

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

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

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

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

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

Jean Fisher

American Indian Culture Traditionalism and Spiritualism in a Revolutionary Struggle

Culture as a Way to Know the World

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We know that technology and progress depend upon the political

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

American Indian Spiritualism

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

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

HISTORY

SCIENCE

POLITICS

RELIGION

CULTURE or ART

ECONOMICS

These squares are further divided:

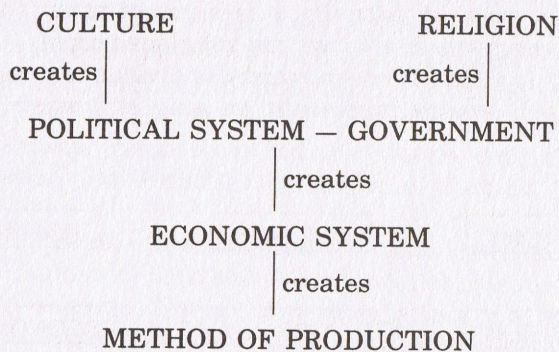
SCIENCE

Biology	Physics
Geology	Anthropology

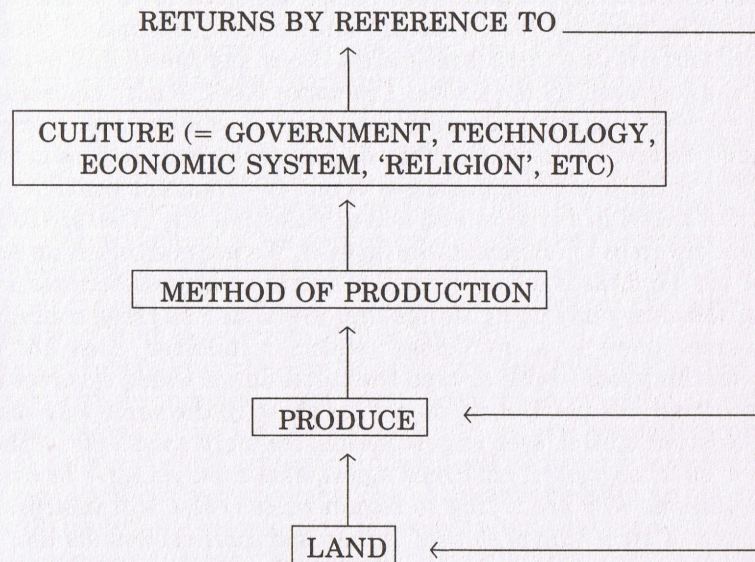
And so on. This is the basis of the 'specialism' that Paulo Freire speaks of. Such a system can make for clarity, I suppose, but what we see it make, in today's capitalist or socialist countries, is alienation. No person can get a grasp of a whole. He may know that eugenics, homiletics, biophysics, Keynesian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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Making Thoughts Match Actions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1974

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

Mr Catlin and Mr Rockefeller Tame the Wilderness

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

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

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

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