entirely unexpected) playful edge to his wool blanket condemnation of "Columbian" colonialism by giving his three-panel painting the title _Trains-N-Boats-N-Plains: The Nina, the Santa Maria and a Pinto_ (figs. 117 and 118). It is a calculated gesture that paradoxically lightens and heightens the intensity of his deadly serious critique. Exploration and travel have never seemed so sinister.

Despite the frequency of irony in his work, Beam (interview, 1991) says, "I can't be endlessly ironic because the irony goes two ways. There's a psychic price--it also implodes. Knowing the world is so shallow and stupid is emotionally draining." Emotional drain notwithstanding, art historian Ruth Phillips suggests that Beam has little choice in the matter. She (interview, 1991) says, "Carl Beam can't really decide not to be ironic because that's him." Her words echo those of Alan Wilde (1981: 3) who views irony first and foremost "as a mode of consciousness, an all-encompassing vision of life" and a series of strategies and techniques only in a secondary sense. Whether or not Beam is an ironic person, he (personal communication, October 1991a) insists, "Don't paint me as an ironic artist....Irony is just one of many aspects; there are other ones in there."

The bleeding red crosses in this piece recall the graphic violence of Boyer's _Batoche Centennial_ (fig. 41, p. 102), and _A Minor Sport in Canada_ (fig. 78, p. 150), as well as the censure of Christian complicity in Native oppression symbolized by Poitras in _The Virgin Bullet_ (fig. 84, p. 158) and Noganosh in _Dominus Vobiscum_ (fig. 85, p. 159). Boyer's positioning of the German word "Verdrängung" ("repression"), above the words "Turtle Island" (a Native metaphor for planet earth) in the central panel, draws a disturbing parallel to Nazi cultural genocide not unlike that made by Noganosh in _The Final Solution_ (fig. 104, p. 175). In light of such associations, Boyer's lilting title, playing as it does off the title of a popular song from the 1960s and a film comedy... (continued...)
In a 1993 review of *Land Spirit Power* and *Indigena*, curator and art historian Scott Watson (1993: 43) identifies Ron Noganosh and Shelley Niro as artists conspicuously absent from the Ottawa exhibitions. It is a notable observation (and omission); no doubt both would have made worthy contributions to either show. Certainly, both had given thought to the upcoming Quincentenary celebrations, and coincidentally both had planned critically comic performances that would ideally be documented on video. In February, 1991, Noganosh explained what he had in mind:

[My wife,] Max and I were talking about doing a [video]. There's all these shows coming on for 1492, right, celebrations, and what we wanted to do--Max is from Jamaica and her aunt lives in Discovery Bay. That's where supposedly Columbus first landed--and what we wanted to do is go down there and shoot a videotape, a film, of the Indians holding an immigration hearing for Columbus, right, because there's no way the guy would have got in the country. Christ, he was in debt, he didn't have relatives here, didn't know the language. Forget it! He was a "write-off," right? (laughs) That son-of-a-bitch took a load of slaves back with him and sold them to make his money. "Hero of the country...great!" A damn Italian working for a Spaniard who got lost! Became a hero. Now that's humorous and ironic! (laughs) This is their hero!

---

191(...continued)
from the 1980s, is all the more jarring, and for this reason perhaps all the more necessary.

192 The museum's concern for regional representation limited the number of Ontario artists included in *Indigena*.

I mean, Jesus, give us a break here! At least the Indians knew where they were going! (laughs)

A week earlier, Shelley Niro (interview, 1991) spoke with enthusiasm about a proposal she was currently writing and intended to submit to the Canada Council.

You’ve heard of all the 1992 celebrations going on in—I don’t know if it’s the world or North America or what—so a lot of galleries and people are jumping on the boat and they’re going to exhibit the "Native’s" perspective. So, I’ve talked to other artists and some of them are kind of peeved...that, again, it’s the Native artists being used for

Also celebrating the Quincentenary was Thomas King who penned the seriously amusing children’s book, A Coyote Columbus Story (1992), outrageously illustrated by Metis artist William Kent Monkman. In King’s version of the familiar tale a female Coyote conjures up the European newcomers out of boredom. Tellingly, Columbus and his crew are portrayed as people with no manners, who act as if they’ve got no relations. Dressed in silly clothes (one crew member is an Elvis lookalike) they search for things to sell, such as computer games and music videos, but settle on human beings who are taken back to Spain and sold into slavery. "Somebody has to pay for this trip," Columbus says. "Sailing over the ocean blue isn’t cheap, you know. Grab some more Indians!...Another couple of trips like this, Columbus tells his friends, and I’ll be able to buy a big bag of licorice jelly beans and a used Mercedes." (n.p.) The book was subsequently nominated for a Governor General’s Award. A version of this story also appears in King, 1993a.

Gerald Vizenor celebrated as well. In his novel The Heirs of Columbus (1991), the famed navigator is envisioned as a crossblood descendant of early Mayan explorers who returns to his homeland in the New World! The book tells the story of "Stone Columbus, crossblood trickster and modern namesake of the great explorer [who] is born on a remote reservation and secures a fortune on a bingo barge, spreads his trickster wisdom on talk radio, and founds a new tribal nation where ‘humor rules and tricksters heal.’ Thus the heirs of Columbus enact and reclaim a misrepresented heritage." (dustjacket blurb).

To my knowledge, Noganosh’s "Columbus project" did not progress beyond the conceptual stage.
a gallery to fill in that little bit of controversy for the year....So, I was thinking, "Well, you could do something on your own." I've talked to a couple of other women [artists], Rebecca Belmore and Pat Deadman, and we were thinking of getting the last word in on 1992. This is kind of an outrageous part right here...maybe somebody's already thought of it, (laughs) but [at] quarter to twelve, 1992, December 31...

So we take a plane to Spain. (laughs) We'll be working on our outfits all year long. So we're going to invent costumes or an outfit, and it has to be so symbolic that everything has to be worked on right to a 'T'. And then we'll climb up the rock of Gibraltar and have our little flag and plant it on the top of the mountain and claim Spain in the name of Elijah Harper (laughs) or whoever else is the 'King of Indians' at the time. Do that and [get] Indian

194 In the fall of 1991, Belmore (interview, 1991a) described a Quincentenary project of her own...

I'm doing ...Trauma Mama in a performance with 7th Fire on Columbus Day. We've priced the tickets at $14.92 and $19.92....Right now, I'm working on a Santa Maria ship costume. It's like a gaudy Spanish ship, like a souvenir, tacky. My head is covered with a big sail and on the back it says, "Hey sailor!", with a flap that flips up and underneath it say, "Get lost!"...A lot of people are thinking about [the celebration] and they need something to touch. That's our job as artists--to articulate it.

Belmore subsequently participated in Land Spirit Power at the National Gallery, contributing a performance to the opening festivities and a critically acclaimed installation (Mawu-che-hitoowin: A Gathering of People for Any Purpose) to the exhibition itself. A photograph of the artist in performance with a giant megaphone (for the piece, Ayum-ee-aawach Oomamowan: Speaking to Their Mother, presented at Banff, Alberta, in the summer of 1991) is featured on the catalogue cover.

195 Elijah Harper is a Cree Indian and former Member of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Manitoba. As the June 23, 1990 deadline drew near for ratification of the Meech Lake Accord (an amendment to the Constitution Act opposed by Native peoples for its failure to recognize Native rights), Manitoba had not yet voted to ratify it. Accelerated introduction of the motion in the Manitoba legislature required the unanimous consent of all MLA's. Harper voted "No" three times, delaying the debate beyond the deadline and effectively halting the change to the constitution.

(continued...)
organizations to give us something to bury in a time capsule. I think it will be really symbolic...[because]... we really don’t want Spain (laughs) or anything else. We really don’t want anybody else’s continent, but it’s a way of making that circle a full circle instead of being at the end of the line and being dumped on all the time. If we can continue the circle around or take it back, then from a spiritual point of view, it’ll be a fresh start. We can start over again....So I have to sit down and write the proposal and get a film maker to come and film it, and maybe have a travelling show from it.

As it turned out, Niro’s project eventually evolved into something decidedly different, but which still affirmed her belief in (and commitment to) the healing power of humour. With a partner, Anna Gronau, she spent much of 1992 writing, producing and directing It Starts With a Whisper, a twenty-six minute film portrayal of a young Native woman’s sometimes comic journey of self-discovery. Offering her guidance along the way are three ancestral spirits, or "matriarchal clowns," played with appropriate gusto by Niro’s three sisters, Bunny, Betsy and Beverley. It is a delightful piece of casting.196 Also proffering words of wisdom and encouragement is Native leader, Elijah Harper, in a surprise cameo appearance. The film ends with a memorable scene that recalls Niro’s original proposal: At 11:55, December 31, 1992, the four women gather for a celebratory tea party at the brink of Niagara Falls

195 (...continued)
Bill Powless commemorated Harper’s momentous achievement in a cartoon (fig. 119) which appeared in the Tekawennake newspaper June 27, 1991.

196 Cf. Niro’s earlier analogy to Indian clowns, p. 86.
(shown in back-projection on a screen behind the actors). Following a reading from Mohawk poet, E. Pauline Johnson’s famous poem, "The Song My Paddle Sings", the quartet joins together in a traditional drum song as fireworks explode in the sky above, creating in the final frame, the image of an Iroquois celestial tree rising from the back of the Great Turtle Island. Twinkling in the heavens, it ushers in a new year (and a new era) brimming with pride and promise.

Still hoping to have the last word in 1992, Niro and Gronau scheduled a late night preview of the film on New Year’s Eve at the Six Nations Iroquois Lodge, only to find that their choice of venue (a senior citizen’s home) necessitated a much earlier showing. In fact, they had to be out by 8:30 p.m.) Undaunted, they merely asked the audience of nearly one hundred and fifty guests to imagine a later hour. According to Niro, the occasion was a resounding success and cause for much celebration (personal communication, January, 1993).

In a graphic gesture that captures the subversive spirit of the artist’s first proposal, and the postcolonial sentiment of the year in which the film was made, Niro and company symbolically "reframed" del Piombo’s painting of Columbus for...
the invitation to the film’s Toronto premiere at the Euclid Theatre in March, 1993 (fig. 120).\footnote{In the fall of 1993 It Starts With a Whisper won the Walking in Beauty Award at the Two Rivers Film and Video Festival in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was also one of the first films broadcast on the newly created Women’s Television Network cable channel which went on the air in early 1995.} Like the film it announces, the invitation is yet another small "sign" of expressive resistance and increasing cultural confidence.

The many works in this chapter that mark this juncture in history with a mixture of humour and irony, anger and hope, signal a turning point in Native/non-Native relations, and imagine another way of "human being." As Hill (interview, 1991a) said in his presentation in New York:

Let’s use this time to rethink this, these ideas. Are we prepared to change? And if we don’t change what does it mean? And if we do change what does it mean?"

In recalling Hill’s comments, it is perhaps appropriate to recall as well the way in which Niro (interview, 1991) couched the description of her comical "claiming Gibraltar" project in terms of spiritual healing and circular time:

It’s a way of making that circle a full circle instead of being at the end of the line and being dumped on all the time. If we can continue the circle around or take it back, then from a spiritual point of view it’ll be a fresh start. We can start over again.

It is an approach to aesthetic and political practice shared by many within the Native community.
CONCLUSION

DOUBLE-PLAY ON THE WORLD STAGE:
AFFIRMING A GLOBAL PRESENCE

Stand on the back of the Turtle, our mother, and look at the land and wonder what it would have been like if Columbus [had] been successful in his pursuit of India and avoided the eastern shore of this continent. Wipe your Indian hands on your Levi jeans, get into your Toyota pick-up. Throw in a tape of Mozart, Led Zeppelin or ceremonial Sioux songs; then throw back your head and laugh—you are a survivor of a colonized people. Paint what you see, sculpt what you feel, and stay amused.

George Longfish and Joan Randall

The business of a trickster is to take her work very seriously. It is to find a way to change the rhythm, to find a way to look at things differently. If it works, and just one person smiles as a result, that smile is a blessing for all people.

Sharon Manybeads Bowers

It will be obvious by now that what Lurie (1968: 202 ff.) said of Native humour in 1968—"It is strong on puns, word play in general, and stunning juxtapositions of seemingly unrelated concepts and contexts"—is an equally fitting description of the works examined in the last three chapters. In many cases, much of their emotional impact or "ironic magic" (to use Ian McLachlan's [1990: 12] characterization of Carl Beam's artwork), derives directly from the stunning--

---

199 Cf. Lurie, Footnote 145, p. 148, this document.

200 In a discussion of Beam's "Columbus Project," Ian McLachlan (1990: 12) writes

All that counts is the power of the objects he makes, their ironic magic that enables us to see some of the lies we're not supposed to see and to make the connections we're never encouraged to make. 

---
read surprising -- juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated concepts and contexts. Yet, what is perceived as "unrelated" may merely reflect the viewer's (and sometime's the curator's) ignorance of Native culture, both historic and contemporary, and the hybrid nature and global context of present day aboriginal life. Well aware of this fact, Native artists take full advantage of it. It is part of the "subtle ambush," the coyote manoeuvre--and the Trickster shift.

Putting the lie to notions of "unrelatedness" is in fact a leading motivation for many aboriginal artists. Increasingly, they seek to frame global issues culturally and cultural issues globally--no more so than in matters military and political, and affairs environmental. This final chapter will consider several works that put a global spin on a Trickster's grin to address these themes, and then consider what might be expected in the future.

About the same time that Shelley Niro was plotting her New Year's assault on Gibraltar, Jim Logan was coordinating an Indian attack on Rome. His mixed-media painting Unreasonable History (fig. 121, detail) from The Classical Aboriginal Series, portrays both an Indian attack which might have taken

---

201 Cf. Robert Houle's (1988: 60) rebuke of cultural institutions that refuse to let Native artists interpret "the way our communities respond to everyday life," p. 51, this document.
place—had history unfolded otherwise—and one that did take place. Such is the beauty of irony's double vision, and Logan's double narrative.

The principal activity depicted in this painting is the sacking of ancient Rome by a group of armed and feathered "wild Indians." On the ground beside a fallen Roman soldier is the ashen image of the Sioux chief Big Foot frozen in the snow, along with the words, "Let us not forget," and "THIS IS REAL." Partially visible through the smoke rising from the burning buildings, like a spirit glimpsed in a dream, is a photograph of Logan's father as a young soldier, a bemused smile on his face.

And bemused he might well have been. Logan (interview, 1994) tells a favourite anecdote, passed on to him by his father, that was shared by Native soldiers serving in Italy, "the cradle of civilization," during the Second World War:

Here we are, Indians shooting white people and we're getting away with it!

The artist continues

It was sadistic, but at the same time it was like a shallow victory....Being part of that part of history, wearing a Canadian uniform, made it legitimate to be an Indian and shoot white people and get away with it. [The joke] was a relief of anger, I guess, frustration, a shallow victory, sadistic as it may have been. Ah, it wasn't even a joke...to kill somebody is sick...but [it's] the thought behind it.

---

202 Cf. Small Matters, fig. 81, p. 154, and Footnote 153, p. 156.
If you lighten anything up in these times of trauma and despair then you laugh about stuff like that, because it’s reflecting on the reality of the situation.

Another element in this painting is an excerpt from a poem penned by the artist, also titled Unreasonable History. The words convey the idea that

I wish that we could have discovered Europe. I wish we could have sacked London, Berlin, met the Romans head on and sacked Rome, then we could have had an effect on the Euro-aboriginal world....Maybe if we could have met Christ over there things would have been different.

In struggling with the injustice of history Logan asks, "Why did it have to be the way it was? Why couldn’t it be reversed? So I painted the painting of Indians sacking Rome."

Beneath the portrait of Edward Logan included in Unreasonable History, the artist has written, in the manner of a caption or identification label, "WWII VICTIM." Viewers might assume from this that the individual pictured (but not identified as the artist’s father) was killed in action, an unfortunate casualty of war. They would be only half right. Edward Logan was indeed a World War II victim, but died many years later, after the war concluded.

In Memorial Blanket for Eddy (My Marilyn) (fig. 122) from the same series, Logan pays tribute to his father’s memory, and that of other Native veterans (whose contributions to the defence of home and country have long gone unrecognized) by
blending two very distinct cultural and artistic traditions for celebrating a person's life—one from northern plains culture and the other from contemporary pop culture. Here, the military portrait seen in the previous piece is reproduced eight times in two rows of four panels. It is contrasted with a second photograph of the artist's father in later years reproduced below the first set in similar fashion. In this, Logan echoes the style of American pop artist Andy Warhol who, in the 1960s and 1970s, confirmed the celebrity status of individuals, such as actress Marilyn Monroe, by making them the subjects of his own subversive art. Overlaying and complementing the sixteen formally arranged portraits is a loosely rendered pattern of brightly coloured geometric shapes, reminiscent of those painted and beaded on traditional plains robes to symbolically honour a life well-lived, a deed well done.  

But the analogy between the soldier and the movie star does not end there. Explaining the somewhat puzzling title of this piece, Logan says

In a lot of ways, my dad and Marilyn Monroe have a lot in common. My dad always wanted to be "somebody," somebody famous or somebody known. He wanted that, and he thought that coming out of the war and being a veteran would gain him a lot of respect. However, that was never a reality. It never occurred. I think he was disillusioned when he

---

203 Bob Boyer has also drawn inspiration from traditional blanket designs to create works honouring specific individuals. See, for example, Lone Elk, Gerald Red Elk, We Miss You, 1986, in Hoffmann 1988: 377.
returned, only to find himself being labelled "Indian" again or "Metis"—no specific rights, poorly educated, and begging for a job—rather than a hero that, I guess, he was kind of envisioning....Marilyn Monroe was a person who attained fame and respect. She obtained it, my father didn’t, but they both ended up killing themselves—my father killing himself through alcoholism, Marilyn Monroe through barbiturates and alcohol 'cause she couldn’t handle her fame. And my dad couldn’t handle not having the fame. He was fifty-eight [and] I was twenty-one when he died.

Through the work of his son, and almost two decades after his death, Edward Logan may finally be granted the recognition he desired but was denied in life. Ironically, he may be accorded in death more than the fifteen minutes in the limelight that Warhol promised everyone.

A World War II victim who has been in the limelight ever since the posthumous publication of her wartime diary is the young Jewish schoolgirl, Anne Frank.204 In his affecting ceramic bowl portrait of Frank (fig. 123) Carl Beam taps into the ancient Mimbres tradition of narrative pottery decoration to culturally frame (both literally and figuratively) and personalize a comment on ethnic and cultural oppression outside North America.205 No less compelling is Beam’s ceramic

204 Anne Frank kept a diary when she and her family went into hiding during the Nazi occupation of Holland. They were eventually discovered and imprisoned in concentration camps where most of the family, including Anne, died. After the war her diary was published and has been in print ever since.

205 Four artists in this study have drawn parallels between Native and German culture: In The Final Solution (fig. 104, p. 175), and Trains-N-Boats-N-Plains: The Nina, the Santa (continued...
fig. 12.3

fig. 12.4
reframing of the 1981 assassination of Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat, a victim, like Frank, of those who would impose their will on the world. While Beam’s 1991 shadow-box portrait of the recently released African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela (fig. 125) could be considered a commentary on victimization as well, it is more importantly an

---

205(...continued)

Maria, and a Pinto (fig. 117, p. 186), Noganosh and Boyer, respectively, make use of German historical reference to critique abuse of aboriginal peoples, while Beam in his portrait of Ann Frank, utilizes aboriginal history to contextualize Nazi mistreatment of the Jewish people. In No Life Like It (fig. 111, p. 179) Gerald McMaster contrasts a hopeful act of healing (in the recent reunification of Berlin) with a hateful act of hurting (in suburban Montreal). More recently, in a unique cross-cultural enterprise, Cree artist George Littlechild and Okanagan-Shuswap-Cree poet Gary Gottfriedson collaborated with Jewish artist Linda Frimer and Jewish poet Reisa Schneider on the book, In Honour of Our Grandmothers: Imprints of Cultural Survival (Schneider 1994 et. al.) which commemorates the parallel histories, and celebrates the cultural tenacity of both peoples.

206 The peace with Israel negotiated by Anwar Sadat ended centuries of historic conflict. He was assassinated by Egyptian religious extremists opposed to the peace.

207 In a 1987 review Hamilton Spectator art critic Grace Inglis (n.p.) said of Beam’s earthenware bowls

Beam takes that which we know—old photos and printed images—and transposes them into something larger, more profound, disturbing, that we do not know....The images take on an extraordinary three-dimensional effect within this deeply rounded space. The bowls are truly sculptural in that they create a significant space which was not there before, not only that, but they seem to hold, first and foremost, the spirit of whatever is portrayed there. They send shivers up the spine.

For insight into Beam’s attraction to this medium, as well as his amusing speculation on how these bowls might be viewed by art historians of the future, see the artist’s commentary in APPENDIX 16, p. 252.
Ranch A Reserve
DINAla: Indigenous Land claim + solidarity
GLA$NST

fig. 1.26

fig. 1.25
expression of aboriginal solidarity with indigenous freedom fighters elsewhere in the world, and one man’s tribute to an individual whose spirit was never broken through twenty-seven years of imprisonment for opposing South Africa’s official policy of apartheid. That Mandela is today president of a newly formed inter-racial democratic government in South Africa can only encourage indigenous peoples in all corners of the globe.

In recent years encouragement has also come from Eastern Europe where a spirit of "glasnost" or friendship and goodwill has increasingly characterized the relationship between world superpowers. At the same time member states of the once powerful Soviet Union have been brazenly reclaiming their status as independent nations--at times at considerable risk.

In his painting Glasnost (fig. 126) from The cowboy/Indian Show, Gerald McMaster recontextualizes the Russian word "glasnost" to call for a new commitment to friendship and cooperation in relations between the Canadian government and aboriginal peoples, and to align the Native struggle for

---

208 Cf. Beam's other shadow-box pieces discussed in this study, Big Koan, fig. 62, p. 130, Chronos 2, fig. 63, p. 130, and Chronos 1, fig. 90, Footnote 160, p. 164.

209 Beam has also created shadow-box pieces that interrogate the historic practice of slavery in the United States. Whenever the subject of "authoritative voice" is raised Beam (interview, 1991b) has a ready answer: "To people who say that I don’t know about the Black experience, I counter, "But I do know about slavery!"
sovereignty and self-determination with that of oppressed peoples in Europe. It is a shrewd and effective piece of cultural and textual appropriation meant to disrupt and dislodge the colonial mindset.

For his 1991 exhibition, *Marginal Recession*, at the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan, Edward Poitras also drew inspiration from recent political history in Eastern Europe—in particular, the toppling of monuments to Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the soviet state—to issue a sobering warning to those who would continue to ignore the demands of Native peoples for greater control of their individual and collective lives. Concerning the installations *Progress* (fig. 127) and *Creación O Muerte ivenceremos!* (fig. 128), Poitras (interview, 1991) said

What I was doing was using the fall of the Lenin statues in Russia and somehow drawing a parallel with the monuments that exist in Canada and the potential of them falling at some point. So what I used was all of this Lenin imagery\(^{210}\) with a reproduction of what’s up at the legislative building here [in Regina], the pediment, where...there’s three different characters: there’s an Indian, a white woman who is the main character--supposed to represent Canada--and then there’s a white guy on the other side.\(^{211}\)...In the piece

\(^{210}\) While visiting Finland in August, 1991, for the opening of an exhibition of his work, Poitras acquired a considerable amount of Lenin memorabilia--posters, books and small souvenir statues--from the Lenin museum in Tampere.

\(^{211}\) In the course of researching this project, Poitras found that the pediment as constructed differs somewhat from the original concept. He says

(continued...
[fig. 127] that I put up in the gallery the heads are knocked off of the woman and the man, and underneath it is the Coyote—the coyote that's made out of bones. Then, on the ground there's all of these little busted Lenin heads. They look like little eggs....Inside the gallery there's a large Lenin head made out of plaster, a big four hundred pound thing [fig. 128]....

Reflecting on the suitability of these pieces for an approaching exhibition in communist Cuba, Poitras added

With the work that was in this show—with all the Lenin imagery—I know that it would be foolish to...show it in Cuba. But yet, I'd like to because of my reason for doing it here....It's not that I'm attacking or making fun of Lenin. I'm pointing something out. If it can happen there [in Russia] it can happen here....I think they [the Cubans] could make the connection. On a global scale. The whole fall of the socialist system over there I think that they [could] relate to more than the Native content which was very subtle.

(...continued)

In the first proposal for this piece the Indian was holding this bow, and the main character, this woman, her hand was extended out towards this Indian and this white guy. She was also bare breasted. But in the piece that actually went up the Indian's disarmed, the woman's breasts are covered up [and] her hand's retracted away from the Indian. (laughs)

Made from the bones of seven coyotes, this 1986 sculpture was featured in the travelling exhibition, Stardusters. (See Mainprize 1986: 68). Fonseca notwithstanding (cf. Footnote 133, fig. 68, p. 138), this is one of the few instances in which the Trickster Coyote is actually visualized. Its incorporation into the Progress installation is unusual, even audacious, in that it clearly places Coyote "at the scene of the crime" impudently taking credit (or blame) for his subversive handiwork. Discussing this sculpture in the Marginal Recession catalogue, Cherokee artist/activist Jimmie Durham (1994: n. p.) writes "Our Grandfather coyote has come to be a symbol of survival-with-hubris for most Indian people." Absolutely.
Included in *Marginal Recession* as well was the installation *Untitled (Over the Gulf)* (fig. 129). Consisting of a wrapped bison skull, an oil-filled lead basin in the shape of the Persian Gulf, and a child's doll suspended over the basin on a swing, it offered a uniquely Native perspective on the 1991 Gulf War. As Poitras tells it, the Iraqi destruction of the Kuwaiti oil fields and the deliberate oil pollution of the gulf waters parallels the wilful destruction of the Plains buffalo in the nineteenth century. He adds an interesting corollary:

Just before the Gulf War there was a group of Sioux Indians that went to Baghdad to do a pipe ceremony to prevent the war from happening. This old man had this vision that they [the Iraqis] possessed some kind of weapon that would have brought about some kind of great destruction. So they were very concerned.

The most intriguing—certainly the most complex—component of Poitras' installation is the befeathered doll, painted in the manner of a pueblo koshare clown. It is not the first time the artist has employed this figure: a few months earlier it was featured in a Montreal exhibition in a piece titled *Self-Portrait*; before that it appeared in the Vancouver show, *et in

---

213 Cf. the earlier discussion of pueblo clowning, p. 45, ff.

214 See "A Review of the Edward Poitras Installation/Exhibition at Articule" by Curtis J. Collins (1991: 19-22). Included in this show was a piece titled *Cheese/Oil*, a double commentary on Oka and the Gulf War which combined the bison skull and lead basin from *Untitled (Over the Gulf)* with a sabre imbedded in a large block of "Oka"-brand cheese.
America ego, with the word "witness" lettered across its forehead (fig. 130). Poitras says that in Marginal Recession "it’s still acting as ‘witness’—over top of Babylon." He also readily admits, "Yeah, that’s me in the swing!" Taken together these two statements illuminate an especially affecting (and effective) double metaphor. Rarely has an image of the artist as clown-Trickster and witness to world history been portrayed so directly and with such clarity. Ever conscious of the educational function of children’s dolls, Poitras sees his adaptation and recontextualization of them in his work as an opportunity to both teach and learn. But especially learn. He says, I’m "more the student; [I’m] teaching myself about, maybe, global issues where I’m creating pieces that I learn from." In the exhibition of such pieces, however, he is also educator.

As Untitled (over the Gulf) clearly illustrates, global issues increasingly involve environmental abuse. It is a pressing concern that several Native artists have addressed with a cutting blend of irony and urgency, and a dry sardonic wit. It is not an unexpected approach to the subject in light of the earlier discussion in Chapter 1 (p. 35) of "ecological

---

215 Cf. et in America ego, detail, fig. 47, p. 112.

216 Clearly, this case of self-imaging could just as easily have been included in Chapter 2.
aesthetics" (Elgin 1986) and "the comedy of survival" (Meeker 1974). Still, the humour frequently elicits hollow laughter.

In the title of his sculpture, Will the Turtle Be Unbroken (fig. 131), Ron Noganosh puts a downward spin on the title of an uplifting country and western gospel song—"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?"—to lament the rampant defiling of "Turtle Island." He offers a grim prognosis for the future of the planet if current harmful practices aren't curtailed.

Referring to the photograph of this sculpture included in this document, Noganosh (interview, 1991) said

If you look at the world, it's bleak. I've got a piece right there that's one hell of a bleak statement on the world. The Ojibway legend of creation is that the world is built on the back of a turtle. That's a turtle shell there. There's the Starship Enterprise. The Earth is moving through space...on the back of a turtle. These are rainforests burning, there's oil slicks on it, half the God-damned world is turning into a desert!

One of the artist's chief concerns is the rapid depletion of fresh water in the world. He tells a hilarious story about

---

217 Shedding some light on Noganosh's penchant for wordplay in his titles, his wife Maxine Bedyn (interview, 1991) said:

You know, Ron has a great, bizarre, off the wall sense of humour, and even our daughter finds it a little strange to live with all the time. And he wakes up in the middle of the night with puns—which gives you an idea what he's like. So if this is reflected in his work it's no surprise.

218 This story was told on a midwinter's night at the Ottawa home of artist Viviane Gray. Providing an appreciative audience for Noganosh were Gray, her husband John, Noganosh's wife Maxine, visiting Swedish scholar Vanessa Vogel, and the writer.
the creation of the piece *It Takes Time* (fig. 132), which presents this problem in a most memorable manner.

I got [the idea for] that from Jacques Cousteau. (laughs) Jacques Cousteau, Christ, he's explored every mudhole, creek, pond, swamp, sewer in the known world!...I had picked up one of those student lamps at a junk sale one time so I figured, aha!, I've got a use for that, and I'm watching this thing on Cousteau and he said that there's no place that he went that he didn't run into pollution. Everywhere, oceans...all the rivers, everywhere. I thought, "OK, I've got my student lamp. I need a toilet. Aha! I know where there's a toilet." So I head up to Wakefield, [Ontario,] 'cause I knew that there was a dirty old toilet up there. I get up there and the toilet that I wanted was positively...rotten, but it was broke. Somebody broke it. So, I'm feeling kind of dejected and I'm headin' back down the old road and I'm drivin' along and I come around the corner and, God damn it!, there's [this] old toilet sittin' beside the road. I said, "Holy shit!" (laughter) Stop the car, back up, grab her and throw her in the back of the car. Whoever put it out there must have thought, "This guy's really gone mad." (more laughter) So I took it and I put the little stick up behind it, right?, there's a big tap coming out of the Pacific Ocean, and that's blue plexiglas there [for] the water. It's called *It Takes Time*.

But when I picked it up, right?, the inside was all full of spider webs and rust and everything else. So the [conservator at] the Museum [of Civilization] phoned me up one day...[and] says, "Are the spider webs part of the piece?" So me says, "Oh yes. Yes, sure!" (loud laughter) "I trained that spider to spin all those webs in there. Took me years!" But [my wife,] Max hates that piece because the toilet is so grubby and dirty. When they had it on exhibit [at the museum] and we're over there this lady's talking to me about mysticism of the art. I was tired, I said, "Lady, it's a dirty old toilet. How the hell can you get mystic about a toilet?" (laughs) It sort of blew her away but that's how I was feeling....What I'm saying [in the title is that] it doesn't take time. It doesn't. We're

---

The Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec, is the proud owner of this piece of contemporary "Native/Indian art." On behalf of all Canadians, conservators there are entrusted with the solemn task of preserving it as a national and cultural treasure.

just flushing all the fresh water down the toilet. It's ridiculous that we flush three gallons of fresh water to get rid of three ounces of urine. Piss on that!

Water pollution takes many forms. One of the most damaging is acid rain, the result of thoughtless atmospheric contamination. It is the primary subject of Bob Boyer's blanket painting *Let the Acid Queen Rain: The White Goop Devours All* (fig. 133). In conversation with the writer in November 1991, the artist said

I was just thinking about how, at one time, this land was beautiful, pure, nice bright colours, and gradually this land is just getting more and more rotten with pollution. [The coloured pieces falling from the sky,] that was nice stuff, that part is the bright part....Pollution [is] spilling out from the middle of it.

Drawing a parallel between environmental abuse and cultural abuse not unlike that made by Poitras in *Untitled (Over the Gulf)* (fig. 129), Boyer has also painted two circular figures in the lower section of the piece to symbolize that "the buffalo's been wiped out." 220 In the upper section two similar "barred circles"--the internationally recognized sign for prohibition--have been superimposed over images of sacred pipes, an allusion to misguided bureaucratic attempts to

---

220 For further analysis of this piece see Duffek (1988: n.p.).
combat air pollution by applying "No smoking" bylaws to Native ceremonies.\footnote{221}

Acid rain is also the subject of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's painting \textit{Native Winter Snow} (fig. 134), but the reference is more oblique--and the beauty of the landscape cleverly deceptive. Yuxweluptun knows too much to be taken in by a beautiful face. He (interview, 1990) says

On a good day bad things can happen. On a sunny day I know that there's toxins and toxicities [sic] poured into the environment....When acid rain comes from Japan then it's a social problem over there that we get over here. When Chernobyl\footnote{222} happens over there and up north [we're told] "Don't eat the snow" then I find that a social problem. Where these social problems come from is from their social order and their social attitudes about this planet. When are we going to clean this planet? There's a lot of questions in my work....If we get fish that are full of mercury and we're dying from it, then why should I paint a pretty picture of salmon swimming upstream?

In \textit{Native Winter Snow} Yuxweluptun's bending and warping and melting of cultural symbols in the manner of Salvador Dali\footnote{223}
seems an especially apt use of visual and political metaphor. "I think that dioxin bends and warps and distorts and kills," he (interview, 1991) says bluntly. "Toxic humour" doesn't get much stronger or more literal than this.

When Yuxweluptun's surreal environment is not suffering the effects of chemical fallout it is frequently under attack from ravenous logging corporations. In his painting Hole in the Sky (fig. 42), discussed earlier on p. 110, the principal activity—an attempt to repair the tear in the earth's protective ozone layer—is set in the midst of a clearcut forest. A less surreal but no less devastated clearcut forms the backdrop in Jim Logan's The Three Environmentalists (fig. 135) from his Classical Aboriginal Series. A wicked update of Raphael's famous painting, The Three Graces, it exemplifies Hutcheon's (1988: 26) concept of parody as "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity."

In Logan's version three Native women are pictured frolicking together on a giant tree stump. The figure on the left ponders the significance of a turtle—ever a symbol of the Great Turtle Island and Native Mother Earth—which she holds suspended from a ball and chain. According to the artist

223(...continued)
Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory (Maddox 1979: 24-25, 78-79).
(interview, 1994) it signifies the earth’s enslavement by western thought and the profit motive. The woman in the centre contemplates a sacred heart, a reference to the biblical dictum to exercise dominion over the earth. The figure on the right considers a human skull, a prophetic omen signalling the inevitable result of human "progress" unless our relationship to the earth is seriously reevaluated. It is no accident that Logan executed this piece while protests were taking place against the logging of old growth forests in Clayoquot Sound on Vancouver Island. It is perhaps no accident as well that it was women who were at the forefront of these demonstrations and who were jailed for their moral stand. In his own way Logan pays tribute to them here.

Logging protests in another part of the country inspired Bob Boyer to create his three-blanket wall installation **Imago for a dying buffalo and lost treeties** (fig. 136 detail). The piece was included in the 1990 exhibition, *Contemporary Rituals*, at the White Water Gallery in North Bay, Ontario, organized in support of the Teme-Augama Anishnabai who were trying to halt further logging on disputed territory until

---

224 As he did in *Let The Acid Queen Rain...* (fig. 133), Boyer draws a parallel--this time in the title--between present abuse of the environment and past abuse of the buffalo. His double-play on the word "treeties" is a particularly effective pun.
land claims were settled. In his "Artist’s Statement" in the show’s catalogue Boyer (1990: n. p.) makes a troubling connection between literacy and environmental abuse. He says

The death and destruction of our forests is being spurred on by the proliferation of literacy. I find literacy a bit of a dilemma; illiterate societies do not pollute and destroy the worlds. The more educated societies become the more destructive they seem to become. How many trees must bleed to put newspapers on the shelves? Perhaps more televisions, computers and bi-weekly newspapers could cut down on the amount of paper misuse. The Regina paper keeps getting bigger, not better, because of all the advertising and grocery store flyers. I am not saying "Don’t read" but on the other hand, what are you reading and are you reading all that you are buying?"

One of the most prevalent forms of "paper misuse" is disregard for paper reuse. This is the theme of Gerald McMaster’s mixed-media installation Bärk: The Great Tree of Life (fig. 137) created for the 1990 group show Last Chance at the Saw Gallery in Ottawa. From several hundred discarded telephone books McMaster fashioned two eight foot columns wrapped in "healing blankets" to call attention to wanton environmental waste and the rapid depletion of the earth’s natural resources. What gives the piece added dimension and emotional power is the simultaneous affirmation of a widespread Native spiritual concept—"the Great Tree of Life"—using the unlikeliest of materials.

The three-man exhibition also featured work by Edward Poitras and Saulteaux artist Robert Houle.

Among the Plains Cree the Great Tree of Life is symbolized by the Sundance pole. See also Niro, Footnote 85, p. 83, and p. 191.
Perhaps no other aboriginal artist has expressed the Native spiritual (and cultural) connection to the landscape as effectively as Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun—nor advocated the need for drastic revision of environmental policy so fervently and consistently. His painting The Environmentalist (fig. 138) arguably as much a portrait of the artist as witness/teacher (and trickster/healer) as the doll in Poitras' Untitled (Over the Gulf (fig. 129, p. 203), graphically symbolizes the sacred and symbiotic nature of mankind’s relationship to mother Earth.

The inherent familial bond is manifest in the features of the red man’s face mirrored on the hillside in the background, in the clearing in the foreground and wrapped about the branches of what might properly be understood as the sacred tree. Clearly, the analogy could as easily be played out in reverse. The point is that the relationship is much more than one of stewardship. Yet even that aspect is threatened. Yuxweluptun (interview, 1990) says

> What I was showing was stripping [away] the social values of the Western world. [With] all these clothes on you don’t see the ideology. [Here] you don’t see Reeboks, you don’t

---

227 Or Beam’s Self-Portrait in My Christian Dior Bathing Suit (fig. 16, p. 68), Burying the Ruler (figs. 19 and 20, p. 71), Niro’s Portrait of the Artist Sitting With a Killer Surrounded by French Curves (figs. 28 and 29, p. 85) or Cardinal-Schubert’s Beginning of Life (fig. 51, p. 120).

228 I have long felt that a term like "Environmentalite"—as in "Israelite"—might better convey the sense of spiritual and cultural connection to the land that Yuxweluptun intends.
see cowboy boots, you don’t see Levis jeans, you don’t see his black leather coat. You don’t see any of the above mentioned; you see a cultural setting of a cultural person ....I was [also] showing that this person cares about the environment around him, yet doesn’t have those social rights as a human being in this country...[nor] the right to control...this land."

Like the brown man in Yuxweluptun’s *Dance Me Outside, Dance Me On Sovereignty Anywhere I Want* (Footnote 167, fig. 98, p. 170), the red man in *The Environmentalist* suffers the indignity of an imposed colonial identity that not only fails to recognize his spiritual nature (let alone his comic vision) but denies his claim to a sacred and familial connection to the land as well. No wonder Yuxweluptun portrays him with a huge cavity in his chest where his heart should be. Still, the figure’s playful pose suggests the need for a comic disposition to ensure any semblance of cultural or physical survival. The sacred human-humour-humus triad remains intact. In an increasingly secular world where outdated notions of "Indianness" still have power, Yuxweluptun endeavours to impart his vision of spiritual and environmental "relatedness." His commitment is unwavering. He (interview, 1991) says

I’m just...try[ing] to put a visual soul into people [so they] start to see everything in a Native perspective...to

---

229 To paraphrase the title of the National Gallery’s exhibition of First Nations art, this painting concerns "Land Spirit and No Power!"

230 Cf. McMaster’s contrast of the spiritual Indian with the secular cowboy, p. 61.
put a feeling where no feeling has been before...getting into their mind, trying to get into their soul. I do love this land. I'm not some heathen barbaric savage as I'm portrayed in a book, in a John Wayne movie. I do see. If I accidentally cut myself in the leg with a chainsaw I do bleed. I am human. I’m not something out of the Indian Act that is subject to a conforming structure....I’m prepared to try to change that stereotypical ideology...and then, getting over that, even going into the whole world to show them that we can't just let it go the way it is. We have to be accountable for our actions....It's not an Indian issue any more.

* * *

I will conclude with a few observations from Carleton University professor Ruth Phillips, Woodland Cultural Centre Director, Tom Hill and, to return to where this study began, artist Carl Beam. In conversation in February 1991, Dr. Phillips commented

I am endlessly amazed at the control that Native people exert over their critique. It’s extremely controlled. Partly it’s been imposed on them by their particular historical experience--they have been disempowered in a certain way--and/or something in the Native tradition that has survived as a value, as a way of dealing with people in
groups, is fundamentally non-confrontational I think. There's a great emphasis on talking things out and arriving at consensus. And I think what [the artists] are doing is talking things out with us now....

Why is it that they have chosen this [humorous] mechanism? Yes, it's trendy now. Yes, it's part of the postmodern consciousness, but there's something else going on, and I think that that has to do with both some kinds of traditions in Native culture, and also with the Canadian experience because Canadian society has also been non-confrontational.

Phillips' reference to "something else going on" is in fact the central focus of the present study. Her query as to why

---

One last image. In 1988 Gerald McMaster created a series of small wooden sculptures adorned with sticks, feathers, ropes and wire which he called Post-Moderns (fig. 139). Their basic human form was derived from an image painted on a historic Blackfoot tipi. Why the Post-Modern title? It was a playful response to German colleague Gerhard Hoffmann's constant use of the word. "What is postmodernism?" McMaster (interview, 1990) asks. "Are Indians experiencing it? Nobody knows. Nobody knows what the term means." McMaster's own understanding of "postmodernism" is bound up in the notion of reinterpreting and re-presenting ancient forms in contemporary materials to allow traditional values and beliefs to be seen as relevant once more. "Certain objects have a quality to them—a look that speaks of a sense of spirit. These objects have that look. The past is starting to come through in various ways," he says. Given the nature of McMaster's playful appropriation, his sculptures could easily have been discussed in Chapter 3.

Comparative investigation of the non-confrontational character of both societies is beyond the scope of the present study but could be given an interesting slant by considering the function (and possible interrelationship) of irony in both groups. An obvious starting point would be Hutcheon's (1991: 1 ff.) essay, "As Canadian as...Possible...Under the Circumstances," which examines the role of irony as an expression of English-Canadian identity. It is interesting to note that as the first Native artist to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale (1995), Edward Poitras chose to explore the exposition theme of identity and otherness through the persona of the trickster coyote (Tousley 1995). Cf. Easton's (1970: 40) assertion that the quintessentially "American" dry wit of actor/humorist Will Rogers owed more to his Cherokee heritage than his mainstream American upbringing.
fig. 139
the artists have chosen to address their concerns through humour and irony might best be answered by once again referring to Vizenor's (in Bruchac 1987: 309, emphasis added) theory of "mythic verism."

In light of the works examined and the conversations cited in the previous pages, it would indeed seem as applicable to the present discussion as it is to contemporary Native literature. It bears repeating.

It is the attitude of the characters which gives it the mythic verism and that attitude is comic....It is something that is alive...the way time is handled and resolved, the tension in time, and the sense of comedy or comic spirit through imagination and a collective sense that people prevail and survive, get along, get by. They're not at war with the environment, they're not rising above, and there are no subtle references to manifest destiny [and] monotheistic superiority. All of that's very subtle, but it's there and I think you can find it and I think we can focus on it and I think we can make a theory of it.

"Subtlety" is a term that has recurred frequently in the present discussion of Native humour and Trickster practice. It accounts for much of the conceptual layering and multiple referencing in the art, and invariably confounds unsuspecting (and uninformed) viewers. Subtlety has become synonymous with aesthetic sophistication--another term increasingly used to describe the work and practice of aboriginal artists. As Hill (interview, 1991) makes clear, the word is well-chosen.

It has become more sophisticated. The environment has changed to accommodate that sophistication. You have artists now who are more aware of the political climate and more aware that their presence or...their personal point of view can in some way address some of those issues. There's

\[233\] Cf. p. 10, this document.
no question that humour does play a role. And I think humour does one thing for an artist—it makes, sometimes, a very sensitive issue...more palatable. You come in, you chuckle, you laugh and then you realize what he is really saying is something that is very, very serious, and he means to, through his art or his discussion, cause change....

I see it...moving further to more sophistication. The double entendre will become more sophisticated, will appeal to more [levels of meaning], there’ll be more metaphors, there’ll be more anachronisms. All those kinds of things will come into play even more so visually, plus [there will be] the creation of new ones....New things are being created, new images are coming on stream. New levels of consciousness are being appealed to, both by the artist and by the audience. You have to come in on those same terms.

As Carl Beam (1991a) sees it, "There’s something concretely happening that has not happened at any [other] point in history—a great fusion, a synthesis of shamanic process and modern materials." Echoing Vizenor’s (1987: 290) description of breaking "from formula" and breaking "out of program" as "a spiritual quest in a way," Beam (1991b) later adds, "If you explain what’s involved, being an artist can be seen as a real sacred mission. Those who don’t see it say, "Get a job!" "Get a life!"

"The Trickster shift, they can’t recognize that thing" (Beam 1992).

Cf. Vizenor, p. 48, this document.
COYOTE’S ENCOUNTER WITH ANTHROPOLOGY

In a lot of books about Native peoples there are rarely personalities in there. It’s the study of "Man" not the study of individuals. It’s the study of the structures. And this whole notion of "informants," it’s always a one-sided exchange: "Come on, give me the information." What is there to give in return?...Native peoples are very guarded about what they’re going to say to anthropologists.

Gerald McMaster, Oct 1990

For Allan, a friend and colleague
Best wishes, your informant
GR McMaster
Feb 1991

It is indeed fortuitous that the present study was undertaken at what Marcus and Fisher (1986) have called an "experimental moment in the human sciences," "a period rich in experimentation and conceptual risk taking" when "intellectual resources [are] to be used in novel and eclectic ways" (Marcus and Fisher 1986: 10).²³⁵ It would be difficult to imagine this project without its novel and eclectic elements. They account for much of its critical and "messy vitality" (Venturi 1968 n. p. in Wilde 1981: 133). They are the source of its quickening spirit--an active Trickster spirit. As explained at the outset, this dissertation has been conceived as a "Trickster discourse" (Vizenor 1989: 9), that is a discourse among tricksters, about tricksters and trickster practice, and as trickster, in the sense that the "trickster is a comic

discourse, a collection of utterances in oral tradition" (Vizenor 1989: 191). It is open-ended, evolving, and, by definition, incomplete. How best to contextualize and represent this discourse has been a dual challenge.

Regarding the first point, the hybrid nature of much of the material has necessitated the creation of a hybrid theoretical framework. Accordingly, a multiplicity of theoretical concepts have been braided together and interwoven throughout the various chapters to reflect the complexity, density and interconnectedness of the verbal and visual narratives presented. In summary, theory has related to: the Trickster, sacred clowning, irony, parody, comic vision, "mythic verism," humour (Native, resistance, black, gallows, toxic, healing, critical), postmodernism and postcolonialism.

To convey the sense of multilayered communication and simultaneous conversation, quotation and footnote have been used extensively as parallel and overlapping texts. "Authoritative voice" is thus disbursed among the many narratives that comprise the discourse. They are strong voices, as well as strong narratives. (McMaster need not fear the sacrifice of individuals and personalities to another study of "Man.") In addition, frequent cross-referencing has been employed to underscore the interconnectedness of the texts and the intertextual nature of the discourse as a whole.
An effort has also been made to achieve a certain "aesthetic elegance" (Fisher 1986: 229) in the contextualizing prose not only to engage the reader, but to reflect both the (com)passion and the playfulness of the material presented. Moreover, it is hoped that the overall presentation participates to some degree in the traditional Trickster narrative tradition that allows each retelling to "cause important ideas to come alive in exciting ways" (Toelken 1969: 225). And finally, mindful of Vizenor's (1989: 9) assertion that the "trickster is postmodern," there is also the hope that this study might approach Brian McHale's (1987: 3-5 in Vizenor 1989: 4) concept of a "superior construction of postmodernism...one that produces new insights, new or richer connections, coherence of a different degree or kind, ultimately more discourse."

---

236 In this case, each chapter (and in fact the overall document) has been constructed much as a playwright might block out a play, or a screenwriter adapt material from another medium--with close attention to continuity and flow and scene transitions. See APPENDIX 19, p. 257 for a visual outline of Chapter 4.
POSTSCRIPT

The difference, then, between Pure and Applied research is primarily one of footnotes. Pure has many footnotes, Applied has few footnotes.

Vine Deloria Jr.

My friend, Nampiao, put the pot on for some tea. I clean up all the coyote tracks on the floor.

Thomas King
## APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix 1</th>
<th>Joane Cardinal-Schubert’s Installation, <em>Art Tribe</em></th>
<th>223</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>Record of Interviews</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3</td>
<td>Biographical Notes</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4</td>
<td>The Exhibitions, <em>Indigena</em> and <em>Land Spirit Power</em></td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5</td>
<td>Additional Bibliographic References</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 6</td>
<td>Jane Ash Poitras and Peyote Humour</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 7</td>
<td><em>The cowboy/Indian Show</em> Review Excerpts</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 8</td>
<td>Rebecca Belmore’s <em>True Grit: A Souvenir</em></td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 9</td>
<td>Rebecca Belmore’s Song/Performance: <em>(I’m A)</em> High-Tech Teepee Trauma Mama</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 10</td>
<td>Rebecca Belmore’s Story of <em>Crazy Old Woman Child</em></td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 11</td>
<td>Ron Noganosh: Artist’s Statement</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 12</td>
<td>Joane Cardinal-Schubert’s Poem, <em>Oh, Canada</em></td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 13</td>
<td>&quot;Anthropologitis&quot; by Peter Blue Cloud/Aroniawenrate</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 14</td>
<td>A Navajo Triple Pun</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 15</td>
<td>Catharsis and Creativity in Shelley Niro’s Painting, <em>The Waitress</em></td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 16</td>
<td>Carl Beam on the Production of Earthenware Bowls</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 17</td>
<td>Gerald McMaster’s Commentary on the Painting, <em>Glasnost</em></td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 18</td>
<td>Chapter Heading Quotations</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 19</td>
<td>Sample outline, Chapter 4</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 1: JOANE CARDINAL-SCHUBERT’S INSTALLATION, ART TRIBE

In conversation on November 13, 1991, Cardinal-Schubert explained the evolution of the piece, Art Tribe, an installation created for her Preservation of A Species exhibition at the Articule Gallery in Montreal, May-June, 1990. In the absence of slides, the Blood artist referred to several Polaroid photographs taken when the installation was later remounted in Calgary.

I went in a shop in Calgary before I left [for Ottawa and Montreal] and I bought ten magic slates. It was the whole idea of writing,...that whole idea of "blackboard."...I thought, "This is the contemporary slate." It’s the magic slate that you can just make [the writing] disappear [on]. But what I did was I wrote on the slate in felt pen so that you couldn’t erase the names. The names are indelible. And then they were given a seal of approval [symbolized] by the little gold seal on the side and that little diploma-like ribbon cut kind of on an angle. They were on black...tissue attached in one spot so that any air movement caused it to kind of lift up and go, "rattle, rattle." And it was all crinkly; it’s a matte black tissue. And then over top of the magic slates I had this little piece of netting exactly the size of the slate, and it had tiny little sparkles in it and it had little stars, so it was like we were the stars--elevated--but we were still the "ten little Indians." The "Canadian Club" ["Different From All Others"] sign was at the top in the middle, and below that was a diploma--just a white piece of paper....It was like the diploma of credibility or whatever--academia.

So out of that diploma came all this IV tubing and it had red neon tape wrapped around it every so often like a notation device. And that IV tubing went down into the light. I couldn’t get a red bulb so I just painted the lightbulb [with] red acrylic paint. And I was in Simpsons Sears and I found all these plastic Indians in a box--they’re still selling them--so I bought those plastic figures and I painted them all black. There was a cowboy driving a wagon, there were all these Indians all over, some cowboys on horses--I put them on backwards on the horse...because they were screwed up. It’s just a funny little thing.

And that little box had a seal on it so it was mysterious. It was just a little lacquered cardboard box, kind of nice looking, and I put the seal on it and then I put a whole bunch of gold pins in it--little gold pins that are acceptable ways of pinning things together. And then I had a prayer book--and I found that in an antique shop when I was walking around
Montreal. And I found the light in an antique shop. I wanted a light. Actually, I don't even think I thought about the light until I was in the antique shop and I saw the light. And it was a tree. And I wanted the idea of the "tree of life," and the "family tree." All that kind of stuff is all connected to that. And I thought, "This is incredible!" I think I had to pay eighty-five bucks for that stupid light.

I had to have an extension cord 'cause there wasn't a plug where I was putting this piece, so I thought, "Well, I'll incorporate the whole extension cord into the piece." So, of course, it was a white extension cord and it was plugged into power. So there was a funny little thing about that....That's just tissue [on the Canadian Club sign] with a gold seal covering the..."5 cents" on it. So it has some ribbon...and it says "Artist as Artifact." (laughs)

[Art Tribe was remounted in Calgary when] the New Gallery here was doing that show called Fear of Others. It was started in Vancouver and went right across the country. It was dealing with racism. They had originally asked me to be in that show but I didn't have time. They asked me at the last minute. Whoever was organizing it in Vancouver was embarrassed to call me up and ask me to be in the show at such a late date. And I said, "I'd like to be in it but I'm too busy right now." So when it came to Calgary--the thesis of the whole show was to include some local people, one or two local people of the gallery's choice--so the gallery called me up here and they said, "Do you have something you can put in this show?" And I said, "Well, I can put my Art Tribe in." I explained it to them and they really liked the idea, so I zipped down there with my little "Cultural Baggage" suitcase [See fig. 59, p. 127] and (laughs) did a snap-on installation. It should have been on a black wall though. It was originally on a black wall [in Montreal]. It was a lot better....

I just snapped [these photographs] with a Polaroid just as a document. And I thought it was funny to put this write-up on the wall--this explanation of what the piece was about--because that's never really done. It's usually in the catalogue but it's not part of the piece. I said to [a] reviewer in Ottawa that I was taking back my right to explain what the piece was about, and not leaving it up to critics or historians to try and put together what I was thinking about when I was doing it. So it's just a funny little irony, I guess....

There's a lot of money put towards a catalogue and a lot of times the catalogues contain a lot of words and not too much about what the artist is doing, or thinking or writing. In fact, a lot of people don't think that artists should even
write about their work—that their writing is even valid. So there's a reaction about that, I think, and that's been going on for a while. And then there is [another] reason: that [artists] really do want to communicate directly with the viewer, and they want to eliminate this middleman, this interpreter.
APPENDIX 2: RECORD OF INTERVIEWS

AUDIOTAPED INTERVIEWS


   Amos Key, Iroquois educator, February 11, 1991, Brantford, Ontario.  30 min.

14-15. Ron Noganosh, Ojibway sculptor, and Viviane Gray, Mic Mac artist/Manager, Indian Art Centre, Dept. of Indian and Northern Affairs, Hull, Quebec, February 15, 1991, Ottawa, Ont.  2 hrs. 10 min.

16-17. Ron Noganosh, February 17, 1991, Ottawa, Ont.  3 hrs.


32. Tom Hill, Seneca artist/curator/Museum Director, Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ont., October 1, 1991, Brantford, Ont. 90 min.

32b. Bill Powless, October 1, 1991, Brantford, Ont. c. 15 min.

33. Shelley Niro, October 1, 1991, Brantford, Ont. 1 hr.


36-37. Gerald McMaster, October 9, 11, 1991, Ottawa, Ont. and Hull, Quebec. 2 hrs. 15 min.

38. Viviane Gray, October 10, 1991, Hull, Quebec. 45 min.


41-43. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, November 1, 2, 1991, Vancouver, B.C. 4 hrs.


Carolyn Acoose, Boyer colleague and SIFC instructor, November 7, 1991, Regina, Sask. 45 min.


56. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, September 14, 1992, phone conversation from artist's home, Ft. St. James to Vancouver. 1 hr.


UNTAPED INTERVIEWS (NOTES ONLY)

Basil Johnston, Ojibway author and humorist, February 12, 1991, Toronto, Ont. c. 1 hr.


Carl Beam, October 3, 1991, phone conversation from Toronto to the artist's home, Peterborough, Ont. c. 15 min.

Rebecca Belmore, Ojibway performance artist, October 7, 1991, Toronto, Ont. c. 1 hr.

Carl Beam, October 16, 1991, Peterborough, Ont. c. 5 hrs.
APPENDIX 3: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Carl Beam (Ojibway), was born in 1943 in West Bay, Manitoulin Island, Ontario. He studied art at the Kootenay School of Art and the University of Victoria where he completed a B.F.A. in 1974. He continued his studies at the University of Alberta in Edmonton in the M.F.A. program. He lives and works in West Bay, Ontario.

Rebecca Belmore (Ojibway) was born in 1960 in Upsala, Ontario. She studied at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. She lives in Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

Bob Boyer (Metis) was born near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan in 1948. He attended the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus, and in 1971 received a Bachelor of Education degree with an art major. Since 1981 he has been head of the Department of Indian Art and professor at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College at the University of Regina.

Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Blood) was born in 1942 in Red Deer, Alberta. She studied Fine Arts at the Alberta College of Art in Calgary and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting/printmaking in 1977. She completed a certificate course in Management for Art Administrators at the Banff Centre of Fine Arts in Banff, Alberta and was Assistant Curator at the Nickle Art Museum at the University of Calgary for six years. She was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of Art in 1986. She lives and works in Calgary.

Gary Farmer (Mohawk) was born in the U.S., studied photography at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto and graduated in 1975. His acting career has included roles in stage, film and television. He is the editor-in-chief of Aboriginal Voices, The Magazine of Evolving Native American Arts. He lives in Toronto.

Jim Logan (Cree/Sioux/Scottish) was born in 1955 in New Westminster, British Columbia. In 1983 he received a certificate in Graphic Design from the Kootenay School of Fine Art (David Thompson University) in Nelson, British Columbia. He has worked as a graphic designer for the Yukon Indian News and now lives in Kamloops, B.C.

Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree) was born in 1953 in Saskatchewan and grew up near North Battleford on the Red Pheasant reserve. He studied fine arts at the Institute of American Indian Art at Santa Fe, New Mexico from 1973 to 1975 and two years later completed a B.F.A. at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. He was the Indian Art Program Coordinator and Instructor at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan from 1977 to 1981. In 1994
he completed an M.A. in Anthropology at Carleton University. He has been Curator of Contemporary Indian Art for the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa/Hull since 1981.

Shelley Niro (Mohawk) was born in 1954 in Niagara Falls, New York. She studied art at Durham College in Oshawa, Ontario, the Banff School of Fine Arts in Banff, Alberta, the Algoma School of Landscape Painting in Spruce Lake, Ontario and the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. She lives in Brantford, Ontario.

Ron Noganosh (Ojibway/Algonquin) was born on the Magnetawan Reserve near Parry Sound, Ontario in 1949. He received diplomas in welding in 1968 and graphic design in 1970 from George Brown College in Toronto and studied fine arts at the University of Ottawa. He has taught courses in sculpture, printmaking and design at Heritage College in Hull, Quebec. He lives in Ottawa, Ontario.

Edward Poitras (Metis) was born in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1953. In 1974 he studied with Sarain Stump at the Indian Art Program at the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College in Saskatoon. In 1976 he studied at Manitou College in Quebec with Domingo Cisneros. He has taught Indian art courses at the University of Manitoba and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College and has worked as a graphic artist for The New Breed magazine. He lives in Regina.

Jane Ash Poitras (Cree/Chipewyan) was born in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta in 1951. She studied at the University of Alberta in Edmonton receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology and later a Bachelor of Fine Arts. She received a Master of Fine Arts degree in printmaking from Columbia University, New York in 1985. She is a sessional instructor at the University of Alberta and lives in Edmonton.

Bill Powless (Mohawk) was born in 1952 on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario. He studied art at Mohawk College in Brantford, Ontario. He is principal graphic designer at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario and a regular contributor of editorial cartoons to The Tekawennake-New Credit Reporter. He lives on the Six Nations Reserve in Ohsweken, Ontario.

Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (Cowichan Salish/Okanagan) was born in 1957 in Kamloops and raised in Richmond, British Columbia. He graduated in 1987 from the Emily Carr College of Art and Design with honours in painting. He lives and works in Vancouver, B.C.

(Parts of the above biographical information were excerpted from McMaster and Martin, 1992.)
Indigena: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years, curated by Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, ran from April 16–October 12, 1992 at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec. It consisted of thirty-eight works in a variety of media—including painting, sculpture, photography, video, performance and mixed-media installation—by nineteen Native Canadian artists: Kenny and Rebecca Baird, Carl Beam, Lance Belanger, Bob Boyer, Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Domingo Cisneros, Joe David, Jim Logan, George Longfish, Mike Macdonald, Lawrence Paul, Edward Poitras, Jane Ash Poitras, Rick Rivet, Eric Robertson, Luke Simon, Lucy Tasseor and Nick Sikkuark. The catalogue (edited by the curators) includes biographical statements by the artists and essays by McMaster and Martin, Gloria Cranmer Webster, Alootook Ipellie, Alfred Young Man, George E. Sioui Wendayete, Loretta Todd and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias. Artists and writers were asked to reflect on the concepts of "colonization," "discovery," "celebration" and "cultural tenacity."

Land Spirit Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada, curated by Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault was exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, from September 25 - November 22, 1992. It consisted of fifty-three works in a variety of media as well by [the following] eighteen Canadian and American Native artists: Carl Beam, Rebecca Belmore, Dempsey Bob, Domingo Cisneros, Robert Davidson, Jimmie Durham, Dorothy Grant, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, Faye HeavyShield, Alex Janvier, Zacharias Kunuk, James Lavadour, Truman Lowe, James Luna, Teresa Marshall, Alanis Obomsawin, Kay WalkingStick and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. The catalogue contains lengthy essays by the three curators who state (1992:13) that the works are meant to show that "Native artists carry in them the memory of the land--place at its most primordial--as a spiritual and political legacy."

* * *

In the United States, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith curated The Submoluc Show/Columbus Wohs, a "visual commentary on the Columbus Quincentennial from the perspective of America's first people." Organized by Atlatl, a national service organization for Native American arts, the exhibition travelled to twelve venues in the United States from January 1992 to February 1994. See Quick-to-See Smith, 1992.
APPENDIX 5: ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

1. For a review of the extensive Trickster literature, see The Trickster in Folklore, in Apte (1985). Notable too are Babcock, 1975, (for Trickster as the ultimate "marginal man"), Ballinger, 1989, (for Trickster as collective social conscience), Ricketts, 1966, (for Trickster as spirited religious celebrant), Toelken, 1969, (for Trickster as "the exponent of all possibilities") and Holden 1976 (for Trickster as ironic symbol of cultural resistance).

Published collections of traditional Native Trickster tales abound; among them, Mourning Dove (1933/1990), Hill and Hill (1945), Lopez (1977), and 'Ksan (1977). Artists Paul Goble (ex., 1988, 1991, 1994) and Bill Reid (1984) not only retell but [also] illustrate traditional Trickster narratives. Anthologies of contemporary Trickster prose and poetry include Koller et al. (1982) and Blue Cloud/Aroniawenrate (1990). Bright (1993) features both traditional and contemporary stories. Works in which Trickster tales form a part include: Robinson (1989), Keeshig-Tobias (1991, and 1992 in McMaster and Martin), E. Poitras (in McMaster and Martin 1992), and Annharte (Baker), Brant, and King in Moses and Goldie (1992). King (1990 in New, 1993, 1993a) and Vizenor (ex., 1978/90, 1987a, 1988, 1991) are equally prolific in their production of contemporary Trickster fiction. As well, the two award-winning plays by Highway (1988, 1989) and the film by Weise (1984, based on a screenplay by Vizenor) are all Trickster vehicles. Of note too are the "urban Coyote" drawings by Maidu artist, Harry Fonseca (in Koller et. al., 1982) which, along with the artist's Coyote paintings, are discussed in Archuleta (1986). Of course, there are many other works that betray a Trickster "texture" but do not feature Trickster characters.

2. For an overview of postmodern theory and practice, see Hutcheon's A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (1988), and The Politics of Postmodernism (1989); for its manifestation in Canadian literature, see The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction (1988a); for its expression in Canadian visual art, see, with Mark Cheetham, Remembering Postmodernism: Trends in Recent Canadian Art.


4. For frontier painters, see Ewers (1965) and Schimmel in Truettner (1991). For artist Charles Bird King, see Viola (1976); for Karl Bodmer, see Thomas and Ronnefeldt (1976); for George Catlin, see McCracken (1959), Halpin (1965) and Hassrick (1977); for Paul Kane, see Harper (1971). For frontier photographers, see Scherer and Walker (1982). For photographer Edward Curtis, see Graybill and Boesen (1976), Holm and Quimby (1980), Lyman (1982) and Davis (1985).
APPENDIX 6: JANE ASH POITRAS AND PEYOTE HUMOUR

Excerpt from Interview 2 with Cree artist, Jane Ash Poitras, August 21, 1991, Vancouver B.C., following the artist’s return to Canada from a visit to the Salt River Indian Reserve, near Phoenix, Arizona, where she participated for the first time in a peyote ceremony conducted by members of the Native American Church. Knowing of my interest in humour, Poitras was eager to explain how it functioned in the context of the all-night ritual.

[What I learned] was that their humour, the humour they use --and this is something for you, and because I thought of you at this time I had to find the answer--the humour is a camouflage. Wow!, like it’s a camouflage. What happens is that when Indian people use humour—you see, most people will look at it and just see the surface of it but you’ve got to go deeper below the levels of the real, deep, deep into the humour, and you find knowledge beyond the profane. You find sacred knowledge....If your mind is open to the shamanic consciousness then the humour teaches you an incredible amount of knowledge....

Just talking about humour...the camouflage thing...the humour is a language. It’s a sacred language, and if you’re not tapped in you’re just going to get the superficial--and most people are satisfied with that. But if you’re tapped in, Wow!, you learn a lot.

And so there I was, right, and there’s Norm [the Roadman, the head priest,] going on really loud, ’cause I have these painted shirts I paint, and he says, "You know, I think she thinks she’s a clown. I think we’ve got a clown with us. Maybe one of those...Hopis." They put each other down with their humour and they take your whole ego away. They want to take your ego away because once they take away your ego then you are open to be transformed and transcend into the higher realm. But you can not enter the higher realm with an ego. And so I let them take away my ego....They joked about it. A person who was proud would have gotten a little bit upset and said, "Well, just wait a minute" or become defensive. I said nothing. I just laughed and I acted like I never heard it, and it didn’t bother me. So here, they’re making fun of me, and he kept on repeating it through the whole night to all the guys. He’d say, "She’s a clown, she’s a clown," because of the way my shirt was painted. And I let him get away with it. I kinda laughed and I thought, "OK, these guys think I’m funny, eh?"...
Getting back to this humour thing, they kidded everybody else too, you see, they joke with each other, and they poke fun at each other....You humble a person, right, but then at the same time, if they tell a funny story...if you’re in the right sort of consciousness...and especially with the peyote that opens your mind...then you really learn a lot....

They poke fun at everything they do and they poke fun at themselves...[and] I found out that it was a way--like little kids say, "Include me, include me because I want to be loved and I want to be one of you guys"--and it’s a way of loving you. If they say nothing about you that’s the greatest insult, but [if] they talked about you openly you obviously have made some impact on their minds. And the fact that they’re including you in their humour--'cause we were totally outsiders--they are welcoming you. They have all done peyote before, they all know each other, they’re all old buddies from the old school days.

There was one little girl and there was [my friend,] Ramona and myself. And she [Ramona?] had done peyote before and she’d been raised in that tradition. See, these Indians [never] had to be educated as to how to be an Indian. They always were Indian. [It was] never beaten out of them. They told the missionaries to go fly a kite. They held on tenaciously...to their belief system, and would not give up their belief system and...go believe that the Catholics or the Mormons were better. They just looked at these guys,...and maybe through their humour had this coded language that those guys couldn’t understand. And that’s what held them together.

What happens with the humour...and it’s a camouflage too...is the fact that they hide behind it. They can trivialize something that’s very important....I think they used humour to find out about me and to find out what kind of personality I was. Then they found out, "Hey, she’s okay, she’s pretty...cool, she’s cool, she’s with it." I used to be a very vain and very proud person and...I think after last summer I gave that up.

* * *

For a sampling of humorous anecdotes regularly told over breakfast following ceremonies like that attended by Poitras, see James H. Howard, "Peyote Jokes," in the Journal of American Folklore, 1962(75): 10-14. A "genre of humour" unto itself, such jokes depend on familiarity with the peyote ritual and thus, "serve to bind together those whose knowledge makes the circumstances of the joke intelligible."
APPENDIX 7: THE COWBOY/INDIAN SHOW REVIEW EXCERPTS

Gerald McMaster’s exhibition of paintings, The cowboy/Indian Show, ran from February-April 1991 at the McMichael Canadian Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, then travelled to other venues.

In Now Magazine Deirdre Hanna (1991, n.p.) wrote

Gerald McMaster’s deft The cowboy/Indian Show plays on Hollywood stereotypes of Plains Indians to bring home the skewed justice and racism at the root of Canada’s broken treaties and unsettled land claims....The lush surfaces of his vibrantly coloured and deceptively humorous, text-laden paintings are at once potent and appealing....Visual one-liners...resonate with multiple meanings.

In The Toronto Star Christopher Hume (1991: D14) said

Given the situation in Canada, it’s amazing Gerald McMaster can find anything to laugh about. A Plains Cree born in North Battleford, Sask., McMaster is an artist/curator/writer whose paintings confront the grim reality of native life yet burst with all sorts of good humor and sly jokes. ...Some people--me included--might think that odd, but perhaps he’s right. "There are enough angry artists out there," McMaster says. "But who listens to angry people? I feel comfortable with humor as an alternative strategy."... McMaster draws from mass media sources with which we’re all endlessly familiar. But he filters them through his own sensibilities. Like many people who find themselves strangers in their own home, he wants to change the world. This show is another small step in that direction.

And in the Ottawa Citizen, Nancy Beale (1991: D7) stated,

Gerald McMaster knows how to throw a comic curve. In The cowboy/Indian Show...he plays with words, making puns and caricatures of stereotypes of cowboys and Indians. But his jokes always have a serious twist....McMaster, who grew up on Red Pheasant Reserve near Battleford, Sask, gives a lot back to his culture in this show. He takes his art into a hybrid form--part comic book caricature, part high art concerned with finely worked surfaces, and part evolution of language. Each painting has a punch line dependent on the same sense of discovery found in unlocking the visual logic of an oriental ideogram....There is a sense in this show that McMaster is a public artist writing on the wall, of graffiti raising questions about the status quo.
APPENDIX 8: REBECCA BELMORE’S TRUE GRIT (A SOUVENIR)

Excerpt from an interview with Rebecca Belmore, (February 25, 1991, Toronto, Ontario), in which the Ojibwa artist discusses the making of True Grit (A Souvenir), her self-portrait as a giant souvenir cushion—"looking like a...cross between a linebacker and Michael Jackson!"

I had quit [the Ontario College of Art] and gone back to Thunder Bay, and I think I did that in '87 or '88,...and at that time there was this big discussion going on in Ontario--specifically the Ontario Arts Council--where people were freaking out because there was a lack of representation by people of colour on jury panels, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, and [from] the regions as well. The regions were complaining that the centralized OCA-Toronto stronghold was ignoring the regions. So people were freaking out--artists of colour, women, etcetera--about who’s getting the money. So it was becoming a big discussion.

So, I was working in Thunder Bay and...suddenly I was sort of sucked out of the north and brought down to Toronto to sit on juries and do this and that kind of thing. And I couldn’t understand why, because I was just out of school and relatively inexperienced and not very well informed--very naive, actually, when I think back to it now. And basically, I think I was being used because I’m the most politically correct thing to put on a jury--a Native woman artist from one of the regions. "Perfect, there she is!--to be paraded, and to cover their asses basically. So I was angered by that. I was really pissed off when I realized what had happened to me. So, as a result, I made this cushion...thinking, well, the next time (laughs) they need me I’ll just send this along. (laughs)...

I was pissed off about being a token Native artist, so this piece to me is a comment about myself--questioning myself as a maker of objects, as a maker of commodity, as a maker of products. As an artist you make things. Is it for sale? And what’s the price on it? And also, [I was] using myself, as a Native artist, as a commodity.

I fashioned it after souvenir cushions, like you see [of] Niagara Falls or...Mounted Police. So in a sense, I was using myself as an object to be used to represent something, for example, when I was sitting on those juries etcetera. Or whenever [I] get invited to something, usually it’s a token position.
[And] I do see myself as a football player. (laughs) I was so angered by [the tokenism] that I felt that it's a mean and ugly world out there, and it's often times not upfront with you about what [people are] really doing, and you've got to be tough to go out there and survive all the madness and try to figure it out. [You have to] come up with some...[way] to make sense of everything. So that's why I'm projecting this image of this tough, tough [guy]...That's how I dress--cowboy boots (laughs) and a football sweater. That's my personality. I wear big boots that make lots of noise because...I just dig it!...So that image is a really hard, kind of angry picture of me I think.

And then [there's] the whole thing of it being this goofy soft cushion. So it's really quite harmless. It can project a tough image but really I'm a pussycat. (laughs) But--I guess it's the whole thing that I've learned--you have to be ready. You can't let your guard down because you gotta be careful in the political art arena. I could go beat somebody up with that [cushion] and I wouldn't hurt them. I could knock them over. It's got the idea of a pillow fight....

I think the humour in my work has really allowed me to slip into places where, possibly, had my work been of a different sort, maybe I wouldn't be getting exhibitions or bla bla bla. Or maybe I wouldn't be invited to sit on panels. (laughs) Then I'd have nothing to worry about! What's my problem?

(continued)...
ARTIST'S STATEMENT


TRUE GRIT (A SOUVENIR)

What began as a quilt-cube, with an intricately patterned beautiful surface— to be physically entered and explored by one person at a time— became a 5'10" x 6'1" souvenir pillow, complete with decorative fringe.

I used myself as the central figure, the northern motif, the native Indian as marketable commodity, the artist as product. The souvenir is: "Rebecca Belmore, Ojibway Performance Artist" "Rebecca Belmore, (you fill in the blank)." I am projecting an image in True Grit—the artist/souvenir is strong, free and tough. You have to be to take up a front line position. But no matter how tough you are, or how tough you project—you never win.

I could knock someone out cold with True Grit.

Every town up north has a gift shop. When I was growing up in Upsalla I would go into the local tourist store and see all these "things" with Native Indian people in them, on them, hanging from them. I wondered where all these things came from... who makes these things? I knew people in Upsalla weren’t making keychains out of plastic chiefs’ heads and totem poles...

I found a china gum-saver in Keskus Mall last weekend. It’s a little plate for storing chewed gum temporarily. A one-inch high female figure (in "Native" costume) stands on the edge of the plate, guarding the yet-to-be-chewed wad of gum. 99c price tag, on sale.

There are a lot of souvenirs in the north.
APPENDIX 9: REBECCA BELMORE'S SONG/PERFORMANCE: (I'M A) HIGH-TECH TEEPEE TRAUMA MAMA

(I'm A) High-Tech Teepee Trauma Mama


(Chorus)
I'm a high-tech teepee trauma mama,
a high-tech teepee trauma mama.
Plastic replica of Mother Earth
Plastic replica of Mother Earth.

Souvenir seeker,
you may think you can buy me--cheap!
Plastic woman
Long black hair.
Shy woman.
Silent. WHOOP!

(Chorus)

Souvenir seeker,
hang me from your keychain.
Watch, while I dangle in distress.
Fe-e-e-e like you know our way.
Come on! Let's walk.

(Chorus)

I am not, I repeat
I am not, an American movie.
Nor am I related to Running Bear, yaah!
I come from a place, yaah!
Somewhere just north of here.
I bet you met an Indian who came from there, once!
Am I right? WHOOP!

(Chorus)

Souvenir seeker,
I know you are not a bad person
Free me from this plastic,
Come on, let's talk!
Trinkets may have bought our past,
but now our eyes are open.
We can see a long way,
very far ahead.
Come on, souvenir seeker.
Free me from this plastic!

(Chorus)

HOWUH!

* * *

Excerpt from an interview with Rebecca Belmore, February 25, 1991, Toronto, Ontario, in which the Ojibway artist discusses the evolution of the song (and performance), I’m a High Tech Teepee Trauma Mama.

That piece, the original I’m a High-Tech Teepee Trauma Mama, that performance, I did originally at [The Ontario College of Art] in first year where in 3D class we were given self-image [as a project]. We had to present who we were or who we thought we were, so I sort of did the stereotypical environment with...a totem pole, which is obviously not Ojibway...and I put myself in it and I did a dance where I mixed traditional music with songs from the seventies like Running Bear....There was a ghetto blaster, a television set, and I took imagery from the movie, Little Big Man--where they annihilate the village, where there’s lots of screaming, shooting women and burning tipis and shooting kids, and I re-edited it so that each woman dies about nine times. So it’s graphically violent. Graphic violence against Native women taken out of the context of the film is even more graphic. It’s really gross. [In a photograph of the performance taken at the time] you can see everybody’s looking at the TV instead of me. And so the whole performance piece is just a dance where the ghetto blaster dictates how I dance. So I did that at OCA.

And then when I quit [college] and I went home [to Thunder Bay,] trying to figure out what the hell I was going to do with my life, with this "art" stuff, I did it in my studio for an audience--the same performance piece. And for me, the whole experience of finally taking my plastic teepee home, taking my stereotyped environment, my self-image, basically, the interrogation of who am I, after being at art school, was such a...because my family was sort of coming down on me ‘cause I quit school. They were upset that I quit ‘cause the one who pushed on to post-secondary [education], she quits, she’s come home. And I was afraid that they would be really disappointed in me. So when I did the performance piece, how I felt afterwards was so elated ‘cause I knew that I had done the right thing. Coming home to perform for a Native audience is what I needed to do. I needed that criticism from the community: "They will either validate my work or they’ll tell
me I'm full of shit." And that whole sense of feeling that I [had] come to the right place. Coming home was a good thing 'cause I used to think that I wanted to go to New York City, just like everybody else in Toronto. The art system sort of teaches you that the way up is to New York. (laughs) But, anyways,...with that performance, having done it here in Toronto at school, finally taking it home and having the audience understand or relate to the piece was amazing for me.

And so I...tried to think of myself and what I was trying to do with my work, etcetera, and that's when I came up with the title for the piece, I'm a High-Tech Teepee Trauma Mama, 'cause it has the TV and the ghetto blaster and it has the traumatic deaths of the women on the television screen. And so the song is based in that piece....The song is sort of a culmination of my own self. It's like an Artist's Statement,...I call it my anthem, and it basically sums up where I get my strength and where I think I'm headed--my position as an individual in society....

I wrote it for [a] workshop thing we did in Thunder Bay, and I wrote it [with the band, Seventh Fire,] the day before we had to perform it in public. So it was really raw and it was really new. I had to keep the paper up there with me 'cause I didn't know the words. But it was fun for me because a couple of friends of mine went next door to Mike's Milk during the performance or shortly after the performance--and there were young teenage girls in Mike's Milk, young Native girls--and the woman said, "You should have heard them, Rebecca, they were [singing,] 'I'm a High Tech...'" (laughs)...the young women. So that made me feel like, "That's great! That's what it's about. That's what it's for."

* * *

Reflecting on her performance with Seventh Fire a few days earlier at the Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec, Belmore said,

I thought it was the perfect place to do the song--the museum. It was meant for that stage. (laughs) It's funny 'cause I think that rather than being an actress or getting into acting I'd rather get into music, even though I don't know how to play anything and I don't know what "four bars" means. I don't understand that but I think I would love to be able to...[do]...rock videos. (laughs) Even before going to art school I always thought, "I wish I knew how to play something. I should learn how to play the guitar. I should learn how to do this 'cause I'd rather sing." Even though I can't sing very well...I always romanticize that whole rock image (laughs)--rock and roller.
APPENDIX 10: REBECCA BELMORE’S STORY OF CRAZY OLD WOMAN CHILD


I did a site-specific piece for the friendship centre in Thunder Bay, and it was on talent night at Satellite House Friendship Centre, which is more of a cultural place for things to happen. Basically, it’s just a hall and they have talent night and I was invited to come and perform. And talent night—there’s like twenty-five people sign up and you have to wait in line and do your thing. So, there’s everything from heavy metal air bands to finishing off with a country and western band, a 704 [?] band.

And what was happening at the time—‘cause I was living in Thunder Bay so I was in touch with what was going on and it’s a small town so you hear things—but what was happening is the band was—it was a bunch of men, macho guys with their guitars (laughs)—and what they were doing is they were starting to—because they’d been the house band for six months and they were getting tired of people who can’t sing coming up and singing—so they were trying to discourage people from coming up, especially women, ’cause they were being sexist. They were saying things like, "If you come up, well, we’ll let you come up if you’ll go out with me." That kind of thing was going on. (laughs) So, this thing was happening and I was aware of it so I figured, okay you guys, I’m going to come and I’m going to perform and I’m going to do something. And they’re a country band and they always have cowboy hats and cowboy boots (laughs)—they’re funny, they’re funny guys. So what I did is I made this double sided costume: I was like a washer woman, like a cleaning lady on one side, which was the real me, and on the back I created this costume which was a voluptuous country and western star with this corset and these large, large breasts and it was really tight. And then I had a mask which I bought at Kresge’s, and it was just a white woman—a Marilyn Monroe-type, red flaming hair. So I had this hat on which was basically a kerchief on this [one] side and on the other side was this voluptuous woman and it was all sewn together. And...I recorded Tammy Wynette’s song, Stand By Your Man, (laughs) so I had to demand that the band get off the stage: "Get off the stage, I’m going up. It’s my turn." So I had to fight my way up. So finally I get up, and they take their time putting down their instruments and getting off. So I waited until they were all gone and I had a little cassette deck and so I told my sister, "Hit it!" (laughs) So she hits the button and I was backwards and it’s really funny—it was hilarious because my movements are really weird. So it’s the voluptuous woman doing this Las Vegas dance, Stand By Your Man, and then...after everybody’s hooting and hollering...
and whistling and the audience is carrying on, I turn around --and I have a mop close by...and there’s a bucket too--and I turn around and I immediately start washing the floor (laughs) up by their guitars and cleaning the stage. And the men were ...mad at me because I was making fun of this whole country and western...sexism.

And...I proceeded to tell a story from the point of view of the Native cleaning woman. And it’s the story of two women, but the Native woman is talking about the white woman who is her neighbour and she lives on the hill. And she’s like this alcoholic woman who has a husband who adores her and he works himself to death and he dies of a heart attack. And so she sort of takes off and the white woman manipulates the Native woman into cleaning her house and doing all her chores ‘cause she’s not capable of doing housework. She can’t function. She’s like a child. And so the Native woman is talking about their relationship, their friendship. And the Native woman has nine kids and she’s been abandoned by her husband. She has a black eye and so it’s like two stories of two different women. And it’s about love basically, but there’s a lot of irony in the story. The performance is called Crazy Old Woman Child, which is how the Native woman describes the white woman: "She’s a crazy old woman child, and every time I think of her I can still see her, ‘cause she’s always drunk in her house and dancing away to country and western tunes."

(laughs) So I can still see her, and then I turn around again and I finish off the performance by dancing again (laughs and sings) "Stand by..." (laughs) A lot of hip swinging and... it’s pretty funny. The women really enjoyed it. The women understood what I was saying, whereas I think the men...were trying to not open up to the story or what I was trying to get at. But the women were like, (clapping) "Thanks!" (laughs)
RONALD J. NOGANOSH

Born May 3, 1949, Magnetawan Indian Reserve
Tribal Affiliation - Ojibway/Algonquin

I am according to the Government of Canada, a real INDIAN. The number that has been assigned to me is B047957 and my band number is 99. This has helped me to find my place in society, for without this information, I would, in all probability not know that I was an Indian, says the Government.

I spent my youth on the Shawnaga Indian Reservation, attending various and sundry schools, after which I was pronounced CIVILIZED.

Upon completing a Graphic Design course in Toronto in 1980, I was officially declared an ARTIST, and let loose upon an unsuspecting world. Thereafter I obtained gainful employment in diverse occupations ranging from car washer to screen washer and discovered that jobs for CIVILIZED INDIAN ARTISTS are not profuse.

During this time, caught up in the mystique of being a CIVILIZED INDIAN ARTIST, I began making prints of a realistic nature and this approach continues to this day.

I entered the Fine Arts Program at the University of Ottawa and began teaching art at the C.E.G.E.P. de l’Outaouais in Hull, Québec. At the university I began to explore the political, economic, ecological and social issues which confront people in their everyday lives, through the medium of sculpture, using found objects. Perhaps, I am becoming a MYSTICAL CIVILIZED INDIAN ARTIST...say the reviewers. Their pronouncements have led to exhibitions in Ottawa, Hull, Toronto, Brantford, New York, Tokyo and Munich. My work has been acquired by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and by several private collectors.

Someday, I may even be a RICH MYSTICAL CIVILIZED INDIAN ARTIST.
APPENDIX 12: JOANE CARDINAL-SCHUBERT'S POEM, OH CANADA.
Published in Whetstone, Spring, 1987, p. 28.

oh Canada

Not so many
months ago
I applied

To the Canada Council
Arts B Grant

To study
Canadian Painter
Emily Carr.

Wanted to use her as
my mentor
Post Humously.

Seemed like a good idea --
The RCA used her
Posthumously --
Even awarded her
An accolade.

Good painting
they said
the jury
said.

Loved your Warshirts.
(they shortlisted me)

But...
they said
the jury said

We were worried
if you went to
B.C.
You might end up
painting the totems
Red

What of it
I thought
It is art historical.

now I know better
Next time
I will apply to
go to visit
the pyramids....

oh Canada
"Anthropologitis,

Is what the men got accused of having by their girlfriends, wives and sisters.

"Oh, she had honey-colored hair and long, white legs which were ever eager to clutch a man in need. She couldn’t help herself, she loved her ‘informants,’ each and every one without prejudice.

"She was like having a nice juicy melon in the middle of winter, or like hearing the sweet downriver flute music for the first time.

"But as they say in college: alas and alack, she had one fatal flaw: she re-interpreted all of the information she received to fit into her own thesis. Yes, she really wanted that doctorate.

"So of course the women of the village sent a runner to fetch me. And not being one to turn down a challenge, I led the runner a merry backtrack.

"One night of love became three and four. Not to be bragging, but, what woman can resist Coyote with such a skilled love probe?

"So by the time I was ready to head out of there, so was she. I led her here and there in the mountains and desert, all the while re-programming her. I showed her the real meaning of existence.

"She may never get her doctorate, but what’s wrong with Coyote’s Master of Fine Love Degree?

"So, since this is my first visit to your village, I thought I’d let you men know that if you ever have any woman problems, I can probably help you solve it."

"Coyote, we think you’re full of shit!" said one.

"Yes, many people think that. We’re all entitled to our own opinions, aren’t we?"
APPENDIX 14: A NAVAJO TRIPLE PUN


In the Preface to this slim volume the authors write

The subtlety and beauty of the Navajo language is brought to bear upon a great variety of situations with an alchemy that renders them startlingly humorous. One story in the collection evolves into a fantastic, tri-dimensional pun, utilizing double plays on three words and on color as applied to both horses and monetary designations.

The following is their exegesis of this triple pun

Translation of Text 7 (pp. 26-27)

Some small children were playing by the roadside. A man came along on horseback. He said to (asked) the children: "Three of my horses have run away. One is spotted, another is yellow and the other is blue (gray). Have you seen them?"

A little boy spoke up: "The spotted one fell over. The yellow one and the blue one were probably sold for fifteen cents."

Explanation of text

This story is a display of immensely clever punning upon three Navajo words. The joke features a triple play on words involving color, quality and monetary value applied to horses. The three words with double meaning are:

1) yistl'in - spotted, a stack
2) litso - yellow, a nickle
3) dootl'izh - blue, a dime

The triple entendre comes about by the fact that a stack falls over (reference to the spotted horse), that the colors yellow and blue are applied not only to horses but have monetary values, as well, and that the sum of a dime and a nickle is fifteen cents—all of which makes the three lost horses seem a worthless lot.
APPENDIX 15: CATHARSIS AND CREATIVITY IN SHELLEY NIRO’S PAINTING, THE WAITRESS.

Excerpt from a conversation with Shelley Niro, February 10, 1991, at the NIROQUOIS GALLERY, Brantford, Ontario, in which the Mohawk artist discusses the experience that prompted her to paint The Waitress.

I think [the painting] was done out of anger. I think that was the basic inspiration. But I’m trying to combat some kind of anger by not any kind of physical means but combat it with intellectual means. [The anger] comes from being a visible minority and subconsciously aware that other people see you that way, and being treated a little bit differently. I don’t know if it’s imaginary or if it’s there....Most of the time I can just let it go. I can just ignore it and let it pass over me without giving it too much thought. But this time I thought, "I’m really going to think about this and really dig my teeth into it and hold onto this anger for a while and taste it--get the taste of it in my mouth." I thought, "Hmmm, I’m going to get this woman back!" (laughs)

The woman,...I just remember going into a store and the woman being really...not aggressive, but treating me in such a way that she couldn’t look at me in the face, and just the way she would hand me things, like very quickly....I’m not the type to go around saying, "Well, she doesn’t like me ‘cause I’m Indian!" (laughs) But this time I thought, "Well, I’m going to use it—even if she doesn’t mean it that way I’m going to take it and use it." So I started working on this painting and I was pretty angry. I didn’t rationalize it into being a light-hearted [piece]. I was emotionally upset. But then I thought, "Hmmm, there must be something you can do with this kind of feeling. There must be something you can creatively do and express yourself and...get back at this person." (laughs)

I sort of had her under my arm. (laughs while feigning a headlock) I was arm wrestling this woman in my head. So then I started working on this painting and I started thinking to myself, "Why is she like this? Is it because of all these things you read in the paper about Native people being on welfare--they’re taking all this money from Canadian people." Because the Canadian people are always saying, "Indians get everything for nothing." Because we work quite hard and what we have is what we deserve--and I worked as a waitress before (laughs) many times. And so I started thinking, "Well, a lot of people don’t really have the right to put these kind of accusations on Native people because they do work hard." So, again, I put myself in the role as a waitress and I used a friend as a model for the person I’m serving. She was this white woman.
In the store she was an older woman, maybe fifty-five, so she had this staunch look about her—"middle class white society." (laughs) She just had it written right there in her face! As I started painting, the painting started getting really fun: "I'm going to be a working woman." And again, the working woman role sort of comes back—I don't know if it's a feminist thing or what—but it comes back to the point [that]...the women do take charge, and you have to be pretty aggressive when you're in society and you have to make a stand. So in the painting I have me working and a bit of terror going on. (laughs)...

At the time, I was a bit shy of having models so I thought I'd just use a photograph [of my friend] and work from that....I said, "Now look really scared!" (laughs) She said, "Like this?" I said, "Yeah." I sort of wanted the feeling that I was a bit of a terrorist. Here I am with this glass of wine. It's a bit of a terrorist act I think. You can interpret the wine as blood or whatever else you want to see it as. (laughs) ...You can see it as almost a religious thing too--the spilling of wine--it could come into a communion thing. It's in any...Chinese restaurant! (laughs) That's where I worked--it was a Chinese restaurant. That's why the use of the yellow as well, 'cause they seem to use a lot of red and yellow....So I think I was being a bit of a terrorist here, but I wanted to be a terrorist, again, in an intellectual way, not necessarily [in] a physical or wrecking-the-place type of way. I think I just wanted to clash two different things together--that's where [the goblet] came from.

And then...I was thinking of...this woman...standing there. She was so obviously unfriendly to me. And then I started thinking, "Well, people don't have to be that way. There's nothing for them to say they have the right to act this way." And then again, being a Native person, you think of everything that's gone--like the language, the culture, although it's starting to pick up again. And it's a question of keeping, holding onto everything. Some of the culture's gone. Some things we'll never get back. Like the burning False Faces [in the painting]--once they're ashes you'll never see them again. The False Face is a pretty predominant symbol in Iroquois society, and we've always had these Faces around us. Even if we don't go to the Longhouse they're still always part of something....I wanted a background that adds strength to the character in the painting. I hope that [the faces are] in support of this person—that the strength from them comes down through [her] arm. That's how I look at it. It's sort of directed wrath. (laughing and mimicking an animal roar) Maybe I should have had little electricities coming out of her. Bzzzz!!! But after I finished this painting all those
feelings of antagonism or revenge went away. After I finished it I was quite happy that I felt that way. (laughs)

[As for the image of Prime Minister Mulroney and his wife, Mila,] I figured they want to be the representative[s] of all Canadians. They want to be what is the most "Canadian,"... they are the Canadians. And again, going back to the statements [I made] that Canadians see Native people as freeloaders or as bums or people that are taking things from Canadian people, they don’t really appreciate what Native people have given up—not given up, but have lost. At the same time, they don’t care. They’re just having a great time. So that’s why they’re there. [The Iroquois beadwork designs on the floor are meant] to show that some things might be gone, but still there’s some things that we’re...standing on [that] continue. And from there things will grow. Other things will happen.

When I started doing [the painting] I was doing it for myself, and then when I finished it, it kind of scared me because of the False Faces. People are a little bit leery, like, "Who do you think you are, [thinking] you can put a False Face in a painting?"—that sort of thing. I was not really afraid. I didn’t want to hurt anybody’s feelings with this painting, especially Iroquois people, so I was a little bit hesitant about that. [But] they liked it. They’re a little bit confused by the imagery, like, "What is going on?!” (laughs) They’re intrigued by it. But nobody’s ever come up to me and said, "How dare you!” or "This is not your place.” That’s what I was sort of expecting.

I think it’s kind of a "twisted" picture so people[‘s]...heads go kind of "woinnng!!" (laughs) There’s Mila and Brian in the back having a good time and the customer is so fearful and the waitress is [gesturing], "Up yours!" (laughs) There’s so many things going on and it’s not so obvious....If it’s... obvious, and people can say, "Well, this is what’s happening," then they can be a little more straightforward with their remarks....[The painting] is just an expression of myself and how I felt and how I could win a tiny battle within myself ...’cause I’m such a wimp at heart. (laughs) It’s just an expression of how I felt and how I use those feelings instead of whining and saying, "Poor us." I guess I wanted to be in a position of power in this painting.
APPENDIX 16: CARL BEAM ON THE PRODUCTION OF EARTHENWARE BOWLS

Excerpted from an interview with the artist, February, 1991, Peterborough, Ontario.

I was influenced by the [ancient] southwestern Mimbres bowls—the depiction of birds and mundane scenes. When I was in the southwest I became good at recognizing southwestern pottery styles. Mimbres expert J.J. Brody was astounded by my work. I found the bowl to be a good shape to paint on—for images of a skull or an eagle. The Mimbres created a record of daily life: initiation, beheading, shamanistic activities. Why did they stop? Contemporary pottery is tourist-oriented. It's precise, so tight—it should look "nice." Nowadays people won't warp a bowl. The original pots were more artistic than technical. In the Four Corners area they used looser lines in the decoration. The ancient bowls are "ghosts of the past." We don't have the perception of time they had when they dealt with their craft. It's hard to think of original ideas to put inside bowls. We're making these things in the wrong time frame. The whole function was aesthetic experimentation.

We can't get the space back of informality of line, of craft. The emphasis in the Indian mind is not on detail—wabi—but on craft. It's important to give something an informal look. By informalizing it, it looks like it belongs in the world not in a museum. They weren't thinking about perfection. We can't do it. Nor should we. "Perfection" was no good.

The Albert Einstein [portrait] bowl that I entered in a show at the Heard Museum received an Honourable Mention. It was egg shaped, loose, ghostly. It had a lot of power.

Much contemporary pottery has degenerated into kitsch. Others who've tried painting on bowls haven't taken their cue from the structure of the bowl. A bowl is "a self-contained infinity masquerading as a bowl." It offers more possibilities than a square canvas.

Brody argued that an "aesthetic moment" was possible for the Mimbres and Anasazi people. Bowls were like shaped canvases—they were made to be looked at and admired. The only way to make sense of the many Mimbres bowls found with holes broken through the bottom is on a spiritual basis. They probably told a personal story and were made for individuals. There are no two the same. The bowl is still unsurpassed as a working medium. Why go from a bowl to a flat format? A bowl is an offering to Mother Earth.
I spent two years working with the "Shaman family" image. The central figure is a very benign shaman—it’s like meeting your grandfather.

Like the Mimbres, my bowls are "anecdotal"—they present little stories in contemporary time. If I’ve done anything important in the ‘70s and ‘80s the bowls will be an important part. They offer mute testimony. They’re lasting.

Looking back from the future, people may see the bowls as an idiosyncratic response [and say]

This was his ‘Indian art’—uniquely Native at the time, reflecting a real love of the art of indigenous clays. He had a lot of fun with it. It was the only medium, when working with it, that took him back in time. It felt more ‘Native’ than working on canvas or etching. It was a nostalgic look back at the craft/art occurrence that didn’t owe itself to high tech. It was very humane low tech in an increasingly high tech world.

The craft kinship with the past is not apparent in oils and other things.

I experimented with processes and became aware of the possibilities. It’s too bad there aren’t more traditional crafts being done. It’s a real loss. I’m having a lot of fun with this. Pottery offers an earth-time kinship with the past. It could be something to affect contemporary art practice, although I haven’t considered how.

On the technically perfect replicas of historic Native craftwork by people like Gordon "Sixpipe" Innis: The style is "real Nazi."
APPENDIX 17: GERALD McMASTER’S COMMENTARY ON THE PAINTING, GLASNOST.

Excerpted from an interview with the artist in October, 1990, for The cowboy/Indian Show exhibition catalogue. See Ryan 1991: 47.

The Red Man and the White Man—the two represent a power struggle. The equation that is presented by the notion of "cowboy and Indian" you can see faintly at the top—"cowboy" does not equal "Indian." I painted over it. It’s barely discernible. Whether it’s in the language, whether it’s in the notion of how we see land, the Native person has never really had the choice of calling the shots. It’s been the government.

"Certain lands will be called reservations and they will be for Indians." Of course, the cowboys have this free range of land they can buy and keep adding on to called ranches. You cannot do that with reservations. It’s one plot. That’s it. Native people can’t buy land and keep adding on to it and call it their reservation. So there are two different notions of land here.

There is the notion of the Department of Indian Affairs, which is a government for Indian people, and then this other notion that Indian people are talking about a lot today, "Indian government." So, you have one government governing Indians and another one which is Indians governing themselves. Again, there’s an inequity of ideas here. Indian Affairs is still controlling the pot. They’re still controlling how much money an Indian government would get. There will always be a Department of Indian Affairs.

And then there is the notion of "land claims." I think that Indian people would like to feel that they could get land claims and sovereignty, but that’s not the case. "We can give you land but we’re not giving you sovereignty, because sovereignty means this, this and this. If you give Indians sovereignty then that means giving them nationhood. We can’t have that."

Finally the idea of "glasnost" seemed like a good idea, but was it ever really a good idea? To me it means "freedom." I read it as "freedom" but we’re never really free. Freedom has its price. It seems to be fired by economics. We’re always looking for words to express some idea. You could easily find an Indian word, but here is a word that’s been used in a particular context. Is that the only context in which that idea can be used?
The other interesting thing about "glasnost" is that it's now the government talking about economic freedoms. Yet, there are still a lot of problems...there's still no food...there's still no freedom. Sure, things are changing but there must be some kind of double-talk going on here. When a group in power is saying these things there's got to be some other angle to this. There's got to be some controlling factor. There's no shift in power because the power remains at the top, or remains rooted within a certain group of people. They're not shifting power at all. What's the double-talk? What's actually being said in all this?
APPENDIX 18: CHAPTER HEADING QUOTATIONS

       Barbara Babcock 1984: 111.
       Thomas King 1991: G16.

Pg. 6  Jane Ash Poitras, personal interview, October 1990.

Pg. 50 N. Scott Momaday, Indian Voices, n.d., n. pag.,
       epigraph in Vizenor 1978.

Pg. 95 Philbert Bono, in the 1988 film Powwow Highway,
       directed by Jonathan Wacks.

Pg. 140 Thomas King, Coyote Sees the Prime Minister, in

Pg. 193 George Longfish and Joan Randall, in Bivins 1983:
        n. pag.
        Sharon Manybeads Bowers, in Barreca, ed. 1992:
        141.

Pg. 218 Gerald McMaster, personal interview, October 1990,
        In Ryan 1991: 33
        Gerald McMaster, poster dedication, on the
        occasion of the opening of The cowboy/Indian Show
        exhibition, McMichael Canadian Collection,

Pg. 221 Vine Deloria Jr., 1969: 81.
        Thomas King 1993a: 10.
APPENDIX 19: OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 4

- Changing Guards
- RCMPT, W.F.
- In His Hands
- Trick or Treaty
- Peace/Legacy
- Force Blanket Policy
- Smallpox
- Vancouver Agreement
- Miami
- Semi-Monetary
- Chronic
- Convetstion
- Forced Ideas
- Principal
- Oka
- Chief Office
- Par
- Par for Course
- Par
- Par
- Par
- Par
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexandrian, Sarane

An Offended Indian
1985 Letter to the Editor, Tekawennake, May 29.

Anderson, Mike
1990 Hard and Soft: Collaborative Works by Ottawa Artists Viviane Gray and Ron Noganosh. ARTSCRAFT, Spring, pp. 16-17.

Ansen, David

Apte, Mahadev

Archuleta, Margaret L.

Archuleta, Margaret and Renard Strickland

Atkins, Robert

Babcock, Barbara A.
Baker, Marie Annharte  

Banes, Sally  

Ballinger, Franchot  

Barbeau, Marius  

Barreca, Regina, ed.  

Barthes, Roland  

Basso, Keith  

Bataille, Gretchen M. and Charles Silet, eds.  

Beal, Bob and Rod Macleod  
Beale, Nancy

Beam, Carl
1991 Personal interview, February 13-14, Peterborough, Ontario.
1991a Personal communication, October 3.
1991b Personal interview, October 16, Peterborough, Ontario.

Beam, Carl and Shelagh Young

Beauchamp, Elizabeth

Belmore, Rebecca
1988 Artist's Statement. See *Jane Sew Strontium* (An Exhibition of Non-Traditional Quilts Dedicated to Joyce Wieland), Definitely Superior Gallery, Thunder Bay.
1991a Personal interview, October 7, Toronto, Ontario.

Berkhofer, Robert F. Jr.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Pages/Volume</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Personal interview, November 5, 7, Regina, Saskatchewan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bright, William

Brody, J.J.

Brown, Dee

Brown, Joseph Epps

Bruchac, Joseph
1987 *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets*. Tucson: Sun Tracks/University of Arizona Press.

Burden, Robert

Burke, Kenneth

Camp, Charles, ed.

Cardinal-Schubert, Joane

1991 Personal interview, November 12, 13, Calgary, Alberta.

Carroll, David

Cheetham, Mark A. with Linda Hutcheon
Churchill, Ward

Churchill, Ward, Norbert Hill and Mary Ann Hill

Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds.

Clifton, James A., ed.

Coen, Rena Newmann

Cole, P., ed.

Collins, Curtis J.

Cooke, Katie

Cowling, Elizabeth

Cox, Bruce, Jacques Chevalier and Valda Blundell, eds.
Coyle, William, ed.

Crosby, Marcia

Culler, Jonathan

Davis, Barbara A.

Delany, Paul and George P. Landow, eds.

Deloria Jr., Vine

D’haen, Theo

Dooling, D. M.

Douglas, Mary

Douglas, Stan, ed.

Doxtator, Deborah

Duffek, Karen
Duffek, Karen and Tom Hill

Durham, Jimmie

Dyson, A.E.

Easton, Robert

Eco, Umberto

Elgin, Don D.

Ellis, Scott

Enright, D.J.

Evans-Pritchard, Deirdre

Ewers, John C.
Ewers, John

Farmer, Gary
1991 Personal interview, February 19, Ottawa, Ontario.

Fischer, Michael M. J.

Fisher, Jean

Fokkema, Douwe and Hans Bertens, eds.

Francis, Daniel

Friar, Ralph and Natasha

Frideres, James S.

Galbo, Joe

Galligan, Edward L.

Gates, David
1991 Who Was Columbus? Newsweek, Fall/Winter, Columbus Special Issue, pp. 29-31.
Gilchrist, Sylvene, producer
1995 Jane Ash Poitras: A Portrait in the First Person, 30 min. television program, Sleeping Giant Productions in assoc. with BRAVO! TV. Originals in Art series, Moses Znaimer, Executive Producer.

Goble, Paul

Gray, Viviane

Graybill, Florence Curtis and Victor Boesen

Green, Rayna

Greer, Sandy

Gritton, Joy

Halpin, Marjorie

Hanna, Deirdre

Harper, Vern  
1991 Personal interview, October 4, Scarborough, Ontario.

Hassrick, Royal B.  

Highway, Tomson  
1988a Television interview with Phyllis Wilson. Thompson, Manitoba: Native Communications Inc.  

Hilbert, Vi  

Hill, Tom  
1985 Letter to the Editor, Tekawennake, June 5.  
1991a Personal interview, October 1, Brantford, Ontario.

Hill, Rick  

Hill, W.W., and Dorothy W. Hill  

Hirschfelder, Arlene B.  
Hoffmann, Gerhard, ed.  

Hodge, Robert and Gunther Kress  

Holden, Madronna  

Holm, Bill  

Holm, Bill and George Irving Quimby  

Holy Bible, The  

Houle, Robert  

Houle, Robert, with Clara Hargittay  

Howard, James H.  

Hughte, Phil  

Huizinga, Johan  
Hume, Christopher


Hutcheon, Linda


Hutcheon, Linda, ed.

Hyers, Conrad

Hymes, Dell


Inglis, Grace
Jencks, Charles


Johnson, Samuel
1755 *Dictionary of the English Language.* Quoted in Enright, 1986.

Jonaitis, Aldona

Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore


Kierkegaard, Søren


King, Arden R.

King, Thomas

1991 *Dances With the Truth.* *The Toronto Star,* April 13, G1, G16.


Kinsella, W.P.

Koller, James and 'Gogisgi' Carroll Arnett, Steve Nemirow and Peter Blue Cloud, eds.

'Ksan, Book Builders of

Laga, Barry E.

Leiss-Mckellar, Elizabeth

Levine, Stuart and Nancy O. Lurie, eds.

Lincoln, Kenneth

Linsley, Robert

Lippard, Lucy
Lippard, Lucy R., ed.  

Littlechild, George  

Logan, Jim  
1994 Personal interview, January 26, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Lomatewama  

Longclaws, Lyle  

Longfish, George C. and Joan Randall  

Lopez, Barry  

Lucas, Phil  
1980 Images of Indians. Four Winds, Fall, pp. 69-77.

Luna, James  

Lurie, Nancy Oestrich  

Lynch, William F.  

Lyotard, Francois  
Lyman, Christopher M.
1982 The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions:
Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis.
Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

McCoy, Ron
1988 Bring in the Clowns. Native Peoples -- The Journal

McCracken, Harold
1959 George Catlin and the Old Frontier. New York:
Bonanza Books.

McDonald, Bruce, director
1994 Dance Me Outside. Feature film starring Adam Beach
and Ryan Black.

McHale, Brian
1987 Postmodern Fiction. New York: Methuen. Cited in

McLachlan, Ian
1990 Making Mizzins--Remaking History. Arts craft,
Summer, pp. 10-12.

McLuhan, Elizabeth
1984 Altered Egos: The Multimedia Work of Carl Beam,
exh. cat. Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Art Gallery.

McLuhan, Elizabeth and Tom Hill
1984 Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image
Makers. Toronto: Methuen.

McMaster, Gerald
1990 Personal interview, October 18-21, Vancouver,
British Columbia.

1991 Artist's Statement and commentaries. In Ryan,

McMaster, Gerald and Lee-Ann Martin, eds.
1992 Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives.
Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre.

MacAlloon, John J., ed.
1984 Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals
Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance.
Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human
Issues.

Maddox, Conroy
Mainprize, Gary

Makarius, Laura

Mandelbaum, David G.
1979  The Plains Cree: an Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina.

Maquet, Jaques

Maracle, Brian and Jaqueline Fry

Marcus, George E. and Michael M. J. Fischer

Marsden, Michael T. and Jack Nachbar

Martin, Lee-Ann

Mason, Tina

Matejka, Ladislav and Irwin R. Titunik, eds.

Medicine, Bea

Meeker, Joseph

Momaday, N. Scott,
Morreall, John

Moses, Daniel David
1992 Public lecture, November 10, University of British Columbia.

Moses, Daniel David and Terry Goldie, eds.

Mourning Dove (Humishuma)
1933/1990 Coyote Stores. Edited and illustrated by Heister Dean Guie with notes by L.V. McWhorter (Old Wolf) and a foreword by Chief Standing Bear. Intro. and notes to the Bison Book Edition by Jay Miller. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Mukarovsky, Jan

Nemiroff, Diana, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault

New, W.H., ed.

Nicks, Trudy

Niro, Shelley

1991a Personal interview, October 1, Brantford, Ontario.

1993 Personal communication, January 25.

Niro, Shelley and Anna Gronau
1993 It Starts With a Whisper. 26 min. 16mm. film. Brantford, Ont.: Bay of Quinte Productions.

Nochlin, Linda
Noganosh, Ron
n.d. Artist's Statement.


1991a Personal interview, February 17, Ottawa, Ontario

Norbeck, Edward and Claire R. Farrer, eds.
1977 Forms of Play of Native North Americans. 1977
New York: West.

Obomsawin, Alanis, director
1993 Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance. Feature
length documentary video. Ottawa: National Film
Board of Canada.

Obrdlik, Antonin J.
1942 "Gallows Humor"—A Sociological Phenomenon.
American Journal of Sociology 47: 709-16.

O'Connor, John E.
1980 The Hollywood Indian: Stereotypes of Native
Americans in Films. New Jersey: New Jersey State
Museum.

Olsen, Lance
1990 Circus of the Mind in Motion: Postmodernism and
the Comic Vision. Detroit: Wayne State University
Press.

Owens, Louis

1983 Humor in the Novels of James Welch. WHIM, pp. 140-
42.

Pakasaar, Helga
Phillips Gallery.

Pakes, Fraser J.
1985 Seeing with the Stereotypic Eye: The Visual Image
of the Plains Indian. Native Studies Review 1(2):
1-31.

Phillips, Ruth
1991 Personal interview, February 19, Ottawa, Ontario.
Podedworny, Carol

Poitras, Edward
1991  Personal interview, November 4, 5, 8, Regina, Saskatchewan.

Poitras, Jane Ash
1990  Personal interview, October 22, Vancouver, British Columbia.
1991  Personal interview, August 21, Vancouver, British Columbia.
1991a Personal interview, November 9, 10, Edmonton, Alberta.

Powless, Bill

Price, John A.

Quick-to-See Smith, Jaune

Quintilian

Rabinow, Paul

Radin, Paul
Reid, Bill

Ricketts, Mac Linscott

Robinson, Harry

Rodway, Allan

Rosso, Stefano

Ryan, Allan J.


Sainte-Marie, Buffy
Saussure, Ferdinand de

Scherer, Joanna Cohan with Jean Burton Walker

Schimmel, Julie

Schneider, Reisa and Garry Gottfriedson with artwork by George Littlechild and Linda Frimer

Scholder, Fritz

Scholes, Robert

Sinclair, Lister and Jack Pollock
1979 The Art of Norval Morrisseau. Toronto: Methuen.

Skeels, Dell

Slatin, John

Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson

Stedman, Raymond William

Steward, Julian H.
Sturtevant, William C.

Sturtevant, William C., general ed.

Sullivan, Lawrence

Surtees, Robert J.

Sweet, Jill D.

Sykes, J.B., ed.

Tanner, Clara Lee

Terry, Chief Saul
1990 Our Land Is Our Future. Promotional statement issued by the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs to promote the sale of David Neel’s poster, Life On the 18th Hole, August.

Thomas, Davis and Karin Ronnefeldt, eds.,

Toelken, J. Barre

Tousley, Nancy

Townsend, Mary Lee

Townsend-GaIt, Charlotte

Trachtenberg, Stanley, ed.

Trevelyan, Amelia M.

Truettner, William H., ed.

Tyler, Stephen

Valpy, Michael

Varty, Alexander

Vastokas, Joan

Venturi, Robert
Verschueren, Jef, and Marcella Bertuccelli-Papi, eds.
1987  The Pragmatic Perspective: Selected Papers from
       the 1985 International Pragmatics Conference.
       Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing
       Co.

Viola, Herman J.
1976  The Indian Legacy of Charles Bird King.
       Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Vizenor, Gerald
1978  Wordarrows: Indians and Whites in the New Fur
       Trade. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

1978/1990  Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles. Minneapolis:
           University of Minnesota Press.

1987  Follow the Trickroutes: An Interview with Gerald

       Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

1988  The Trickster of Liberty: Tribal Heirs to a Wild
       Baronage. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
       Press.

1989  Preface, A Postmodern Introduction, and Trickster
       Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games. In

1991  The Heirs of Columbus. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan
       University Press.

Vizenor, Gerald, ed.
1989  Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native
       American Literatures. Albuquerque: University of
       New Mexico Press.

Wacks, Jonathan, director
1988  Powwow Highway. Feature film based on the novel by
       David Seals, starring A Martinez and Gary Farmer.

Watson, Scott
1993  Whose Nation? Exhibition review of Land Spirit
       Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of
       Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, and Indigena:
       Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred
       Years at the Canadian Museum of Civilization,
       Hull, Quebec. Canadian Art, Spring, pp. 34-43.
Weise, Richard, director
1984 Harold of Orange. 16mm film, colour, 32 min. Produced by Diane Brennan for Film in the Cities, Minneapolis, MN, from a screenplay by Gerald Vizenor.

Wiget, Andrew, ed.

Wilde, Alan

Wilson, Alan, with Gene Dennison

Woodland Indian Cultural Educational Centre

York, Geoffrey and Loreen Pindera

Yuxweluptun, Lawrence Paul

1990a Personal interview, January 4, Vancouver, British Columbia.

1991 Personal interview, November 1, 2, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Zepp, Norman and Michael Parke-Taylor

Zolten, J. Jerome
1988 Humor and the Challenger Shuttle Disaster: Joke-Telling as a Reaction to Tragedy. WHIMSY VI: 134-36.