
FRONT COVER DETAILS

Cheri Maracle as the Spirit Woman in the 1995 production of Sun Raiser at the Banff Arts Festival. Performed 4-11 August 1995 at the Banff Centre
Written and directed by Yves Sioui

Photography by Cheryl Bellows, The Banff Centre

BACK COVER DETAILS

Jerry Longboat as the lightning spirit and James Nicholas as the Sun Raiser engage in combat in the 1995 production of Sun Raiser at the Banff Arts Festival. Performed 4-11 August 1995 at the Banff Centre
Written and directed by Yves Sioui

Photography by Cheryl Bellows, The Banff Centre

Some financial assistance was provided by the Australia Council,
the Federal Government's Arts funding and advisory body



AUSTRALIAN- CANADIAN STUDIES

MUSIC/IMAGE/TEXT:
A SPECIAL ISSUE ON INDIGENOUS MEDIA

GUEST EDITOR: HART COHEN

VOLUME 14

NUMBERS 1 & 2

1996

AUSTRALIAN-CANADIAN STUDIES is the official journal of ACSANZ. It is a refereed journal of both the Humanities and the Social Sciences and focuses on comparative, interdisciplinary research in these areas. Its aim is to provide a forum for intellectual debate and information exchange in Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

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Acknowledgements:..... *Australian-Canadian Studies* gratefully acknowledges grants received from ACSANZ as well as the financial support of the Department of English, and the Faculty of Law, University of Wollongong. Founded as *Australian-Canadian Studies: a Multidisciplinary Review* at La Trobe University in 1983. Editors Vols. 1 - 3: G. Ternowetsky, A. Borowski, T. Puckett and B. Langer. Editors Vols. 4 - 9: Malcolm Alexander and Gillian Whitlock.

ISSN:..... 0810-1906

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HART COHEN
INTRODUCTORY ESSAY:
MUSIC/ MEDIA/ TEXT: INDIGENOUS
MEDIA OF CANADA AND AUSTRALIA

This issue is made by those engaged with and committed to the communication and exchanges of the First Nations people of Canada and the Aboriginal people of Australia. It appears at a time when the recent if belated achievements of Native title in Australia and Self-Government in Canada have come under attack. There is no doubt that the writings, representations and exchanges documented in this issue presume an organic link to the political struggles currently under way in both countries. The authors published in this volume responded to a call for papers on the topic of Indigenous Media in Canada and Australia. The extent of this response entailed an expanded double issue revealing the significance and breadth of the work executed in this field and the commentary produced in relation to it. It also reveals an increasing awareness that the problems and practices of Indigenous people are germane to the general project of a nation's self-understanding in the spheres of culture and politics.

COMMUNICATION AND KNOWLEDGE

Indigenous media practice is part of a current explosive phase in both media and communications and marks a turning point in the opportunities for media participation. Distinctive for its emphasis on process as much as product, Indigenous media tends to be organised around themes of community and tradition. These tendencies are often re-framed in local and regional contexts to present innovative forms and styles. In this way Indigenous media often escape the communication

channels of the “information society” relying instead on deep structures of kinship and community for its knowledge base. In a world in which information systems are constantly reconstructing spatial relationships, Indigenous media serve *time-bound* traditions and contribute to the repair and maintenance of cultural continuity.

The time-bound quality of Indigenous media makes it unique in a space-bound world. (While the character of Indigenous cosmologies differ, in Tomson Highway’s account of Cree cosmology, the time-bounded traditions are rendered “time-less” and are given a specific spatial configuration.¹) This makes Indigenous media attractive and has resulted in considerable cross-over to non-Indigenous industrial and commercial agencies for production and distribution of media product. In some instances, the agencies have been developed and are run by Indigenous people. In other contexts, Indigenous media design and ideas have been unashamedly appropriated without consent or adequate attribution. The phenomenon has attracted considerable commentary and assessment from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. The central issues concern the cultural values of Indigenous media delivered in and by the varied production contexts currently available. The strong sense of cultural identification that remains implicit in much Indigenous media suggests that the current phase of “multivocality” in media representations must be carefully assessed. This may not mean axiomatic rejection of contemporary forms in which media undergo considerable modification through exchange and collaboration. It may suggest, however, that boundaries may be drawn as a means of assessing the relative merits of these exchanges — the extent to which they can be seen to be consonant with the cultural values that lie at the heart of Indigenous media.

HISTORY WITHOUT PEOPLE

No account of Indigenous communication and media can be given without an historical contextualisation. Colonial settlement in Canada and Australia was above all else a “silencing” activity with regards to the First Peoples. The grand narratives of progress and social Darwinism can be expressed in their most salient forms as the rationalisations of this silencing. These discourses informed the natural history of civilisation. They told the story endlessly of “what actually happened”; they created the *noise* that justified and covered the silencing. It is not a coincidence, then, that visualising practices of photography and film, anthropology’s field work models and various forms of replication (for example, taxidermy) become dominant practices in this period of

colonisation (Griffiths, 1996, 23). The silence is an emptiness that needs an image, a *form* to simultaneously proclaim the loss and triumph over it. Edmund Carpenter once wrote: “media destroys cultures, but first it creates a false record of what it is about to destroy” (Carpenter, 1972, 195).

The understanding and importance of this silencing has now been well-documented by contemporary historians and cultural critics in both Canada and Australia. My use of this term is purposefully placed in relation to this volume because it is about the *expressive* activities of Indigenous people whose legacy has left them with a rich reservoir of emotion and strength. The term “media” is often interchangeable with “voice” in many of the articles in this volume. In this sense Indigenous media may be said to disrupt the silence, intervene within it, and in the process convene a new commonality.

John Cage, whose musical compositions and performances would sometimes consist of not producing any sounds, once wrote that there was no such thing as silence. By this he meant to say that in the texture of everyday life, sound was abundant. The ambient, the background, the rumblings of the atmospheric as Alphonso Lingis has referred to it, all contribute to supporting Cage’s declaration. In the context of the silencing of Indigenous people, this may suggest something quite different than that implied by Carpenter’s concern with the destruction of Indigenous cultures. It suggests quite a different model — one that can see the thread of cultural survival and resistance in the texture of the violence of settlement. No amount of visualisation of Indigenous people by photographic means could capture the presence of this thread. Invisible to the colonists, this is what could *not* be destroyed by colonisation. It is this thread of survival and resistance which is embodied by Indigenous voices and Indigenous media today.

APPROPRIATION NOTES

In an article by Métis filmmaker, Lorreta Todd, titled, “Notes on Appropriation”, appropriation is defined as “when someone else speaks for, tells, defines describes, represents uses or recruits the images, stories, experiences dreams of others for their own”. The antithesis to appropriation is cultural autonomy based on Aboriginal title and rights. These are rights to “one’s origins and histories as told within the culture and not as mediated from without” (Todd, 1990, 24–26).

The concerns around appropriation are certainly relevant to a publishing project such as this one. It is particularly the case that although appropriation practices would have begun with first contact,

the current tendency in the spheres of cultural practice is towards the erasure of boundaries between cultural formations. This suggests ample possibilities for the kind of theft alluded to in the use of Indigenous cultural expression and images.

Todd gives evidence in the form of contemporary aestheticians calling for the fostering of cultural production in the context of the "new global postmodern village culture". It is unclear across the range of theorisation of this phenomenon as to whether cultural difference will be destroyed or enhanced. Accounting for the extent of appropriation of this material will be even more precarious. Todd suggests that the net result is a disavowal of cultural difference:

What is most revealing is that in the appropriation and naming of Native as healer, as storyteller, as a humorist, the appropriators name themselves. We become the object against which the threat of difference is disavowed. Our difference is covered over by becoming a symbol, a fetish. (1990, 30)

Todd argues persuasively that appropriation reduces differences and plurality of Indigenous discourses and usurps authority over the distribution and interpretation of Indigenous forms of communication.

Against this position but perhaps complementary to it, the question arises as to whether forms of appropriation have other consequences — where appropriation may occur in the service of informing, re-telling and re-connecting Indigenous values. These activities would support rather than undermine difference and are legitimate if Indigenous cultural authority remains intact.

As Todd writes, "Artists who are committed to resisting dominant culture must acknowledge our authority, not merely our so-called 'wisdom'" (Todd, 1990, 32). In so doing, structures of power are linked to structures of representation lessening opportunities for commodification of Indigenous cultural values.

The concern for appropriation best expresses the deep-structure of "Nativism" — a term which in line with Said's "Orientalism", describes the Eurocentric construction of the Orient politically, ideologically and imaginatively. In this sense Todd is correct to characterise "Native" as a discourse, "inscribing meaning from without ... knowledge which blocks our own certain subjectivities and ways of experiencing the world ... in which power, technology and ideology come together to produce forms of knowledge, social relations and other concrete cultural forms that function to silence people" (1992, 77).

In this sense, Todd has identified what Faye Ginsburg has referred to as the "Faustian contract" in which Indigenous and minority people have faced a kind of Faustian dilemma. "On the one [end], they are finding new modes for expressing Indigenous identity through media ... on the other, the spread of communications technology threatens to be a final assault on culture, language, imagery, relations between generations and respect for traditional knowledge" (Ginsburg, 1991, 96). Indigenous media responds directly to appropriation in the assertion of cultural autonomy and authority. The essays in this volume contribute to the growing awareness of Indigenous media as a force of empowerment in the general sense articulated above. It is also an account of the many forms and channels Indigenous media currently utilises.

INDIGENOUS MEDIA IN CANADA AND AUSTRALIA: POINTS OF CONTACT

In the following pages I would like to track some of the points of contact between Aboriginal and First Nations media. The three areas of media which this issue explores are music, broadcasting and text.²

First Contact

The cross-fertilisation between Indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia is expressed most emphatically in the way media has emerged as a vehicle for Indigenous voices in both countries. The tracking of the relationship between the various people and organisations in the sphere of Indigenous media has only just begun. This volume of essays contributes to this project in both explicit and implicit ways. Some authors have chosen to take up comparative accounts in their approach to Indigenous media. Other essays are juxtaposed so that readers may draw their own comparisons. Beyond these broad comparisons are the lesser-known anecdotal accounts of contacts between key individuals working within their communities but keen to form contacts with others in similar situations.

One example of this latter approach is Phillip Batty's account, in "Imagining Nations Within Nations", of one of the early meetings (1982) between Josephi Padlyat, then President of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, and Freda Glynn, then Director of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA). What is curious in Batty's account is the sense of discomfort and awkwardness — both physical and social — which is said to have pervaded the first meetings between the Inuit guest and his Australian and Aboriginal counterparts. Batty

goes on to pose the question as to why this would have been the case given a number of possibly dubious assumptions made by the respective government administrators intent on promoting this exchange. (It did not help matters that Josephi was flown directly to Central Australia and into 40-degree heat at a time of year when he normally would have been shovelling snow!) Significantly, Josephi Padlyat's visit was not initiated by Indigenous groups but by a communications consultant. The more recent contacts initiated by direct communication between Indigenous media groups throw into relief these early attempts (ten years ago) at transcultural communication.

Batty suggests that though Canadians were prominent in policy formation, this did not lead to the adoption of broadcasting models identical to those then current in Canada. This is reiterated by Meadows who also contributes an article in this volume to furthering the comparison between Aboriginal and First Nations approaches and responses to broadcasting.

Batty describes visits undertaken by himself and Freda Glynn to a number of Indigenous media organisations in Canada and the United States. The most significant in the terms of cross-fertilisation and influence were visits to the Wawatay Native Communications Society at Sioux Lookout in Ontario and the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation's operational base at Frobisher Bay.

At Sioux Lookout, Wawatay was in many respects a mirror image of CAAMA. Both the radio broadcasting facilities delivered media to multilingual and multicultural audiences. Two articles in this volume detail the respective formation and importance of these radio networks: Helen Molnar's article, "Radio: 'The Heart and Soul of Aboriginal Aspirations'" and Lavinia Mohr's, "To Tell the People — Wawatay Radio Network".

Both CAAMA radio and Wawatay radio evolved to deliver their programs via satellite.

The similarities went even further in the way the organisations of these networks were established. In an uncanny though possibly predictable fashion both organisations were founded by twosomes. Each twosome had one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous member: Freda Glynn and Phillip Batty for CAAMA; Garnet Angeconeb and Florence Woolner for Wawatay.

Music

The accounts of Indigenous musics in this issue suggest a much more transportable medium across space and time than other cultural forms. Neuenfeldt, in his essay, "Songs of Survival", suggests that ethno-pop, in particular, plays an important role as a vehicle for identity-narratives and as a mediator for encounters with dominant culture:

Ethno-pop songs themselves can create culturally useful meanings. They have come to be used extensively because they address vital issues; are relatively cheap to produce, reproduce and circulate; and function variously as entertainment, education and empowerment....

This last point is particularly relevant to Todd's concern with appropriation if, as Langton suggests, "the issue is to control the means of production" (1993,10).

While the points of contact between Indigenous musicians and performers from both countries have increased recently, it may be instructive to look at specific examples drawn by Neuenfeldt and others in which the experiences of songwriters resonate strongly. These often demonstrate the links between Indigenous social and cultural experiences given the administrative policies of the governments of the day.

An example provided by Neuenfeldt is the Shingoose (Curtis Johnny) song, "Reservation Blues". Shingoose is an Ojibwe singer-songwriter adopted by missionaries as a child. As Neuenfeldt states: "The poetic text of 'Reservation Blues' draws attention to personal and socio-cultural dislocation precipitated by the denial of notions of basic human rights".

The adopting out assimilationist policies are familiar experiences to Aboriginal people with their consequences of social dislocation and emotional destruction. Interestingly Neuenfeldt points out how Shingoose uses the "blues" idiom drawing on a pop culture form within a "universal pop aesthetic". This approach has its Aboriginal equivalent in the music of Yothu Yindi — a band "able to crack the world music market while remaining based in a small, isolated homeland community".

The issue for both examples of Indigenous music relates to the mediation of Indigenous musics by commercial music forms and structures. These occur within a global entertainment industry which has the capacity for both appropriation and trivialisation of Indigenous musics. The degree of success enjoyed by bands like Yothu Yindi and performers like Shingoose testify to the possibilities afforded by globalisation inasmuch as these musics retain a high profile and recognition as a kind of "discourse politics".

Just as Shingoose resonates with Aboriginal songwriters so would Yothu Yindi's and Bart Willoughby's "Anthem of Survival" for Aboriginal people resonate with Canada's First Peoples:

We have survived the white man's world,
and the horror and the torment of it all.
We have survived the white man's world,
and you know you can't change that.

Bart Willoughby (Mushroom Music)

In a similar vein, David Hollinsworth examines a successful cultural organisation providing support for Indigenous performing artists and explores the cultural and commercial contexts in which it operates. Interviews with the staff of *Narna Tarkendi*, Katrina Power and Sonja Arnold provide Indigenous perspectives on issues of cultural appropriation, primitivist representations and racism in the music industry. Hollinsworth proposes that

the recent spectacular success of Indigenous music and dance does not signal some watershed in anti-racism. The access and reception of Aboriginal performers continues to be limited by racist notions of tradition, authenticity and aesthetics.

Narna Tarkendi, according to Hollinsworth, demonstrates the possibility of overcoming forms of marginalisation and institutional racism.

Michael Patterson in an article titled, "Native Music in Canada — the Age of the Seventh Fire", links Indigenous music to specific values: "self-determination, healing and expression". However, in examining the group known as the Seventh Fire, Patterson is keen to underline environmental values in Indigenous culture and the prophecy of the Seventh Fire of the Anishabe people.

In this prophecy, each of the seven fires represent an era of human history. This is the time of Seventh Fire — a time at which the earth is threatened by her own environment and people.

Patterson traces the Seventh Fire Prophecy as both a migration legend and as part of the contemporary spiritual teachings of the Anishabe people though linked to older traditional stories of the Ojibwe nation. Other leading musicians, for example, Buffy Saint-Marie, Robbie Robertson, Kashtin, Susan Aglukark along with the Seventh Fire are involved with the Seventh Fire Prophecy and with using music as a "site for social and political awakening".

In "The Voices of First Nations", Elaine Keillor pays particular attention to the participation of First Nations' women in musical events.

Significantly much of the use of music by women was of a personal or private nature. For this reason, Keillor argues that most ethnography overlooked these musical practices. Reviewing the ethnographic record and other sources, Keillor documents a number of variants on the participation of both men and women in song and dance in various complementary gender configurations.

More recent examples suggest new configurations, particularly all-female groups involved in drumming and singing. Keillor is keen to point out that women, in pre-contact times, played a prominent role in singing/dancing and that contemporary initiatives by women in this domain were ways of "bringing a 'desired continuity' of tradition to their own peoples and to a widening circle".

Keillor points out the importance of Euro-Canadian music to the present flowering of music among First Nation's women. Buffy Saint-Marie is singled out for special mention among a number of contemporary performers and musicians.

Text

Points of contact between writers of both Indigenous peoples have increased substantially. The presence of Tomson Highway at this year's ACSANZ conference, prior visits, as well as production of his plays in Australia, all suggest the kind of contact that has been ongoing for some time. Examples of this development are continuing to occur on several fronts.

Greg Young-Ing is manager of Theytus Books, a publishing house that was the first to be under First Nations ownership and control. "Theytus" is a Coast Salishan word meaning "preserving for the purpose of handing down", and, as Young-Ing states, is a source and resource for the expression of "the Aboriginal Voice". Ian Chunn has offered a synoptic view of Theytus Books following the selection from Greg Young-Ing's report on Indigenous publishing in Canada.

In his report for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Young-Ing states:

Self-controlled publishing eliminates editorial discrimination. It incorporates cultural sensitivity. It makes writing and publishing a cohesive and fluid process under the control of Aboriginal people, so that the writer does not have to step into an alienating situation to get published. Most importantly, it produces material in which the highest possible level and most authentic expression of the Aboriginal Voice is attained. (1995, 13)

The report was titled, "An Overview of Aboriginal and Publishing in Canada", and was submitted to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1995. It is a benchmark report which combines historical contextualisation with an account of where and how First Nations publishing fits within Canadian publishing as a whole. It profiles First Nations publishers and program support for such publishing in Canada. Two elements stand out in Young-Ing's approach in this document. First, a section on appropriation echoes much of Lorreta Todd's positions alluded to earlier in this introduction and second, the idea of "voice" is the central motif for expressing the concern for First Nations expressiveness in the realm of contemporary publishing.

Norbert Ruebsaat is a German-born Canadian who has spent significant periods of time in Australia. His recent collaboration with a Haida woman, Gwaganad (Diane Brown) centred on food gathering and healing practices. Two texts are presented in this issue. The first is Gwaganad's testimony offered to a tribunal relating to land and environmental disputes on the Queen Charlotte Islands. The second is a multivocal text excerpted from a text-in-progress titled, *Walking-Around-Eating*. Here, Norbert Ruebsaat diarises his experiences and ideas while living on the Queen Charlottes with Gwaganad. In striving for a collaborative form that would approximate the shared experiences, the textual space includes both voices.

Moving from text to the words themselves, Bernie Harder's article closely examines treaty language. He demonstrates the "objective bias" of English which works against the interests of the Anishinabeg. There is a complementary account of the importance of maintaining Indigenous languages to buttress the domination of treaty English and help repair and maintain cultural continuity.

Alfred Young-Man offers a short non-fiction story. In many ways it is a familiar story exploring the parameters of power and art. The story tracks a journey of inquiry into art, philosophy and the crisis invoked in the attempts by various parties to position First Nations art between them.

It was not too long ago, Many White Horses remembers, that Native art curators, that is, curators who were of the First Nations, found it next to impossible to garner the public support which would enable them to academically equate Western metaphysical reality with the actual political state/history of their art.

The story suggests a possible turn towards a grudging acceptance of First Nations Art on its own terms — perhaps more as a consequence of

the vicissitudes of contemporary western theory (for example, postmodernism) than a recognition of the limitations of a blinkered past.

It is quite clear that we are witnessing the emergence of a wide range of media expression by Indigenous people in both countries. In some ways the examples of past media may hold the key to the manner in which contemporary concerns with Native title and environmental protection are expressed. They are a benchmark which measures the progress, or lack thereof, of the public debate in both countries regarding Indigenous rights. But Indigenous media is also a discourse in formation uncovering new forms and meanings within a subjecthood secured on its own terms.

NOTES

- 1 Tomson Highway, Keynote Address, ACSANZ Biennial Conference, Hobart, Tasmania, 1996.
- 2 The rich material of Indigenous filmmaking has not been addressed in this issue because of space limitations. An expanded version of this issue in book form is planned which will include a section on Indigenous filmmaking.

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