Reading Hollywood's Post-racism: Lessons for Art Education[1]

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Abstract

Racism requires a re-evaluation of the new forms of its guises during the postmodern era. This essay attempts to provide such an analysis in the area of films presented in and around Columbus's quincentenary celebrations. It is argued that the representational narrative of the noble savage *is called upon to do such an ideological duty. Implications as to why art educators should take-up postmodern racism in films in general is encouraged.*

Art Education in a Spectacular Society

There is a rather humorous and interesting film, *The Moderns* (1988), which presents the story of a European art critic living at the turn of the century in Paris when the film industry was just beginning to burgeon, but was not respected as a *high* art form. An expert in Impressionism, neo-Impressionism, Expressionism, Fauvism, and various other *modern* art movements, the narrative presents his utter boredom with these art forms and the dullness of the exhibitions when compared to the mesmerizing power of film made for the *masses*. It comes to a point where he can't take the pomposity of the art world any more. He stages his own *faked death* (so that he can die as a respectable critic) and secretly journeys to America where film has become the craze. The narrative ends as he watches a movie screen, eyes wide open, fascinated by the ephemerality of the moving figures.

There is a odd lacuna in art education concerning films which make *The Moderns* a useful lesson for us. Film, as an art form, is given very little attention by art educators when compared to other art forms, especially painting, printmaking, and sculpture. Perhaps art educators, in general, feel that they are encroaching on other territories—film studies, or English, or media studies? By doing so the field not only confines itself to *static* art forms, but misses out on opportunities to actively engage students with one of the most popular art forms for which they willingly pay to see. Given that postmodern society has been described as being spectacular in its representational style, where the hyperreality of both vision and sound have become commonplace on the screens (television, computers, movie theaters) that directly structure the representation of how we perceive *reality*, it seems that we, as art educators, need to stage a certain *death scene* of our own and move on to acknowledge the importance of the media in structuring the ideological reality of students and adults alike.

This essay attempts to present a way of reading a number of films which, in the context of multicultural and cross-cultural art education, flesh out how postmodern racism is reproduced through the representations of what might be termed as the *return of the noble savage* in certain recent Hollywood films. As a research methodology, this is both a narrative analysis as well as a representational analysis of the *Other*, confined to a particular five year historical period, more specifically to a given year, 1992 which celebrated the Columbus Quincentenary. The necessity of

a poststructuralist approach which recombines the complex relations between politics, aesthetics, and ethics that were severed at the beginning of the modern era according to Jürgen Habermas (1983), need to be brought together. The following filmic analysis also attempts to incorporate the psychoanalytic dimension of fantasy which is an irreducible dimension of perception and ideology. To initiate a critical multicultural and cross-cultural art education, it is crucial that art teachers become versed in the skills of how the dominant society presents the Other in all forms of art, but especially film (and no less television) because of its ubiquitous nature as an art form. Although no prescriptive steps as to how such an art education should be initiated, it is hoped that the essay provides an exemplar of such an analysis and might encourage art educational research in this direction.

Racism in a Postmodern Era

It is to the credit of such cultural theorists as Etienne Balibar (1991) that the rudiments of what is referred to as a *civilized racism*, or *differentialist racism* have begun to be worked out. In contrast to the old racial biologism which was presented in a direct, raw, and brutally physical fashion, in the postcolonial and postmodern period where *decolonialization* is said to be taking place, new forms of neo-racism require the *reflective* theorizations of an anthropological culturalism for justification of *difference* and *otherness*. In a postmodern era, writes Balibar (1991), "There is in fact no racism without theory (or theories)" (p. 18). This *meta-racism*, as developed by academics, constructs a scientific theory which immediately explains and justifies the racism of the masses. It links their *visible* collective violence, such as the fire-bombing of Turkish tenement houses in Rostock, Germany, for instance, to a set of *hidden causes*, thereby fulfilling an intense desire for an interpretative explanation as to what individuals are experiencing during this postmodern decentralization of identity. Such theorizing provides an explanation for identity formation in a social world where the forces of globalization have begun to erode the barriers of distinct separation.

This new *differentiated racism* is for Balibar, a *racism without race*; that is to say, racial tensions exist only as the incompatible differences between cultures, lifestyles, sexual preferences, traditions, and so forth. The necessity of maintaining these differences now parades as a *democratic* solution. Such a theoretical position *naturalizes* cultural differences in order to contain individuals, or groups, in apriori cultural genealogies. They become essential, fixed entities separated by a margin of *cultural distance*. In this way cultural differences are maintained by erecting borders. The older notion of superiority of race is replaced by a multicultural theory which gives various groups status on the grounds that there is an essential culture to which they belong; which can be observed and learnt from at a distance as long as the barrier, the border or distance is maintained. The Other can be admired and exoticized for its difference, but at the same time this very difference and particularity is maintained in order to maintain inequality. Such an explanation goes a long way in explaining how the hegemony of dominance amongst cultures is maintained.

Not all such cultural differences are maintained at the cost of chronic violence and bloodshed, as paradigmatically exemplified, for instance, by the Israeli/

Palestinian conflict, or Sein Fein's struggle with British troops in Northern Ireland. Postmodern racism takes on different inflections when it comes to the hegemonic relations with First Nations. Historical circumstances of contact, land appropriation, treaty rights, constitutional law, and the desire for aboriginal self-government have necessitated different ideological fantasy scenarios of containment than those played out in Europe (the Old World) to reproduce hegemonic dominance in the New World. Often the performance of *cultural authenticity* by those dominated carries with it both political purchase and economic dividends along spectacular lines. Perhaps the most bizarre case of such dialectical reciprocity is the case of the indigenous people known as the Tasaday (Ball, 1995), a stone-age *primitive* tribe *discovered* by anthropologists in the Philippines living in a remote jungle far from Manila. Journalists uncovered several years later that the whole thing had been a hoax set up by the Minister of the Interior to gain publicity for his department by staging a theme-park village that hid all the usual clues from being simply yet another postmodern simulacrum. When journalists and anthropologists were scheduled to arrive for interviews these *natives* would take off the jeans and T-shirts that they normally wore, paint their bodies, and wait in the remote village of thatched huts built by the government. Such performed staging is only one side of such *reciprocity*. There is also the attempt on behalf of the subjugated Other to maintain a suspension between sameness and difference, what Bhabha (1994) and Taussig (1993) refer to as the phenomenon of *mimesis*. When defeat by dominant forces is inevitable what often happens is a dogged resistance by the Other so as never to become assimilated. The performed ritual dances of the nineteenth century Zuñi, for instance, mocked white colonizers and, at the same time, were a form of spiritual psychic resistance (Greenblatt, 1990). The Mud Men of Papua New Guinea likewise began to change their ritual masks to *look* wryly back at the tourists. Resistance to a dominating colonial discourse almost always takes place at the micropolitical level (Kulchyski, 1992; McMaster, 1995).

Columbus's Quincentenary: Liberalizing the Other

In this essay, I want to argue that one form of such postmodern racism is presented by a particular Hollywood narrative that keeps reproducing itself in a variety of forms so as to reconcile the incommensurable and *impossible* settlement of peaceful co-existence between Peoples of the First Nations and governments who have inherited the legacy of their colonial past, e.g., Canada, United States, Mexico, Australia, etc. Defined as *primitive* in terms of an older colonial discourse they provide a counter memory for reminding North Americans of their *past* colonial conquest mentality. Unlike the *Jewish question*, The Peoples of the First Nation, present a closed system which challenges, thwarts, and prevents each *host* nation from facilely claiming unification, even when such unification already includes the rhetoric of diversity. They represent the *interiorized* and repressed border tensions of nationhood, a *visible* interiorized Other with an established political *voice*, exerting unrelentless social pressure concerning their land claims and desire for self-government from, so to speak, a *dispersed base* in the social order given that they were in each *host* country *first*. With the continual growing ecological

crisis, aboriginal demands for land claims became key issues in the debates over national identity which reached their apex in the late 80s and early 90s. This occurred precisely when their visibility began to receive strong *coloration* from Hollywood in order to smooth over the cultural memory which the quincentenary celebration of Columbus's heroic journey had begun to stir-up. It should not be forgotten that this encounter perpetuated, in the sixteenth century, the greatest genocide in human history. 1492 marked a beginning of a modern era insofar as the world shrank: "We are all the direct descendants of Columbus" (Todorov, 1987, p. 5).

The films discussed below were all produced from the period of 1986 to 1992, a span of time just prior to and including the celebration itself. (The majority of films discussed were however produced in 1992. Two films, *Geronimo: An American Legend* and *Tecumseh: The Last Warrior* were produced in 1994 and 1995 respectively, however their screen scripts were written during the time frame considered.) This was an historical moment which generated an intense commemorative commodification that included the extensive production and marketing of books, films, TV and radio programs, theatre performances, rap songs, and, of course, the promotion and marketing of *Indian art*. Since then, the spectacularization of the *aboriginal* no longer sells. The struggle for the social memory of the past has been won. One is hard pressed to identify a single Hollywood film which addresses the issues of genocide and colonization since 1992; the *democratic* public response to aboriginal voices have been successfully negotiated—a new popular memory of *contact* reformulated, and a new past reconstructed. Such movies as the remake of *Geronimo*: *An American Legend* (Walter Hill, 1994) and *Tecumseh: The Last Warrior* (Larry Elikann, 1995) seem to be token productions of heroism after the quincentenary *event*: The legendary exploits of the Apache chief are subsumed under each film's subtitle. It seems this is not an *Indian*, but an *American* legend. The latter, about the Shawnee chief's attempt to unite all the Indian tribes along traditional and spiritual values to collectively fight the Americanization of their land, is also misrepresented. The audience is led to believe that the idea of unification came from Tecumseh's reading of the Bible, and that his ability to read was tutored by a colonist! The *fact* that the Shawnee considered themselves a *nation* (and not just another tribe) already belonging to a wider confederation of Indian nations seems beyond the script writer's comprehension.

Hollywood *blockbuster* films were able to displace and disperse white guilt which surrounded the Columbus celebration by redirecting the blame for aboriginal social ills at powerful controlling institutions of dominance: royalty, the F.B.I., pharmaceutical multinationals, organized (legalized) crime, and U.S. Imperialism represented by a few mean-spirited, badly dressed, illiterate, lower-class men in the U.S. cavalry. These now become the *true* culprits of ecological disaster and Aboriginal unrest, the dark forces of the *world system*. The narratives of Hollywood films to be discussed, incorporate and romanticize aboriginal myths and insights as a therapeutic *cure* to the ills of the postmodern condition through a *utopian discourse* of a *paradise lost and regained*, thereby reviving and mobilizing the fantasy of the *neo-noble savage* as a way to counter the storm that developed over Columbus's birthday. *Paradise*, in this case, is that nonexistent *objet a* of desire that belongs to

the Lacanian Real.[2] Were it possible for the West to recover this mythical object, it would be healed and become whole again.

The very title of Ridley Scott's film, *1492 Conquest of Paradise*, produced in 1992, vivifies the very redemptive allegory I am proposing. The narrative portrays Columbus as a victim of his own passion, and somewhat absolves him of his crimes in an epic cast against a hyper-realist celluloid landscape. Each scene seems to be embroidered and crafted with the greatest amount of care, like a moving picture of Hans Holbein's *Ambassadors*; the anamorphic projection of the death skull of Charles the First is now replaced by Sanchez, the treasurer and advisor to the court of Isabella and Ferdinand who ends up being both Columbus's supporter as well as his nemisis.[3] The Spanish nobles who accompany his second voyage shoulder the blame for the eventual destruction of this "earthly paradise" (Todorov, 1987, p. 16). Columbus (Gerard Depardieu), on the other hand, is presented as a man of courage, a great navigator, patriarch, and enobalizer and defender of the *savage*, often intervening and handing out justice on their behalf should they be mistreated by one of his men or the Spanish nobility. The *truth* of Cristobal Colón is, however, quite the opposite. Contrary to being an *enlightened thinker* he believed in revealed theology, i.e., the signs of nature were to be read through the established writings of Church authorities. The final answer was already given to him despite *evidence* to the contrary. In his mind, Columbus did not *discover* America but simply found it where he *knew* it would be, i.e., as the eastern coast of Asia. Empirical facts were to be skewed or disregarded to make the pre-established connections fit. Native informants were simply dismissed as lying if the information never fit his convictions. On his arrival in Cuba (his second voyage) he threatened to cut off the tongue of any crew member who denied that he had landed on the mainland where *civilized people* were found. His aforementioned virtues of courage and passion were more like instances of *blind* faith. Empiricism, as a form of *natural* theology, was simply beyond him. As for his generous treatment of *natives*—that too was a lie. The Hollywood narrative has him building a Church in paradise, whereas in *reality* it was a fortress as reported in his diary: "I set out in the morning [October 14, 1492] in search of a place where a fortress might be built" (Todorov, 1987, p. 46). Cristobal never bothered to learn the Indian's language. To him the Indians had no language, no religion, and no law, and no material culture to speak of. His attitude to them was that of a collector of curiosities with no attempt at comprehension. When some Indian stole something, according to Columbus this was punishable "by cutting off nose and ears, for those are the parts of the body which cannot be concealed," as reported by Columbus in "Instructions to Mosén Pedro Margarite," 9/4/1494 (Todorov, p. 40).

Basically, Columbus either conceived Indians as human beings or as being inferior. As *human beings* they had to assimilate themselves into Spanish customs and become identical to himself. But above all else, they had to convert to Christianity so as to become *equal* in the eyes of God. Otherwise, to him, they remained objects, i.e., specimens who were denied a will. Their wealth, gold, was taken in exchange for religion. Should they resist, military subjugation was necessary for their salvation. Those Indians not submitting to Christianity became slaves. In ei-

ther case what was denied was their existence as humanly Other, i.e., their capacity of being not merely an imperfect state of the Christian European.

1492 Conquest of Paradise does not make Columbus's contradictions apparent. It succeeds in playing up his charm with Isabella, his benevolence with the Indians, and in the eyes of the Spanish nobility, his status as a mere commoner and outsider, a Genoese sailor without royal blood. It is this liberalizing construction of cultural sameness—the notion that Indians are like *us* that defined the colonizing conscious. As a cultural *dominant*, (Williams, 1977) Hollywood's allegory incorporates and appropriates the voices of the above marginalized bodies; their memories re-colonized in such a way so as to redirect and level their legitimate social concerns and land claims. As Raymond Williams (1977) once said, the function of this hegemonic process "is to control or transform or even incorporate them [resistances]. . . . any hegemonic process must be especially alert and responsive to the alternatives and opposition which question and threaten its dominance" (p. 113).

The Aboriginal Body: The Return of the *Noble Savage*

It has now been well over a decade since the papers given during the 1984 Santa Fe Conference on ethnographic texts were edited and published by Marcus and Clifford as *Writing Culture* (1986). With the further publication, two years later, of Clifford's own analysis in *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) as to how modern aesthetic movements appropriated the alterity of indigenous peoples, i.e., their *primitive art*, *ethno-anthropology* (the writing about ethnographic writing) finally made it painfully obvious to the anthropological community that the appropriation of the Other's differences masked over and over again a culture's incommensurabilities and specificities through the rhetorics of representation, that is to say, through the tropes of imaginative writing. *In the United States, this critical anthropological discourse emerged precisely during the historical period I am considering (1986-1992).* I think it is fair to say that the literature in this area has exponentially grown over the past decade (1986-1996) whereby anthropologists, including feminist interventions (Mascia-Lees et al., 1989; Newton & Stacey, 1992-93), began applying linguistic conceptualizations to their field that had already been developed in post-structuralist literary theory. They offered a way to critically assess the representational appropriation of the image of the Other which has now resulted in a significant body of literature (e.g., Taylor, 1994; Lutz & Collins, 1993; Shohat & Stam, 1994).

These theoretical developments provide a way of analyzing a swath of Hollywood films that were produced to *re-write* the aboriginal body in an allegorical tale whereby their very marginality was seen as providing a *cure* for the palliatives of Western civilization. Such a ruse staged a way to appease angry voices which Columbus' celebration wrought, endowing the Aboriginal with a new *nobility* that fit well into the discourse of New Age ecological mysticism (e.g., Ross, 1992). It was through the allegorical genre that their alterity was best assimilated. The allegorical structure, where one text is read through another, became the model of commentary and critique which enabled a rewriting of a primary text in terms of its figural meaning (Owens, 1992). As a *morally* charged story for the plight of those who were marginalized, Hollywood's allegorical narratives managed to create sym-

pathy in its viewers by reimagining and re-locating the aboriginal body in a lost Garden of Eden, which was now in *ruins*, as the very embodiment of a *Gemeinschaft* community of yesteryear, thriving in the midst of squalor and decay. The scripts present the *greening* of the Garden of Eden, the Restoration of Eve, and the reinscription of the *noble savage*, each narrative a palimpsest of reappropriated ecological, feminist, and marginalized discourses. For example, we have Allie Fox's village centralized by the phallic cathedral-like ice making machine on the Mosquito Coast in Central America (*Mosquito Coast*, Peter Weir, 1986). Fox, as a postmodern Columbus, is cast as a patriarch, inventor, and entrepreneur who must lose everything before he realizes the *paradise* he has destroyed by his desire to set himself up as a self-sufficient ruler of his self-sustaining village. Amongst other things, *Mosquito Coast* is an allegory about the failure of modern science, of American imperialism, of failed entrepreneurship, and fatherhood, but, as I will argue later, such an allegorical narrative is an exception.

The following allegorical narratives do, however, present a similar *outpost*—a mythical place outside the full clutches of the *civilized* symbolic order, already *greened* or *polluted*, where the meeting of the Other is staged. For such a *mise en scène*, we have the centralized Church villages in the Brazilian rain forest (*The Emerald Forest*, *The Mission*, Roland Joffe, 1986); we have the village built around the modern science lab (*Medicine Man*, John McTiernan, 1992); we even have an entire village in Borneo built for the *white king* himself! (*Farewell to the King*, John Milius, 1988); we have the once ecologically sound Sioux reservation of Bear Creek in the South Dakota *badlands* which has been deteriorated through the contamination of white technology—run down pre-fab houses, rusted automobiles, and abandoned trailers (*Thunderheart*, Michael Apted, 1992), and *The City of Joy* is yet another medical sanctuary built in the slums of Calcutta, (*The City of Joy*, Roland Joffe, 1992). Lastly, we have the deserted garrison at Fort Sedgewick on the edge of *the frontier*, another *ruin* which needs to be cleaned up of civilization's debris left by soldiers (a fouled water source littered with trash and partially devoured animal carcasses) to make it a livable ecological home for Lt. Dunbar (*Dances With Wolves*, Kevin Costner, 1990). Into these settings, the ruins of a paradise to be restored—or to be destroyed—comes the ambivalent colonial-cum-postcolonial invader/savior, the white half-breed, in pilgrimage, searching for a *cure* to the moral and material ills of the megalopolis, of America, of the medical establishment, of the U.S. Army. These narratives present *fantasmatic* subject positions which enable viewers to re-evaluate the ambiguities of such contact. It is the opening up of a number of subject positions in the way the colonizer is to be read that enables the contact between the *New World* and the *Old World* to be re-written. These allegorical narratives are written to sustain the gaze of both the White man and his Other, to create sympathy for the oppressed. The White man, as an outright invader and colonizer, is supplemented by his opposite, repressed side as a well-intentioned savior who is both noble and morally good, or the well-meaning inventor-scientist-entrepreneur caught up in his own passions for the discovery of *truth*. This binary couplet (invader/savior) is then deconstructed in favor of the Other, thereby both leveling and dispersing the moral judgment that the colonizer is an outright force of evil. Church

and science, which at first glance appear as dialectical opposites, become similar *regimes of truth* (Foucault, 1980) bent on achieving a transcendental truth at the expense of the aboriginal body. A *sin* for which they are, if not forgiven, certainly absolved of on their own terms.

The Appeasement of Eve

In each of these Edenic allegorical narratives, Eve is also appeased. She remains the White man's enabler. *She* is a Mother Teresa figure, [St.] Joan (Pauline Collins) in the *City of Joy*, who incessantly peppers Max Lowe (Patrick Swayze), a doctor fleeting from his responsibilities in America, about commitment. *She* is a courageous Indian activist of the Aboriginal Rights Movement (ARM) in *Thunderheart* who opens the door for FBI detective Ray Levoi (half-Sioux) to solve the murder and is then killed for her efforts. *She* is Stands With A Fist, a white woman who likewise opens the door for Lt. John Dunbar. "As an evocation of the feminist new woman, moreover, Stands With a Fist is ultimately rewritten as that familiar woman, a submissive wife" (Newton & Stacey, 1992-93, p. 68). With the presence of feminism's new woman, at least in its liberalist form in each of these allegorical narratives, an Eve can be identified whose gift of knowledge is no longer perceived as evil, but enabling. She can be transformed and allied with New Age spiritualism as the Goddess, the ecofemininst symbol of Gaia. This is an old ruse which, in the history of representational art, has had a long history, perhaps the most controversial example being Gauguin and his appropriation of Eve as represented by the *Vahines* of Tahiti when he went *native* (e.g., Solomon-Godeau, 1989).

Hollywood's strategic reappropriation of the allegory of the *noble savage* does double duty. It sets out to both *cure* them (and in turn ourselves) of the West's sickness by (re)discovering exactly what the aboriginal (and sometimes the romanticized subaltern) have lost. These turn out to be the values of a communal paradise, a nostalgic time before the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, where a particular strong dose of *sentiment* generated within the context of an abstract *humanity* reproduces, once again, the ethnocentric humanist subject, i.e., the white man.

In the case of the subaltern, this redemptive allegory is to be found in the celebration of close family ties and communal bonding, unexpected kindness, dignity, and courage as values that compensate for the West's materialism and its loss of community. The paradigmatic example here is *The City of Joy* which presents the fantasmatic screen of Calcutta as:

> Hell on Earth, the exemplary case of the decaying Third World megalopolis, full of social decay, poverty, violence, and corruption, with its residents caught in terminal apathy (facts are, of course, totally different: Calcutta [for anyone who has also seen Mother Teresa's funeral on television] is a city bursting with activity, culturally much more thriving than Bombay, with a successful local Communist government maintaining a whole network of social services. (Zizek, 1996, p. 80)

Like the late Mother Teresa, who brings a ray of hope into this picture of utter gloom with her message of poverty as a way redemption for enduring their suffer-

ing in silent dignity and faith, i.e., the sick and the poor repeat Christ's way of the cross, the young doctor, Max Lowe (Patrick Swayze), the hero of the story gives up his American dream to follow in similar footsteps. The ideological profit of all of this is complitious on two accounts. First, Mother Teresa's charity work which proposes that the poor and terminally ill look for salvation in their very suffering deters them from probing into the causes of their predicament, i.e., from politicizing their situation. Second, the financial contributions to Mother Teresa's charitable activities enables the rich from the West to benefit from a substitute redemption. All this works because the fantasmatic screen image of "The Third World as Hell on Earth is so utterly desolate that no political activity, only charity and compassion can alleviate the suffering." As for Aboriginals, the redemptive allegory rests on the fundamental premise that they possess (or possessed) a lifestyle which was in harmony with the Earth and Nature through their animistic spirituality, e.g., *Thunderheart*, *Dances With Wolves*, etc., that can be resuscitated for "us" in some form of an ecological conscience.

How the aboriginal body is re-written can be illustrated by the nostalgia for the West's lost family unit. In *Dances With Wolves*, when Kicking Bird and his wife get into bed, a sense of concern and confusion is seen on his face. He then pulls out one of the children's dolls that he has accidentally lain upon. The *mise en scène* of the script here is not constructing the Indian family, rather it is making it *mean* a particular way, i.e., to make them act like any middle-class American family. The attributes of American Indian family are naturalized *if* and *when* the viewer identifies with it. Here one wonders if it isn't the nuclear family of our own culture which is being validated in the guise of sentiment and humanity? Kicking Bird is portrayed as traditional father figure while the authoritative powers of Black Shaw (Canadian Cree/Chippewa Tantoo Cardinal), Kicking Bird's ~~wife~~[4] who is supposed to be a clan mother, remain underdeveloped.

The question of representing sacred and spiritual ceremonies is especially problematic in the above films. "Even if the rite is done right, it isn't right," says a Lakota Sioux of the Jumping Bull Compound at Ogala, South Dakota in the film *Imagining Indians* (Victor Masayesva, 1992), who had refused to take part in the filming of Apted's *Thunderheart*. He goes on to explain that *shape shifting* was not part of the Lakota tradition; that there had been no consultant on Lakota *spirituality* on the set. In one scene, at the memorial to Wounded Knee, the Lakota are shown dancing the Ghost Dance to pow wow music, entirely inappropriate and in bad taste.

There are other incorporations of alterity that are taken for granted in these films. Dunbar comes across Stands With A Fist ~~committing suicide~~. The gallant lieutenant *saves* her from herself and brings her back to the Lakota camp. From the Western perspective this is a heroic action, but from Lakota customs the perception might be otherwise. It is never made clear why this was a necessary act, nor was the issue raised that taking one's life may have been a benefit to that community, as in some aboriginal cultures when old age becomes more of a hindrance than a help: taking one's life is seen as a common good. These same gestures are repeated in *Medicine Man* when the good doctor *saves* a boy of the Poca Nu tribe with the last injection of a cancer curing serum. In both cases, the *contextual meaning* of the

differences between these cultures is taken away and reinscripted by a *humanistic discourse*—life over death no matter what. Yet this very value is being contested in our own culture. This is not to argue whose values should or shouldn't be accepted, it merely points out the way the exotic Other is appropriated and interpreted in terms of sameness. The same may be said of their marriage which takes place in the middle of the day, with Stands With Fists dressed in a white buckskin dress. Such costuming, like the Indian characters themselves who appear to be wearing their finest regalia all the time, is again a *dressing up* for the white tourist trade/audience. According to Castillo (1991), the costumes were modeled on the drawings done by a nineteenth century anthropologist George Catlin which were of formal and ceremonial Sioux attire and not their daily garb.

These incorporations raise once more the question of *authenticity*, as yet another form of fiction. Although South Dakota's Sinte Gleska Indian College linguist, Doris Leader Charge, translated the Michael Blake's screenplay into Lakota, coaching the actors and holding a small role in the film, at the same time one has to question whether this is not another signifying trope borrowed from documentary film-making so as to convince viewers of the credibility of the narrative's *truth*. The question of *translation* of oral culture into a written one remains unanswerable. None of the actors spoke Lakota fluently, nor could it ever be said that the language itself had somehow remained the same throughout its history. It too is subject to the same *reconstruction* as the reconstruction of mythical coming of the *white man* presented in the film.

In each narrative, there are also the *good Indians* and the *bad Indians*. The *bad Indians* always ally themselves with the forces of evil, while the *good Indians* . . ., well you guessed it. The forces of evil in postmodernism have all been inverted to *seemingly* take on the perspective of the Other. In *Dancing with Wolves* it is the Pawnee who help the U.S. army track their traditional enemies—the Sioux (Lakota). In the *Last of the Mohicans* (Michael Mann, 1992) it is the *French* Hurons vs. *British* Iroquois. The division, as to which tribes sided with the British (and why) against the Americans, is rarely problematized. In the *Emerald Forest*, it is the cannibalistic Beetle People who support the white occupation; and in *Thunderheart* civil unrest is between the pro-government Sioux and the Aboriginal Rights Movement (ARM). In the *Mission*, we find indigenous tribes *belonging* either to Spanish or French colonialists. *City of Joy* is marked by various cast divisions, from the Untouchables (lepers) on up to the Brahmans. Aboriginal and subaltern bodies are divided-up in the screen play depending upon whose point of view needs emphasizing. The binary logic which categorizes the aboriginal body as either good or bad masks the treaty agreements that took place in each specific case which, for political gains, were made so that the aboriginal home land might be kept. Indian nations were often used merely as pawns in the deadly chess game between the Americans and the British for final supremacy.

Beware of False Profits/Prophets: The *Wild Man*

The celluloid postcolonial is an invader bearing gifts (e.g., medical knowledge, strategies for fighting, technical know how, even an ecological conscious-

ness) who must undergo a transformation of himself or herself in order to experience the *cure* and find the resolution of identity through some form of bonding with the Other. Such a transformation capitalizes on the awakened spirituality of the Men's Movement, as well as on New Age Eco-spiritualism to further the redemptive allegory. From such a reading, Kevin Costner now becomes the new green *Wild Man* as popularized by Robert Bly.

As every anthropologist knows, *entry* into another culture is always problematic. These Hollywood screen plays solve this problem by *writing in* (to put it pejoratively and oxymoronically) a figuratively simulated white *half-breed*, neither white nor aboriginal, who is looking for a non-existent identity in an arrested childhood. For the postcolonial invader bearing gifts the exemplar to emulate is usually already in place. In Costner's film, *Dancing with Wolves*, Lt. Dunbar, the disillusioned soldier looking for redemption, is transformed into a Lakota warrior facilitated by Stands With Fists, another figuratively simulated *half-breed*. (She, too, has been abducted by Indians as a child!) His marriage to her is an allegorical reenactment of Adam and Eve in Paradise—the birthing of an ecological consciousness amongst the (few) Americans who had embraced the Indians. It is a union with a white woman who had *preceded* Dunbar in her own transformation into tribal ways (a curtsy to Eve, who gave Adam the apple of true knowledge). And again in *Thunderheart*, Ray Levoi is *literally* a half-breed sent in by the FBI to aid in squelching an internal Indian civil war. (In German, the film's title was translated as *Halbblut* making his status even more obvious). Levoi is also in search of redemption and succeeds when he allows his *Sioux* side to take over. Again it is a woman, Maggie Eagle Bear, who helps him initiate the journey of identity. And yet again in the *Mission* it is a Spanish soldier (Robert DeNiro) who is looking for redemption and forgiveness in the very people he helped enslave.

Transformations, in each of these films, require a dramatic event, an intervention of the Lacanian Real, to initiate the process: the suicidal ride in *Dances With Wolves*, the death of a young girl on the operating table in *The City of Joy*, the death of a young native woman in *Thunderheart*, the loss of a son in *The Emerald Forest*, the devastation of an entire Amazonian tribe from common measles in *The Medicine Man*, the fear of nuclear holocaust in *The Mosquito Coast*. Only then can the journeys into the exotic begin. "The exotic is always *empty*, it is characterized by *lack* [italics added], and this incompleteness calls forth and justifies attempts to fill in this gap in iconographical, textual, sexual and military terms" (Mason, 1990, p. 110).

In the aboriginal filmic context, the event into *the heart of darkness*, to recall Joseph Conrad's own xenophobia, is usually a vision quest, the hallucination of visions; in the Lacanian sense—the ability to face the Real. *Dancing With Wolves* offers a double reading of such a transformation. On one level, it may be read as the gradual contact and exchange of a soldier's uniform for native attire, but on another level it is again a *male* shamanistic allegory with a moral—a symbolic death and rebirth. In such an interpretation Dunbar *dies* during his suicidal ride before the Confederate pickets at St. David's field. The events that follow are part of his dangerous journey into *darkness*, filled with trials into the Land of the Dead (the spirit world). From these experiences, he emerges as a shaman who has acquired spiritu-

alistic knowledge. He has developed a close contact with the earth and an animal spirit, the wolf, to help him along the way. The cultural interchange can now be read as one male *white* neophyte shaman learning from another male *red* experienced shaman. With new spiritual powers *Dances with Wolves* is able to let the Lakota know that the buffalo are coming and help them defeat the Pawnee with the hidden rifles. New age spiritualism has once again been successfully mobilized.

In the Home Box Office movie, *The Last of His Tribe* (Harry Hook, 1992), starring Jon Voight and Graham Greene who has become Hollywood's iconic *Indian* with major roles in *Dances With Wolves*, *Thunderheart*, *Clear Cut*, *Medicine Creek*, a similar theme is rehearsed. Here, an anthropologist, not just any anthropologist but the famous Alfred Kroeber himself, undergoes a similar transformation to understand Ishi (the word means *man* in the language of the region's Yahi people thought to be extinct by mid-1890s) who then teaches him about *nature*. And in *Clear Cut* (Richard Bugajski, 1992) it is the lawyer who is given a terrifying lesson by Öko-Krieger against the evils of the timber industry and its representative—the corporate executive. Male shamans square off again in *Medicine Man* and in the Canadian epic *Black Robe* (Bruce Beresford, 1992), where a 17th century priest receives a sobering lesson in theology from an Indian sorcerer. The same reading repeats itself in *Thunderheart*. Visions and animals are central to the same journey. Ray Levoi is able to use his skills as an FBI detective to save the Sioux land from continued mining of radium. The film's resolution becomes a parody of the classic cavalry rescue. In each of these filmic narratives a white messiah of the New Age, the white half-breed brings back to the white man the message that a physical and spiritual balance with the earth needs to be embraced, repeatedly enabled by the body of Woman—metaphorically to be read as the ecofeminist symbol for mother earth—Gaia, a *born again* Eve.

In *Medicine Man*, the viewer already finds the *good doctor* transformed as another simulated *half-breed*, equally participating in tribal rituals and playing golf in modified fashion, of course, in his *own* back yard (The German translation for the title is *Die Letzten Tage von Eden—The Last Days of Eden*). Dr. Robert Campbell (Sean Connery) is a Moses-like messiah who will lead his *adopted* people, the Pocu Nu, out of the clutches of those evil road builders (civilization). He controls their representations like any anthropologist, illustrating their rituals, deaths and births in his notebooks. This is similar to Lt. Dunbar's diary, the sketch-book is the unspoken text of anthropological representation. In this film, we can assume that the construction builders have continued to lay asphalt since the 1986 making of the *Emerald Forest*. Bill Forest, the concerned father, has now been replaced by Dr. Campbell, the concerned patriarch. The *Holy Grail*, in this case, has to be (re)discovered; the *good* doctor has *lost* the cure for cancer in nature's biggest drug store, the Amazon Rain Forest. The secret to finding the *Grail* is to be found right under our very noses, like the letter in Edgar Allan Poe's short story, *The Purloined Letter*; in the most inconsequential of symbiotic relationships—with the ants which frequent the cancer-curing flower. The false opposition between nature and culture is deconstructed as laboratory chemicals, combined with native *spit*, give hope for a cure. It is the good doctor's assistant, Dr. Rae Crain (Lorraine Broca), who has come to keep

an *eye* on him. She represents the forces of *new world* evil, i.e., the pharmaceutical conglomerate who is funding the research, and it is she, as the evil Eve, who must undergo transformation to attain *spiritual knowledge* and have a share in Paradise. At the film's end, the Grail remains missing, but we are left with the hope that it will soon be found as Moses and his now converted daughter (although awkward hints of *incest* do appear throughout the film) relocate their tribe into the promised land by moving even *deeper* into the ~~jungle~~ away from civilization.

It should be parenthetically noted that *spiritual knowledge* is usually referred to or *translated* as ~~*medicine*~~, thereby analogously reiterating the *cure* motif which is given a physical analog in the subaltern context by way of drugs, pills, bandages, equipment, associated with the institutionalization of *big medicine*, i.e., general hospitals and pharmaceutical companies. These are critiqued by juxtapositioning the feminine qualities of care, sympathy, understanding, patience, recovering the *nursing* side of life, analogous to aboriginal *spiritual* recovery, therefore making yet another gesture towards Eve.

Allegorical Criticism: The Anti-Redemptive Text

The re-mobilization of the redemptive allegorical film after its long absence from modernity has been an *impulse* which characterizes much of what has been called postmodern art (Owens, 1992). Historically, the return of allegory "seems regularly to surface in critical and polemical atmospheres when for political or metaphysical reasons there is something that cannot be said" (Fineman, 1980, p. 48). What *cannot be said* is the nostalgia for a past that never was, a pastoral moment which recalls the *benevolence* of the invader who sympathizes and regrets the enslavement of the Other. To recall the *noble savage* of the past in order to fulfill the desire to redeem a *lost Eden* for the present which is now in ruins has been the response from a conservative cultural Right which wishes to reinstall and recenter the modern abstract white male subject; that subject which has been steadily eroding due to the engaged identity politics by left-leaning cultural activists. Consequently, it is a melancholic gaze which runs throughout these Hollywood narratives in their attempt to recover this imaginary *lost* object.

This melancholy mood, properly speaking, belongs to a much larger attempt by conservative forces to recall another fantasmatic mythic structure, namely an idealized America of the 50s where life was led in a Disneyfied fashion (Pfeil, 1990). It should be no surprise why this particular period should be the cite/sight/site of identification for it is a romanticized pastoral time free of the demands of feminism(s), civil rights movement, and identity politics, a protected space in the American imagination which does not have to deal with its domestic problems like the homeless, or the prevalent demonization of the AfricanAmerican male. To present a counter-hegemonic imaginary of this period has been the work of directors who have tried to undermine this mythic time ironically, e.g., Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*, or obliquely, as in David Cronenberg's movie, *Crash*, which alludes to the car crashes of Jane Mansfield and James Dean who, in the film, are revered as heroic and iconic exemplars of suicidal road kills of 50s America's (mis)perceived Other.

In the sense that allegory is a model for all commentary and critique which enable primary texts to be rewritten, viewers are continually confronted with the difficulties surrounding historical revisionism. How can such revisionist narratives be sus-

pended? or at least put under suspicion? Paul Theroux's *Mosquito Coast* is the only allegorical distopia mentioned that avoids the appropriation of alterity by distancing and reversing even further the supplemental reading that *hovers* above the text. Like Tim Burton and David Cronenberg, Peter Weir's translation of Theroux's novel (1986) sets out to *ruin* the bulk of the pastoral filmic allegories which were to appear some six years later. It was both a reminder and a warning that the tragedy of colonial conquest can easily be repeated in a postmodern context. The compulsion to repeat, psychoanalytically speaking now, has meant that the West has been unable to fully face the trauma of the scar it has left on its colonial Other. This repression has come back to haunt it. These allegories vainly try to rationalize and justify the pain that has been levied at the Other. They deny and defer the full extent of the psychic damage that has been done.

In this regard, *Mosquito Coast* is an excellent example of how allegory can be used against itself as a reflexive instrument to counter the hegemonic force of postcolonial interests. It offers an example of counter-commemoration, an allegorical distopia of American postcolonialism, the anti-thesis of the redemptive allegory. On one level, all the above films that appropriate alterity are stories of heroic survival—postmodern Robinson Crusoe's, Dr. Schweitzer's and Dr. Livingstone's. Only Paul Theroux's, *Mosquito Coast*, points out the futility of such appropriations. Allie Fox (the name of a totemic animal that is very telling of his character), an inventor with three patents *pending*, represents the failure of science and the patriarchal family. There is no female body to slip into humanistic abstractions of sentiment and humanity. *She* remains nameless throughout the text, simply referred to as *Mother*. His ice making machine (Fox's self-created Frankenstein, a *mechanical* ego) is the very embodiment of male phallocentric power. It stands out, like a skyscraper in the middle of the rain forest, a sore and shimmering penis dominating the landscape by its shiny corrugated metal. It ejaculates the most useless material needed for aboriginal survival—ice (his frozen semen); it even kills those who might compete with it (e.g., mercenary soldiers or down and out survivors fleeing from civilization, one is never sure). Both religious and scientific discourses are treated as destructive colonial interventions and in the end Allie Fox remains blind, refusing to turn back and go down the river to safety even after having destroyed all that was precious to him. Allie, like the West, has not confronted the Real of his desire. He will continue to repeat his mistakes.

By speaking the unspeakable, Peter Weir's filmic adaptation was able to create a discourse which was "the other as us" (Tyler, 1986, p. 128). The point of such discourse "is not how to make a better representation [of the Other], but how to *avoid* representation" in the first place. In Tyler's sense, Theroux, has enacted a post-modern ethnography for he has *evoked* the absent, i.e., that which is nonrepresentational, as a call to ethical responsibility. *Mosquito Coast* is *not* a symbol of what it evokes, rather it points to that ampersand between reality & fiction, i.e., the *evoking* process itself which suspends the spacio-temporal enlightenment intertextuality with the postmodern condition of America today, and the ampersand of evocation avoids any mimetic reconciliation. It belongs to a counter-hegemonic movement against appropriation and assimilation; and it does this by reversing the utopian allegorical code of paradise lost. Admittingly, this is a rare counter-factual buried amongst the video-store grab-bag of consumptive

goodies. However it's very singularity bears witness to this other truth. It does this by not falling into the trap of documentary realism, rather it enters into the contest for the popular imagination by being entertaining tragic. It vivifies one effort to counter the fantasy of Hollywood's postcolonial noble savage, so to speak, by playing on its own turf, confirming, once more, that there is no outside to escape to, i.e., no factual documentary truth of scientific and philosophical security. In the cultural wars that map the postmodern landscape (Hunter, 1991), artists & critics who align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized, and disorganized peoples find themselves caught up in oxymoronic positions (West, 1990). Peter Weir is simultaneously both progressive & coopted by the very institutions in which he find himself, i.e., in Hollywood's Hollywood where the mandate is to make a profit. But through a deconstructive move, *Mosquito Coast* confronts the audience with the impossible Real trauma of postcolonialism provoking the audience into an ethical reflexive responsibility if only at the level of a thought experiment. Perhaps in the postmodern culture of consumption such an anti-consumptive text which lays bare the very kernel of Enlightenment's violent desires for power and domination, remains one of the few strong correctives to an otherwise continuous glossing over the violence of racism no matter how *prettily* it remains packaged on the screen?

The pedagogical lessons for art education in a spectacular society concerning film are indeed challenging. Few *revisionist films*, where the indigenous culture is given a voice to present an alternative view, e.g., Lourdes Portillo's *Columbus on Trial* (1992); Kidlak Tahimik's *Magellan's Slave* (1992); Craig Baldwin's *O No Coronado!* (1992), George Burdeau's *Surviving Columbus* (1990), Neil Goodwin and Lena Carr's *Geronimo and the Apache Resistance* (1988), etc., ever find their way into the conglomerate controlled theaters, yet alone into our classrooms. So-called *alternative* theaters and film festivals are usually attended by the converted who are able to sit through the often didactic and documentary presentations. As art teachers, we must face that our students are immersed in Hollywood's representational practices. In order to challenge those representations, especially now, in a world where globalization has made identity politics such a crucial issue, the difficult task of finding time and resources which, at the very least, help our students to question the seduction of the filmic aesthetic that is being offered them, can only be held up as a duty and an ethical responsibility. Such a task requires passion and commitment, qualities not found in any written methodology or curriculum, but in an art teacher's own conviction that such teaching strategies attempt to continue the impossible: to uphold the lofty claims of democracy, justice, and equality for all.

Notes

1. This essay was completed in 1996 and submitted to the USSEA journal in 1998. Due to the constraints of space, I apologize for the reduced nuances and references of argumentation that appear in the full version.
2. In the Lacanian paradigm the Real is that realm which exists *beyond language*, an empty void of the unknowability and strangeness around which the psychic registers of the Imagination and the Symbolic order strive to articulate. The *objet a*, for Lacan represents the lost objects that forever prevent the subject from being whole and complete

again. The mother's breast is the paradigmatic lost object. We are all creatures who *lack* and desire. See Jacques Lacan (1979).

3. I am referring to Lacan's discussion of Holbein's painting the *Ambassadors* where he claims that the death skull of Charles I, as an anamorphic projection, is that point in the picture which deconstructs the Enlightenment tradition which is represented by the two merchants. I am suggesting that Sanchez's character is a similar *stain* in this film. See Jacques Lacan (1979). *What is a Picture.*

4. Following the practices of Jacques Derrida, this word (and others that follow) is placed *under erasure* (graphically crossed out) to indicate its conceptual inadequacy, yet the necessity of its use in this context.

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