Another Look at Old Photographs and Contemporary Indigenous Cinema: Rhetorics of First Nations' Place and Memory:

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Like any cultural artifact, photography has a utilitarian function which alters in meaning through subsequent uses. Early twentieth century photographers like American E. S. Curtis and Canadian Harry Pollard practiced on the western frontiers in a time when federal governments used treaties to extinguish Indian land rights. Their pictorial photography with Natives, despite originating in a European Fine Art movement, is evocative of Homi Bhabha's Third Space(1) - an alteric space outside the dialogue of existing relationships where new possibilities can be articulated. This essay will offer a lense and a historical perspective on Third Space cultural resistance with First Nations Peoples in early photography and in recent films like Zacharias Kunuk's "Atanajuarat" (2001), an Isuma Igloolik/NFB co-production, and Loretta Todd's "Kainayssini Imanistaisiwa: The People Go On" (2003) by the National Film Board of Canada. Despite the ubiquitous Eurocentricity in colonial texts, the early photographs of Pollard and Curtis evidence a First Nations sovereignty that enabled Native subjects to participate actively in the constructions of their locales within a continuum that served their purposes, even if they were unaware of future uses.

Photography, escapes many of the hierarchies of binaries found in spoken and written languages and permits an exchange between two socially interactive performances on opposing sides of the camera in a construction of a fourth wall: between the photographer and the subjects. These men with their bulky cameras and tripods could not simply pin a human being into a corner like a dead butterfly and take a photograph. The photographic production needed to address a physical dialogue between a man with the camera and a living subject in a social interaction: an agonism in a choreography between the body motions of a man and his equipment and a subject's active body positioning. The very holding of a position for several seconds for the camera was a consent to the production because at any point in the production the subject could renege by moving out of the frame. As Curtis and Pollard were working with subjects at sites that were reserves or traditional meeting and ceremonial grounds, their subjects' participation existed within a First Nations' social, religious and political organization. In these circumstances, presentations of self and social constructions followed cultural rules that were an expression of the subject's status and competence in their community and, in this circumstance, would signify, as well, a one-of-a-kind relationship negotiated between a photographer and his subject.

Generations of descendents, scholars and curators are discovering alternate and multiple readings to these cultural artifacts of memory. On both sides of the camera individuals have been engaged in a dialogue about understanding the Other and living and acting in ensemble in the co-creation of the photograph. These early co-creators construct a Third Space through body idioms and a disidentification: the subject neither assimilates nor opposes the ascribed roles of genre from the photographer's production script.

Photography for indigenous peoples is a living storytelling that documents disidentification with assimilation, as it paradoxically also embraces new cultural hybridities. Defined by Jose Esteban Munoz, disidentification "works on and against dominant ideology….this "working on and against" is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance." (Munoz,1999: 11-12) The Native subject's participation in the Pollard or Curtis photographs was thus not an active partnering into a High Photography project which was the photographers' goals.

The primacy of cultural continuity with land, memory and knowledge were reasons for indigenous peoples to return to traditional meeting grounds for sacred observances where temporary domiciles were set up by established rules. The process of returning to a traditional campsite, however, developed a new meaning in the period where indigenous peoples were losing their land rights, which coincidentally was also the early period of the camera. Providing a profoundly visible representation of the subject, the camera as apparatus recorded aspects of subject formation and the interpellation with real and imagined conditions of survival.

A critical variable in a photographic narrative is the construction of culturally significant categories like individual and society and the social organization and maintenance of various boundaries. Oral and written texts and photographs are windows on constructions of the past from the perspective of participants enmeshed in and negotiating various power relations in complex social networks. All societies use narrative structures to enable members to construct and maintain cultural boundaries and reproduce knowledge which either becomes official history or collective memory.

Roland Barthes in his essay, "The Death of the Author" demonstrated that an author is a socially and historically constructed subject that does not exist prior to or outside of language. The "death of the author" concept also applies to photographic production which uses a language of body idioms that exists prior to the photographic act and is a negotiation between subject and photographer. Photography conveys what Fabian describes as "a personally situated process of knowing" within a constructed dialogue between photographer and subject. In Canadian copyright law the person photographed and the photographer must both give their permissions for the photograph to be used beyond a personal use. Thus the negotiation and written agreement between the photographer and the subject is recognized as a legal contract with any limitations agreed upon by either side and is, in effect, a partnership.

A rapid post Civil War migration in the States threatened indigenous cultures and in 1884 made E. B. Tylor, call for the British Association for the Advancement of Science to initiate an intensive effort to record what was disappearing. (1a) Tyler's classical technical and anthropological definition of culture dominated anthropology for thirty years: "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Tylor 1871:I, 1) According to anthropologist Jacob Gruber, the need for salvage produced "a kind of myopia whose distortion accelerated the process of an empirically based observational, item oriented, theory-safe anthropology." (2) Salvage anthropology investigated socio-cultural systems in advanced stages of destruction, and like modern medecine, focussed

on the abnormal which set the standards of investigation. (Gruber 8) From its origins as an entertaining novelty, colonial photography soon rooted in Western frames of reference and masculine subjectivity, but it also retained the other partner's references to home, community and living culture. (Gordon 1988:7 – 24)

In early films about American indigenous cultures, such as E.S. Curtis's "In the Land of the Head Hunters" (1914) and Robert Flaherty's "Nanook of the North" (1922), an effort to recreate an earlier "pre-contact" period was characteristic and, in the case of Curtis, included the reconstruction of costumes and settings for the film 2a). Discourse analysis has made us sensitive to "issues of power and perspective, questions of how authoritative knowledge is legitimated, of self-awareness and authenticity of voice in the presentation of data, and of the constraints of the historical and cultural contexts within which knowledge develops" (Rubinstein 1991: 12 0-13)

Alice Beck Kehoe describes a Third Space in the early transformations of culture: "From a First Nations' perspective, the Blackfoot adopted substitutes for their principal economic resource, the bison, and accepted opportunities to learn English reading, and other means of dealing with the conquerors. To call these strategies "acculturation" – that is moving *toward* Western culture – misses the essential point that indigenous people were struggling to retain as much of their heritage as possible under the much altered circumstances of the reservation." (3)

If we examine some of the portraits we will have a better understanding of the performance dialogue between photographer and subject. In this relationship the photograph is a mutual negotiation between the subject and the photographer. As Pollard was directed by the chief to set up in a tipi next to his, the photographer's tipi position also signifies a formal and hierarchical relation in the community, if not an integration as Pollard uses their tipi and not a military tent. Revered as an honorary chief of the Blackfoot, Pollard had unparalelled access to document ubiquitous and ceremonial events and domestic spaces from this tipi. Though Pollard's and Curtis's Native subjects may not have understood the photographers' artistic purposes, they actively interpellated the original photographic forms with traditional knowledge and values that address their own people. Photographs thus hold traditional storytelling practices and knowledges in suspension for future generations to assimilate through observation. The picture construction therefore is not only a dialogue between the photographer and subject in anticipation of a fourth wall for a public. The purposes of the picture production are organized differently in the consciousnesses of the photographer and the subject and mutually through their collaborative act. The pictorialist emphasizes emotion, composition and artistic effects whereas the subject uses the social occasion as an expression of individuality, competence in the community, and performance of culture.

If we were to apply the dramaturgical model of Erving Goffman, a symbolic interactionist, and do a qualitative analysis we would discover a performance relationship between the photographer and the subject, in which interaction is shaped by body movements and such physical aspects constituted by the subject and the photographer with camera, tripod and tipi. The portrait sitter must match the competence of the photographer's performance in order to achieve a positive result. The sitter's expression even reflects the competent performance of this collaboration.

Pollard's portrait of Big Belly (P58 Big Belly Sarci Chief) in front of a tipi is one of many photographs taken during one of Pollard's photographic studies with his Bosche

and Lombart lens. Documenting life at traditional ceremonial camps from1904 to 1916, Pollard's work is possibly the most complete record of a native spiritual and resistance movement to exist. (He also collected photography on ceremonial camps from his predecessors.)

Big Belly proudly displays the treaty medals and the clothing from Article 6, Treaty Number 7. The clothing was a negotiated treaty benefit that provided every chief one set of European style (or white man) clothes. The full outfit was a brass buttoned coat, side-striped trousers and plug-hat. A portrait of a chief wearing the Queen's Medal is a display of strong faith in the great "White Mother". The wearing of the full outfit at a ceremonial camp, however, is a contradiction of assimilation, if not more clearly a disidentification with the colonizer's apparel. As an item that the Sarci listed in a treaty negotiation with the Queen, the clothing also represents an assimilationist policy which was a desirable outcome for the Canadian government. The act of wearing it at a Sundance ceremonial camp, however, will not make Big Belly with his waist long braids pass for a white man. In fact, the complete presentation of the self is not only for Pollard, the photographer, but also for the little girl at the left side of the frame for whom this enactment is a performance of disindentification. Not only are the clothes and medals a symbol of assimilation, in the context of this historical camp, they are an appropriation from the colonizer and as a mimicry and theatrical dress up take on a new political meaning. They are not simply the Queen's clothes.

With his profile clearly presented to the camera, Big Belly's gaze to the side places him in a spatial relationship to the land as one who surveys and commands the space. It is a symbolic and alteric representation. The relaxed facial expression and body position show comfort and active participation in the portrait making process. Pollard's gaze follows ordinary details from everyday life and the First Peoples resolve to make their culture survive - a defining difference from other contemporary photographers.

Old narratives recirculate a hundred years later and Pollard's Big Belly portrait resonates again in Loretta Todd's poster for "Kainayssini Imanistaisiwa". It presents a man with waist length braids wearing an outfit similar to the clothing from Article 6, Treaty Number 7. The man is in profile and wearing a European hat with a smaller brim. He also surveys the land, possibly even the site of a ceremonial camp where much of Todd's film was shot. He wears fashionable sunglasses and holds a black and white sun umbrella, similar in purpose and shape to the tipi, but more portable: both items are products of industrialism and signifiers of leisure and recreational pursuits. The poster presents digitized clouds and a paint box yellow fabricated sun. Like in Big Belly's portrait the Queen's white man clothes in this poster are not simply retro fashion. Nostalgia and disidentification coexist in precarious balance. The viewer of the poster looks up at our idol like the girl in the Big Belly portrait. These works are pierced by the traditional storytelling forms of their Native subjects in a referentiality to a Native continuum of history by location, place and positionality. The message is clear that "the people go on" which is the second part of Todd's film's title.

In the recent film "Atanajuarat" striking differences mark a disidentification with earlier salvage photography efforts. First, the company's narratives are directed at telling historical stories rich with traditional knowledge to the Igloolik community of Inuktitut speakers using physical action and traditional storytelling forms like songs, games and improvisation. The rest of the world is reached as a secondary audience through sub-

titles and music. These productions have enabled an older generation to pass on life skills like building an igloo, food preparation or traditional courtship practices and only came to life after Kunuk sold a carving and returned home with a video camera some years ago.

In an earlier Kunuk film, "Qaggiq" (1989) a marriage is informally arranged between the families of an ageing bachelor and a child bride. Though this practice seems antiquated, audiences are entertained by age old customs that frame a romantic comedy. Cultural retrieval work enacts a pre-contact virtual world as a spectacle for contemporary audiences and the production crew faces new challenges and must acquire skills like running a dog team. Actors either develop a taste or learn to fake pleasure in eating raw animal flesh. Similarly to the earlier films where ethnographic authority and the power to designate authenticity rested with the filmmaker, the camera is an invisible observer in an understated role as participant in the cinematic spectacle. The indigenous community, however, still gets represented as essentialized, universalized, "traditional" and, possibly even, "rapidly vanishing" - but not under the colonizing influence of empire builders.

Within a process of addressing a racist discourse which they seek to subvert, the filmmakers paradoxically use a very similar race discourse to their predecessors. However, a form of "artificial respiration" which breathes new life into old situations is an aesthetic strategy at work in "Atanajuarat". This term, used by cultural theorist Munoz in reference to gay parody, has an entirely different intersectional value when applied to indigenous communities' own recovery work. When a subject is marked as a racialized minority, they must develop a strategic response to their misrepresentation within dominant culture. "Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship." (Munoz, 1999:4) A postcolonial work articulates "a practice of suturing different lives, of reanimating, through repetition with a difference, a lost country or moment that is relished and loved." (4)

Earlier ethnographic authenticity was located in an imagined pre-modern society that existed in contrast to the felt inauthenticity of contemporary indigenous culture within which the filmmaker was working. (Jessup 1999:51) Marius Barbeau (an ethnologist at the National Museum of Canada in Ottawa) and Ernest MacMillan (principal of the Toronto Conservatory of Music) recorded with camera and phonograph "the vanishing culture, rites and songs and dances of the Indians along the Canadian Pacific Coast" among the Nisga'a of the Nass River in the1928 film "Saving the Sagas". Their recordings anticipated and naturalized the loss of traditional knowledges and there was little evidence that their documents involved retrieval methodologies of any magnitude.

Blackfoot and Blood peoples, like other Native peoples, appropriated the moment of photographic collaboration with Curtis and Pollard into a continuum of their own historical narrative, particularly on ceremonial and reserve land. Loretta Todd's film,"Kainayssini Imanistaisiwa" shifts the terms of memorialization of these photographs and reconfigures them into a competing interpretive framework. Todd's early experiences infiltrated her films with a Native consciousness: "You have to remember that when you grow up Native, you grow up with constant inspection—checking your hair for lice, welfare workers looking in on you, the dentist yanking your

teeth out. It feels like you are constantly peered at, interrogated, under surveillance. I was conscious of wanting to deconstruct that, and camera movements were a way to do that. For some reason, the moving camera allowed me to have a stronger sense of my own point of view." (6)

The notion of vanishing culture may still be evident. Provocatively, however, the interviewees in "Kainayssini Imanistaisiwa" consider an immortality of life: that their present life is the very same life lived two hundred years ago. Land, memory and knowledge through a re-use of the colonial photographs are breathed new life. Pollard's photographs in the Todd film, are a re-appropriation and recontextualize, refract and re-presence an architecture of national identity. (5)

Todd's documentary revisits the Sundance location of Harry Pollard's early documentary photography at the traditional camp of sloping coulees and open sky: the home of the Kainai Blood Indians. Todd's disidentification, however, begins inside the dominant culture, as in the infrastructure of the National Film Board of Canada, using established documentary techniques, while at the same time critiquing these forms she addresses at each new reading. Guided by a strong sense of duty to community she draws on her own experiences: "I thought of myself as being a means to give voice to the Native community. Because I was from somewhere else, was Cree and Métis from Alberta, and now living on the West Coast, I was conscious of being in someone else's territory, and in someone else's culture. I think my filmmaking allowed me to really respect that—the camera helped me negotiate the relationship between myself, this other territory, and these other Native cultures…. I began to recognize my internal voice, my intimate voice, my personal voice…By speaking for myself, I'm engaging in an act of transformation and liberation." (7) It is a strategy for intervening in the public sphere that resists both assimilation with the status quo and an imagined counter-identification.

The Native belief in cultural renewal is the reason for the return of artifacts from distant museums. Collected by colonial travellers entrusted because of expectations that white society would be part of First Nations' cultures, these sacred objects occupy a Third Space in the historical narrative and exist in a disidentification with the museum project. Todd's lyrical projection of the First Nations ancestor portraits on white flags that wave and ripple over the lush prairie grass are also a disidentification: though powerfully evocative of peace, memory and cultural renewal.

Though the photographs conform to European aesthetics, Todd places them in recognizable Blackfoot land to tell a story differently and to de-colonize a modernist framework of galleries, museums or institutions of higher learning. Early treaties are known for their inadequacies in British Parliament procedure and Canadian courts have not been effective in recognizing their status. (Dickason:1992,177) Where "Indian title" in many cases was in the past admitted, often no actual historical agreement exists as to what it actually entailed. As cross-cultural collaborations these photographs and cinematic stories thus offer a new resource and perspective to land claims settlement through Third Space negotiations.

Footnotes

1. Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994)

2. 1 (a) Edward Burnett Tylor authored "Researches into the Early History of Mankind (1865) and Primitive Culture (1971) in roughly the interval between Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) and Descent of Man.

2. Gruber, Jacob W., "Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology" http://www.aaanet.org/gad/history/033gruber.pdf, p. 7 Accessed January 9, 2004 (Originally published in American Anthropologist, 61:379-389, 1959

2 a. Curtis wrote and directed the film "In the Land of the Headhunters" to raise money for his North American Indian Project. Primarily an ethnographic work about Kwakiutl Indians, the film was similar to Nanook of the North (1922) in its use of a plot. The film was only shown once and Curtis never recovered money for the distributors. http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Curtis/curtis-play-3.htm

3. Kehoe, Alice Beck, "Transcribing Insima, a Blackfoot "Old Lady", in Eds. Brown, Jennifer S. H. and Vibert, Elizabeth, "Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History", Peterborough, Broadview Press Ltd., 1996, p. 386 – 37.

4. Munoz, Jose Esteban, "Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Cultural Studies of the Americas, V. 2),Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 128.

5. Kapferer, Bruce and Kapferer Judith, "Monumentalizing Identity: The Discursive Practices of Hegemony in Australia", in David Palumbo-Liu and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht eds., Streams of Cultural Capital, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997, pp.79-96.

6. De Certeau, Michel, "The Practice of Everyday Life", translated by Steven Rendall, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984, pp. 97-98.

7. Silverman, Jason, "Uncommon Visions – The Films of Loretta Todd" in "Senses of Cinema", 2002 http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/02/22/todd.html accessed Jan. 2, 2004.

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