The new tribe: Critical perspectives and practices in Aboriginal contemporary art

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Living on Reservation X

Introduction
What is this place—the reserve,¹—that Americans call the reservation, and some call “the rez”? For most contemporary aboriginal peoples, the reserve is, was, or will be home.

In Chapter 2, we saw how the federal government set aside lands called “reserves” exclusively for its colonized subjects, to extricate them from their cultural habits, and protect them from the vices of the outside world. Reserves were special lands held in trust by a federal government that regarded aboriginal people as wards to be looked after, cared for, and assimilated, even though they had been independent cultural entities long before the arrival of Europeans. Nevertheless, the isolation imposed during the reservation period actually helped aboriginal people to maintain their distinct languages and many other traditional practices. In effect, reserves were “preservation” spaces. Yet reserves continued to be restrictive, panoptic spaces presided over by Indian agents who, until the 1960s, exercised unusual amounts of power. At one time, Indian people needed special “passes” to leave the reserve boundaries. As John PeeAce and George Pecquaquat of the Nut Lake Reserve recall reserve life in the 1940s, they could not leave the reserve without such a pass: “We were prisoners and we could barely survive. There were gates on the fence around the reserve. We had to beg and barter with the neighbouring off-reserve farmers, but before we could do even that we needed a pass to get there.”² Although some may find it difficult to view these places as prisons, it was precisely this effectiveness of the reserve system that inspired apartheid South Africa to institute similar enslavement measures for aboriginal Africans some fifty years ago. Today, reserves remain an affirming presence despite their context of numerous historical uncertainties, and the fact that many non-Indians still believe “reserves are the proper place for Indians.” Ironically, reserves have been the glue giving aboriginal people their distinct identity for more than a century. In recent years, self-determination through land claims is helping to ensure the reserve’s survival and prosperity.

Today, aboriginal people are, of necessity, creating new and previously unimagined discursive spaces that transcend the old restrictive idea of the reserve. In this the final chapter I examine one of those metaphoric spaces in which the “new tribe” is situated, and that I call “reservation X.”
Reservation X

As I argued in chapter 3, community is no longer assumed to be a fixed, unified or stable place; rather, it exists in a state of flux. Often a means of maintaining some sense of meaning and coherence, communities historically encouraged sameness, making individual difference difficult. Similarly, identity is now conceptualized as multiple and mobile, as opposed to the seemingly stable and homogenous entity of the past. Language and religion, once the great integrating forces, are now in crisis; and as the world grows ever more complex, so do our communities and identities. We may say that we are from there, when really we are from here; tomorrow we will be from over there. Similarly, we can no longer say we are this or that; we are now both and more.

In a real sense, the reserve, like many communities today, is both an ambivalent and contingent space: ambivalent in the sense that while it is an attractive social space for familial, spiritual, and emotional reasons, it is a repulsive environment for political, prejudicial and economic ones. At present, we are witnessing tremendous, ambivalent demands on reserves that either attract or repel its members; we are also seeing greater migration of reserve members to urban areas, now estimated at around fifty percent for both Canada and the U.S.A. Reserves are contingent in the synecdochical sense of being part of a larger whole; more specifically, a reserve's members depend on the larger group's response in order to be interpellated as subjects. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will focus on the idea of "reservation x," as a new, conceptual, and hybrid space, constituted by the "new tribe."

To cite Homi Bhabha, hybridity "is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge." It is a conceptual space in which new attitudes, opinions, and ways of thinking and feeling can be expressed, where new points of view are presented, and new approaches and orientations are observed. Bhabha calls this "third space," an incommensurable but productive space of cultural difference. Hybridity is commonly used to describe something of mixed origins, or unlike parts. In fact, the word has other connotations. It encompasses the idea of occupying in-between spaces; and many, composite, or syncretic entities and new formations, as well as Creole or mixed people. I am suggesting that in this third space, or "reservation x," there emerges a new subject, the "new tribe." It is a new site that allows differentiated individuals to carry with them old principles to participate productively and creatively in the world. In this space of "reservation x," status is in flux as social standing shifts and identity is negotiated. Indeed, Mary Longman sees this space as
having ‘no fixed address,’ where artists are in constant motion, whether moving physically off the reserve, or in or out of urban environments. These artists may also be undertaking activities such as an exhibition, a play, a performance, a demonstration, a lecture, an argument, a court challenge, or dancing; or be socially committed in a local community as cultural workers and activists.

It was Edward Poitras who first identified “a place for marginal people [...] who were adopted as children.” Though he described this space as a place for unconnected and displaced individuals, “reservation x” is now seized upon by the “new tribe” as a “position.” As a concept, “position” is seen as a discursive process by Davis and Harré, as opposed to the idea of role. They see position as far more fluid and dynamic, because it takes into account a sense of multiple selves (identities). Position also distinguishes subjects as interpellated in conversations, between people or in other discursive contexts: “there can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself” (48). Though Poitras did not see the “new tribe” as insignificant, he did want them identified as being somewhere at the edge, where they were allowed to be different. Being Métis himself, he has always been aware of the dynamics of social standing between two strongly situated identities, aboriginal and non-aboriginal.

Analogous to Poitras’s marginal space is artist Shelley Niro’s description of a fictional space in her film script for Honey Moccasin: “The locale [...] is a Reservation X otherwise known as the Grand Pine Indian Reservation.” Her point about Reservation X denotes a reality of place for contemporary Indian people, a community that is at once fictional and real, but nonetheless a place with a story. We are forewarned that a reservation narrative is at the threshold, and with the release of Honey Moccasin, our desire to know more about life on the reserve encounters an intellectual permeability. In Canada, reservation narratives are becoming more familiar to general audiences through television dramas like North of 60 and The Rez. Crossing the mysterious frontiers of the reserve, once out of reach to outsiders, is now much easier. Niro and the other artists get us there through individual narratives.

The concepts of position and hybridity illuminate several possibilities for a practice of the “new tribe on reservation x.” The emergence of new positions on “reservation x” gives a licence to new practices, and signals unrestricted movement—physically, intellectually, and virtually—two new issues for a post-reservation practice.
Reservation X: The Exhibition

The initial idea for an exhibition about the issue of place began by our investigating the value and importance of belonging or connecting to an aboriginal community. This idea raised the following questions: What is the artist’s role in, and how does the artist contribute to, a community’s cultural identity? In turn, how is the community giving artists an identity? And, what is the relation between an artist’s community of choice and the mainstream art community? The first question came out of the observation of the current practices on Canada’s west coast, where artists in aboriginal communities have long been connected to community activities, either by active participation in dances and other celebrations, or by making objects for use in such celebrations. This led me to question whether aboriginal artists in other communities engaged in similar practices. The second question is more theoretical, but has been answered in various ways by the artists themselves. The final question is addressed in various sections of this dissertation.

In early 1996, Arthur Renwick and I conducted research/studio tours of the artists’ homes and communities of artists to be featured in the exhibition. It soon became evident that individual circumstances led each artist to conceptualize community in multiple ways. Some artists, born and brought up in aboriginal communities, continued to live there; others, born and raised in urban areas, have since moved to a reserve community. Still others, born and working in urban spaces, maintain links to both urban and rural communities. Their ideas of community and their quotidian experience reflected different perspectives; yet all were essentially aware of their affinity to aboriginal identity. Each artist was invited to create an installation work addressing the issues of community and identity. The exhibition opened at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in the spring of 1998 and included the following artists: Mary Longman, Nora Naranjo-Morse, Marianne Nicolson, Shelley Niro, Jolene Rickard, Mateo Romero, and C. Maxx Stevens. This chapter examines each of their installations.

Who lives on “reservation x”? In this era of land claims and self-determination, aboriginal communities are taking more responsibility for their internal affairs. More and more reserve members with advanced degrees are also contributing to the betterment of their communities. In the past, Indian people moved home when they reached a certain age to become part of the whole once again. Moving back is now a more common event for all ages. A number of artists have recently returned home, only to discover some interesting results. This trend inspired Reservation X.
Of course, not everyone returns. Some prefer cities. Some have returned, only to re-depart again, this time with a more developed disposition. Jolene Rickard, after years of urban living, was asked by her family to return and contribute to the reservation community; Marianne Nicolson went back to the place where her mother grew up, feeling that she needed to make a connection. Mateo Romero moved to his wife’s reservation of Pojoaque; Shelley Niro lives at the edge of the Six Nations Reserve in the town of Brantford. Nora Naranjo-Morse continues to live on her reservation of Santa Clara, while Mary Longman and C. Maxx Stevens choose to live in cities for educational or professional reasons.

The mystery of the X is an historical moment. In late nineteenth-century treaty signings, Indian chiefs had to have their hands held in order to sign an X as a mark of their consent and understanding of the political process, that is: X Poundmaker, his mark; X Red Pheasant, his mark, and so on. X signified articulation. It left a trace, even for those unable to write. Because of the uniformity of their signatures, the marking of an X belied the signatories’ intelligence. The X was contradictory because it also implied inarticulation. Their X’s created the reserves. As Harold Cardinal once observed: “In the language of the Cree Indians, the Indian reserves are known as the land that we kept for ourselves or the land that we did not give to the government” (29). While the treaty negotiators thought they had won the day, it could be argued that the aboriginal signatories were not thinking of themselves, but of their descendants. The Europeans, on the other hand, wanted immediate results. Today, in courts of law, aboriginal people are winning land claim cases based on the interpretations of the original treaties. The simple, cogent mark, X, whose mystery would have done the original signatories proud, has proven to have powerful consequences.

The mystery of Indian territories is like the impermeability of a particular subject: although we see it and hear about it, we don’t understand it. For so long reserves have been out of reach to outsiders. The nature of the reserve is now rapidly changing, however; yet, like any small community, until you know and understand it, it will remain inexplicable. Struggling to maintain its meaning for both the people who live there and for urban Indians and whites who consider visiting it, the reserve has been both sanctuary and prison. Despite its history, reserves are becoming attractive and permeable: attractive in the sense of young people wanting to identify with the reserve culture, and tourists wanting an experience; and permeable, in the sense that communications media, from radio and television to the Internet, are now being beamed into most homes, making...
isolation impossible. Nor does the idea of reservation x limit our understanding of those territories called reserves. Territoriality is fundamentally important to Indian people, and the Indian reserve is a territorial space that signifies “home,” a place that enables and promotes a varied and ever-changing perspective. It is a frontier of difference and a place to which one can always return. Some Indian people must return to participate in Powwows, Potlatches, Corn Dances, or Kiva ceremonies, or to attend weddings or funerals and other rites of passage. For many, this does not mean a return to the margins; rather, it is a return to the centre of activity, which provides points of reference for those in search of a dialogue with identity and community. Thus, by inverting the stereotype of the reserve as somehow outside the core of the state, a new, enabling trend occurs. On the other hand, of the large percentage of aboriginal peoples in North America who live in urban centres, a majority of that number would consider their birthplace to be urban. The urban and rural now make up two discursive spaces or communities that form the new reservation narrative. As will become evident, Indian people’s continuous movement from one place to another makes individual identity problematic because of a need to belong to some community. For Indian people, historically, urban living renders attachment urgent. They continue to greet each other by asking: Where are you from? It is no longer embarrassing to say that one is from a place that is not a reserve, although this may be prefaced by pointing out a parent’s specific tribal territory. It is within this complexity that we quest for a sense of place, of community and identity.

From the artists’ perspective, utopian communities are a thing of the past and can be signified only poetically. There was a time in the 1960s and 1970s when cultural identity was at its zenith and many young people longed for an alternative way of life reminiscent of some golden age. That era contributed to a greater consciousness of community, of living with others, and of sharing ideas. What has survived from those days is a strong commitment to preserving fundamental philosophies and principles. Going back home, living on “reservation x,” contributing to local culture, are now accessible for many. The ancient ancestors who signed their mysterious X would be very surprised to see how great a difference their obscure mark has made for present and future generations.

New Reference Points
The “new tribe,” as I have been proposing throughout, denotes a group of artists whose continued practices are contingent and ambivalent, artists who
understand and negotiate different spaces, artists who are multilingual. The following artists, like all others in this dissertation, construct their culture from the national text of everyday life translated into modern forms of information technology, language, and dress. Furthermore, I have been particularly interested in artists who are contemporary in that their perspectives and practices are critically based, and whose expressive demeanour is conditioned both by tradition and modernity. Moreover, these are artists who are highly conscious of their subject positions as artists—who are also aboriginal, male/female, young/old, urban/rural, Canadian/American, Cree/not-Cree, schooled/unschooled, Métis, treaty/non-treaty. The artists positioned on “reservation x” are individuals who are more aware of the new centres and reference points. In this chapter, then, I examine the work of seven artists whose articulation and position are shifting the focus and breaking down the modernist barriers of art and everyday life.

Historically, artists were always very much a part of the community fabric. During the post-war period, however, contemporary aboriginal artists positioned themselves apart from their respective aboriginal communities, becoming more individualistic by leaving the reserves and conforming more with the mainstream. This disconnection was symptomatic of a modernist world whose adherents had originally wanted to express themselves freely without the pressure of community standards. Modernism became a consciously forward-looking movement that wanted little to do with tradition. It was always thinking in terms of the future, a tomorrow that was forever on its way. If modernism was a necessary step in the evolution of contemporary aboriginal artistic practice, it is also currently undergoing radical changes. Artists are attempting to merge the legacy of individualism with the dynamic and affirming bond of community. They no longer see the appeal of being marginalized iconoclasts but prefer to become active participants, where community and individual growth are not incompatible but complementary goals. By understanding the logic and evolution of their practices, we may be able to see some critical connections and reconnections.

Why, for example, is “reservation x” important and for whom? I suggest that between two or more communities—reserve and urban—there exists a socially ambiguous zone, a site for articulation for the aboriginal contemporary artist that is frequently crossed, experienced, interrogated, and negotiated. The idea of “reservation x” argues for a space of radical openness and “hybridity,” of spaces of resistance being opened at the margins. However, I see this space as in between two centres—a politically charged, though highly permeable site.
Aboriginal contemporary artists, like other artists, often respond to the conditions of their times. These artists move freely between different communities and places, often within a new “third space” that encompasses the two. They are able to see, borrow from, and articulate their position within the two spaces. They understand the aboriginal community and the mainstream; at times they question the two, at other times they subvert them. They see boundaries as permeable and culture as a changing tradition. Aware of family and community dynamics as constituting identity through language, society and the unconscious, aboriginal artists have accessed new and different reference points, for which the reserve is a major catalyst.

Some communities view artists as important because they give visual expression to identity. Always skilled articulators of culture and community identity, aboriginal contemporary artists were for many years led across the discursive boundaries of the mainstream, since it gave them an identity as artists and potentially important artists. Yet in striving to legitimate their identity, they brought with them baggage that was often dismissed by the gate-keepers as not-quite art—a logic akin to the cowboy/Indian dichotomy, where the equation is not quite balanced. On the one hand, cowboy, like artist, is an occupation anyone can choose. Being Indian, however, is a far more complex formation of identity and community. Anyone can become an artist, but not anyone can become an Indian. The identity of the artist is mobile and unfixed, as is the artist’s cultural identity. Yet together, the two identities contribute to the makeup of a complex subject of the modern age.

In what ways is this idea being articulated? Contemporary artists place greater value in self-determination, a willingness to be an individual yet unconsciously tied to place. “Returning home” means contributing and reconnecting to local culture. Living and working in a changing world, while maintaining a sense of identity, an artist must recognize the necessity of preserving fundamental philosophies and principles. In the late 1960s, the community projects of ’Ksan, in northern British Columbia, and the IAIA, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, provided many artists with a new sense of identity and community. In the decades since, however, contemporary artists of aboriginal ancestry have struggled to become recognized players in the mainstream. In the process, many succeeded in becoming nationally and internationally distinguished. The late Haida artist Bill Reid is an example.

Meanwhile, the mainstream itself has undergone major ideological shifts, fuelled in part by artists outside the dominant Western canon.
and in part by the growing awareness of pluralism and difference as leading indicators of change. These changes include notions of cultural identity, an artist’s relation to community, and the questioning of individualism. This is the so-called post-modern moment where boundaries are blurred and more permeable, and where global communication and economies are leading to a kind of creative confusion. Furthermore, we are witnessing a continual movement by artists, both physically and psychologically. Increasing numbers of aboriginal artists are pursuing an education in fine arts or art history, being exposed to new ideas, and asking new questions. They question the mainstream and their role within it. Aboriginal artists also question their identity as aboriginal—can they continue to be aboriginal, Indian, “other”?—and that identity’s value in a changing world.

Crossing intellectual frontiers to meet people and exchange ideas is the reality of artists coming together to share in this experience of questioning identity. “Reservation x” is about any space or place where these artists have lived, where they now live, or where they will live: it is about being elsewhere. It is about the permeable spaces of rural and urban aboriginal communities where artists—like the seven examined in the following sections—move in and out.

Mary Longman
Mary Longman summarizes her spirit—fostered out at a young age, travelling across the country, living among several cultures—in the dictum that “there is no fixed address for Reservation X”: It is everywhere and nowhere.

Longman’s “no fixed address” is situated in an ever-diminishing world where individuals have become increasingly atomized, disoriented, disconnected and displaced. We are forever trying to make sense of place against an increasingly complex environment. Who and what and where is our community when our networks of relations are in spaces subdivided into cities, towns, reserves, neighbourhoods, blocks, and houses? At first glance, our social space is defined by our friends and neighbours. Longman says it is first family and home that embed her in place; then, it is community. But what does community mean for her, and most aboriginal people? While the connection to community often signifies continuity, other connections come deep from within her personal life. Drawing on customs and traditions is not just a bond of faith, but also a transformative integration. She adapts them to contemporary everyday life.
How does Longman conceptualize these frequent shifts in and outside "reservation x"? Her recent works derive their foundation, in part, from a profound consciousness of her aboriginality, conjoined with her quotidian experiences, in and outside, aboriginal communities. The piece called *Reservations* (1992, fig. 34), for example, pertains to the tenacity of cultural memory. We see a birdcage sitting atop a sturdy, decorative column; in the cage stands a solitary red "tree of life." The rusted birdcage has a severe formality; it implies an outdated yet powerful institution. The cage manages to maintain a tree; in a similar way, reserves hold significant stories. Anyone raised on a reserve often has a profound and
simultaneous sense of ambivalence: love and hate, attraction and repulsion, freedom and confinement, liberty and subjection. The reserve is a life in constant transformation—about which Longman also has reservations.

This work does not force itself upon us politically. The caged tree subtly evokes the containment of the colonized. We begin to recognize the human being as the rational animal—"man as the measure"—who is capable of containing nature. The leaves, however, manage to escape their confinement. But, like a colonized people, they can be clipped (read: controlled)—maintained, managed, and manicured. Interestingly, the plant's roots (read: tradition, ancestry, history) remain within the boundaries of the cage. While the plant's life can be terminated at any time, its independence (read: sovereignty) is always in question and under surveillance. Why then, can't it grow and become something? This question, in fact, underlines the new discursive debate for aboriginal leaders who are attempting to define their idea of self-determination through self-government. We may see the plant as a people or community taking a step towards this self-determination, of wrestling authority away from the government's Department of Indian Affairs, the great "Modernist Project." Indeed, this radical move to rebuild local identity is occurring in many aboriginal communities today. At the same time, we are witnessing a system that is losing control and is no longer instrumental in the everyday life of aboriginal communities, a system that can only provide economic but not cultural welfare. Longman's work gives a bleak yet "beautiful" (ironically aestheticized) articulation to this philosophy of aboriginal contemporaneity.

Similarly, her Medicine People (1996, fig. 35) articulates a striving for balanced relationships; a resolution of the tension that is a simultaneity of push/pull, active/passive, us/them, known/unknown. The piece shows three horn-like figures crouched inward; suspended between them is a solitary stone on a steel wire. The medicine people from whom this piece takes its title were not considered doctors in the contemporary sense, resolving issues based on the observance of symptoms; rather, they were a special group more concerned with the psychological manifestations and origins of sickness. They involved themselves more with matters of the mind than of the body, the two being inextricably linked. Medicine people have special powers and language that make them almost incomprehensible. In some ways, Longman articulates this idea abstractly. Looking at this work leaves us with more questions than answers; no doubt, she herself is also pondering the question. The three horns personify three figures, or holy people, engaged in a communal

ceremony. Are they gathered around an embryonic form or rock to help give it energy and spiritual strength? We are not sure. However, Longman seems to suggest this gathering of medicine people is not by chance, but by design. It is a gathering more in the realm of resolving a problem, or an idea, or in honour of an event of extraordinary meaning. Materially speaking, Longman cast the figures in copper, and carved the floating object in Catlinite (or pipestone, an indigenous material from a quarry in Minnesota). It is no accident that copper is Longman's preferred element, as it once was with ancient American cultures. Its conducting properties suggest an exceptionally multiple meaning in this piece. Longman is no doubt aware that cut-out copper forms were used in ceremonial lodges. This material originated near the shorelines of the Great Lakes, where local people pounded it out to form effigies. And on the West Coast, copper became not only a symbol of wealth, but also a monetary standard. Indeed, copper objects found in museums throughout the world indicate how widespread was their use.

Longman's *Strata and Routes* (1998, fig. 36), is a sculptural installation that at first glance shows two tree trunks welded together with roots showing at each end. How does a tree grow to be this way? The image is in fact a *trompe-l'oeil*. The two trees are positioned together, then layers (strata) of little rocks are positioned at the centre acting as sutures. A large stone is embedded atop the trunk suggesting that the roots are growing around it. This stone bears photo-emulsified images of Longman's biological family. It is a deceptively simple work, yet powerfully overdetermined, in that it is an intensely personal statement about Longman's heritage, firmament, and progression. *Strata and Routes* pieces together home, family, community, and land. Although her work
is strongly influenced by aboriginal sensibilities, her themes are decipherable: family ("unconditional acceptance") and community (Shackan). In this piece we see the value of community and personal growth as affirming self-determination among First Nations. Her use of a tree, as in Reservations, signifies the bond between family and nature; the fact that nature as suture helps heal First Nation communities. Roots reach into the earth suggesting heritage. Roots reach into the Sky World, cradling her family (the flat stone supporting photographic images). The homophones, route and root, evoke past, present, and future directions, as well as a categorizing instrument.

Longman positions these works as reflections of a struggle to be an active part of the post-reservation world. In Reservations, we sensed a struggle for freedom from control; in Medicine People it was the significance of a spiritual relationship to the cosmos and the principles of belonging; finally, Strata and Routes addressed the issues of travel, movement and change, both personally and culturally. Longman's grasp of her origins,
influences, experiences, and relations in her personal life, is complemented by her awareness of the change that transforms all cultures.

**Nora Naranjo-Morse**

Nora Naranjo-Morse's *Gia's Song* (1998, fig. 37a-c) is quite simply about home. Several years ago, she and her husband built their home on tribal land, just outside the town of Espanola, New Mexico. "During the process," she says, "I started realizing what art is; art could be everything and is everything. When I started plastering the walls I felt like I had been doing it all my life.[...] This reconnected me to the culture in an important sense." The house took them five to six years to build, using fifty-five hundred adobe bricks. Naranjo-Morse says of the building experience: "I never walk into a building and take it for granted anymore." She lives on the periphery of the Santa Clara Pueblo, an interesting position for a contemporary Pueblo woman, especially when we understand that Pueblo means town or community. The main part of the village is largely unpaved.

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**fig.37a  Nora Naranjo-Morse, Gia's Song, 1998.**
Adobe brick houses are still standard, except on the outskirts of town where government-built, framed stucco houses sit apart from each other. Some of the traditional homes have been here for hundreds of years, whereas the modern homes last for a short while, some even abandoned after only a few years. To understand this connection to tradition is to understand the Pueblo world-view. Naranjo-Morse says:

I come from Pueblo people who still have an ideology of community [...] but because of assimilation they are becoming more fragmented. [... Adobe is] used primarily to build homes, outdoor bread ovens, and interior fireplaces. Not only was this a practical way of using the environment to build shelter, but it was and still is our connection to the earth. Our culture built its belief system to a great degree on the environment, including the idea that we emerged from the earth. This idea is still very rooted in people like me who insist on building their own homes.  

In Gia’s Song Naranjo-Morse presents fragmentation as a sign of the contradictory nature of aboriginal communities today. On one side, the walls are completely plastered with red-coloured adobe; on the other, we see a wall completely plastered with graffiti. This work can thus be viewed in two parts: beauty and loss.

We enter a contemplative space we are to understand as traditionally pueblo; it reflects a belief in finding or coming from a centre. This is the centre from which we emerge, born with an understanding that a people came from a particular place, a place that is sacred and that gives us meaning and identity. On the back of the wall, we see a human image rising out of the earth. This figure has a counter-clockwise spiral sign on its chest (fig. 37b); the centre that Naranjo-Morse calls Po-wa-ha. Below the figure, plant formations rise up from the sand. I read this as a suggestion that we are born of the earth, and of the “emergence” from the earth below. In this case then, each of us is asked to consider our relationship with the natural world. Naranjo-Morse speaks of this relationship with clay:

When my mother gathered clay, she would take me with her. Before she allowed us to gather clay, we would kneel down and pray to the clay spirit, which in the Tewa language is Nan chu kwee jo. [...] My mother was making a connection to something very powerful.

In this uncomplicated space, we can now emerge, not to exit, but to be born into this world. We have come from an abstract space, a contemplative space, a space where we are enveloped: it is a space of beauty.
The second half of this work is much more hectic in contrast: graffiti deface the wall, a television runs continuously, and objects are scattered about (fig. 37c). This is Naranjo-Morse's harshest comment:

One day when we drove by Santa Clara Pueblo, we saw the government-built HUD houses. The first thing my son said was, 'Where is the mud?' When he said that, I could not control the tears. I realized we had put him in a unique position to understand something very elemental about himself and his relationship with his family and the culture."

We gaze through an iron-framed window into a small room where we see a television set. In the room there is an easy chair, and several decorative objects line the wall. The decorations objectify aboriginal culture in that they hang unused from the wall, for aesthetic and Christian motives, rather than ritual purposes. The artist has created a poetic video
narrative focusing on housing issues. In the technique of "slow motion," we see and hear the contradictory situation of her community. We see fragmentation. As the Spanish word indicates, the Pueblo people live in small villages, their homes usually side by side. This is still the case in all Pueblo villages in New Mexico. However, we are seeing more and more prefabricated homes being built on the outskirts of the village. These are single-family dwellings, often poorly constructed. Many are vacated because they are not suitable for habitation. Naranjo-Morse built an exterior wall that is typically modern, its graffiti indicating a moral decay brought on by an external system—one approved by the tribal government that believed it was good for the people. Instead, the two governments ripped apart a system that had worked. Santa Clara had to be "Americanized;" that is, "modernized." Defacement normally typifies disrespect. But in this case, it speaks more about resistance, a yearning for traditional moral values.
Is Santa Clara dying? In other words, by the logic of synecdoche, are aboriginal communities dying? Historically, aboriginal communities suffered because of external pressures, and this would seem to be true even today. We are seeing new social pressures on community. Some of these Naranjo-Morse points out; there are others that will affect the tribal fabric. To survive as aboriginal people, or Tewa, it is more than ever essential to maintain traditional principles and philosophies. Without these, we lose that sense of centre. As Naranjo-Morse puts it:

To be a mother, a nurturer, is how I’m valued by my people. It has nothing to do with what you’ve achieved in the outside world, or what your name is. When my son was dancing for the Deer Dance, I made a whole feast where I fed about one hundred people. I felt I was a very important person—even though I was slaving over the stove. Maybe feminists would deem this a step backwards, but I had a role in my community. I was happy because I was nourishing my son through his spiritual journey, and, on a different level, I was being nourished through his dance and his energy.¹⁴

For her, being and belonging are critical to her Santa Clara identity. Unlike other artists, she remains close, continuing to live near her community. However, although her house is on the reservation, it is located on the outskirts of Española, not in the Pueblo proper.

Despite her location on or near Santa Clara, Naranjo-Morse is an artist very much a part of the post-reservation world. Her connections continually reach beyond the Pueblo. She frequently conjoins traditional and modern ideas, and lectures regularly to different audiences about her art and culture. Though she leaves, she always returns.

**Marianne Nicolson**

Marianne Nicolson’s *House of Origin* (1998, fig. 38a) is made of two large paintings and several photographs printed on both sides. Cedar planks serve as roof trusses. All three visual elements hang from the ceiling and form a house, a *gukwdzi*, big house, or “House of Origin.” Since it forms a virtual house, there is both an inside and outside. The viewer is expected to move in and out of the installation.

“Hutæñala, dukwalala, kʻotčala; To listen, to look, to know.” This inscription which appears on the Copper Doorway painting is the criterion for the newcomer to ensure they respect the old ways, and possibly, come to understand the power of belonging. Aboriginal elders are often
heard saying, "It's hard to be an Indian," implying that observing the strict principles and practices of aboriginality is a lifetime commitment. Yet the elder's wisdom does not seem to be overwhelmingly influential, especially when there are so many seductive attractions around us to captivate the focus of younger people. Pronouncements like this pose a predicament. Elders have an arduous task in preparing young people, when all around them distractions call out, from high-tech to powwows.

Marianne Nicolson is from a small and isolated Kwakwaka'wakw community of Kingcome Inlet, British Columbia. She moved to this, her mother's community, in the early 1990s, having grown up in Vancouver and Victoria. She studied at the Emily Carr College of Art and Design in Vancouver, and in the last year, moved to Victoria to complete
her Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of Victoria. While liv-
ing at Kingcome, she managed to immerse herself in the traditional
Kwakwaka’wakw culture that has greatly influenced her work. She
learned the traditional singing and dancing, as well as the tribal beliefs.
Of the House of Origin, she says, “I’ve drawn from traditional forms
and incorporated contemporary styles with them. They express ideas
about community, about the individual within a community, and how
one relates.”

The people from Kingcome Inlet are referred to as the Dzawada’enuxw. Nicolson retells the traditional story of Kawadilikala:
“[who] brought Hayalilegas down to the Kingcome River which is called
Gwâyi, and there he told her that this is where her home would always
be. There were not yet people, but she would always live in that area to
protect the people that were to come.”

From the top end of Kingcome Inlet came a large wolf and his
name was Galalite, and from him came four other wolves. The first
wolf that came from him was Kawadilikala; the second brother was
‘Nanolakw. The third wolf was a female named Hayalilegas. Their
youngest brother was Kwa’lili. Eventually Kawadilikala shed his
animal form to become the first of the Kingcome people.

To get to Kingcome Inlet takes about one hour by air from Campbell
River, or two hours by speed boat from Alert Bay. The only road is the
one that is used by the community’s sanitation department, which winds
its way through the village. The people here are at ease both on land and
sea. In historic times, visits to other villages were only possible by boat.
All houses faced the water. As late as the turn of the century, houses
were still arranged in their traditional close proximity, although under-
going some stylistic transformation. It is highly possible that the road
that passed in front is the one we see today. The only difference is that
the houses today are very far apart, which is typical of many contempo-
rary reserves, and unlike the “village” quality of historic times.

The most inspiring presence in any West Coast community is the
gukwdzi or “big house.” Located in the centre, the gukwedzi is where all the
people gather to celebrate or honour important community functions. Large
enough to accommodate many local and visiting people, it is a long, simple
structure; four great central posts hold up two giant beams, along with six
side posts. For Nicolson and her people, the gukwedzi is the House of Origin.
Like many people before her, she draws inspiration from its centre. In her
earlier work, she uses the structure to remind us of the strong relationship
the community has with the land and sea and its relative isolation from other regional communities. The idea of the gukwdzi becomes a metaphor for the community itself and the people’s communal identity. Nicolson, however, concedes that the people of Kingcome have accepted many changes in their architecture over the past century, from the large multi-family dwellings, to late-nineteenth-century European vernacular style housing, to the modern government-issue-style homes found on most reserves across the country today. This style of housing reflects the government’s efforts to homogenize all aboriginal people. In addition, the houses at each stage get progressively smaller and further apart. Yet, the gukwdzi at Kingcome retains its symbolic presence within a rapidly changing community. The gukwdzi is what remains to remind the people of their identity, of where they came from, while others around them change. The House of Origin sustains Kwakwaka’wakw identity, which is the land, and the houses each person was born into. The House speaks of the importance of retaining the community structure and family identity. Today, we see a church, a band office, a store, a school, a soccer field, and a post office as important facets of this contemporary community. Large satellite dishes ensure that Kingcome is wired to the global community, negating its isolation even though it is far away and difficult to access physically. Relative isolation has long been advantageous for aboriginal communities because it enabled them to carry on their quotidian expressions of language and ceremony away from the sinister eyes of government officials.

Language also plays a part in the House of Origin. On the exterior of the two paintings that form the end walls of the house, are texts written in Kwakwaka’wakw; the inner sides are paintings that depict the narrative. Here are the translations. The blue painting (not shown) translates thus:

The great Flood had not yet arrived when Kawadilikala and his younger brother Kwa’lili dressed in their wolf cloaks travelled to look for new land. Kawadilikala came to Gwayi (Kingcome). Kwa’lili when to At At ku (Wakeman). Kawadilikala said to his younger brother, “Let us take off our wolf cloaks and we will be just men.”

The red painting translates thus:

“What does this bird sound like in your land?” asked Kwa’lili. “Dza’wala,” replied Kawadilikala. Then the name of your people will be the Dzawada’enuxwa,” said Kwa’lili. “What does the bird sound like in your land?” asked Kawadilikala of his younger brother. “Haxwala,” said Kwa’lili. “Then the name of your people shall be the Haxwamis.” So it is.
The painting's text is inaccessible without this translation (fig. 38b, close-up). Why has Nicolson decided that we should enjoy only the penmanship of this unusual orthography? I would argue that what is suggested here is not so much the text's indecipherability, since the artist has provided a translation. Rather, these texts indicate or promote the reality that most aboriginal people read, write and speak their aboriginal languages. We often hear dire statistics that many aboriginal languages are endangered, that only a handful of the total of fifty-three languages will survive. Indeed, with many aboriginal children seeing, hearing and speaking one or two of the "official" languages, these predictions become ever more real.

What is so important about maintaining aboriginal languages? For one thing, they are an essential means of communication; in particular, in articulating the culture. Aboriginal languages bring objects alive, investing them with meaning. For many, trying to make sense

fig. 38b  Marianne Nicolson, House of Origin, (detail).
of objects contained in museums today, is like trying to find the proverbial key to unlock the secrets, the codes to knowledge and understanding. Otherwise, the objects remain inert and will sit on shelves forever.

There is a sense of urgency in the way Nicolson applies the text; yet, it remains secretive. Aboriginal languages function as well, to maintain unity. Ceremonials, potlatches, and other festivities become the adhesives that hold communities together, and together they celebrate life. Original language upholds Kwakwaka’wakw identity, or more specifically Dzawada’enuxw identity. However, the language is fairly useless outside the community, unless its members are visiting other Kwakwaka’wakw communities. In that case, it is more symbolic and cultural, used for ceremonial and everyday purposes. Thus the language as it is written in the paintings signifies its inaccessibility.

A photographer by training, Nicolson combines the paintings with suspended text/photographs that frame the outer walls of the house. The photographs are of the people and the local landscape, both reflecting Kwakwaka’wakw identity. In the works that are bounded by the walls, the text/photographs reference familial relations—’nula (older brother/sister), gagamp (grandmother/grandfather), wak’wa (brother, sister, first cousin), tsu’ya (younger brother, sister, namwut (a relative), and hi’lu’s (great grandparents). Around the outer structure are photographs of the community and the imposing landscape surrounding Kingcome. Nage (mountain), t’uma’is (beach), ’yugwa (rain), titisla (sun), K’waxi (tree), wa (river) are words that describe the structure of their cosmological landscape. The photographs show how important family is to community. They show smiling children, ceremonies, the everyday life of Kingcome, and what it means to be Kwakwaka’wakw. The words—“Having consumed you I cast you back into the world changed from what you were”—appear in the bear and frog painting. Our entrance/exchange/departure from The House of Origin is a form of consumption; it is experiential. As in the traditional Kwakwaka’wakw culture, we leave these living structures having experienced something profoundly moving that will affect some aspect of our lives. When I visited Nicolson at Kingcome, as an outsider, I felt the community’s remoteness, its inaccessibility; yet, the people themselves felt the opposite. They were at home, surrounded by mountains, sky and water. This was who they were. When the sun disappeared, it seemed they and the cosmos slept. Several years after that visit, all the moments remain with me; indeed, it was a profoundly moving experience to be among them.
Shelley Niro

In Shelley Niro's film *Honey Moccasin* (1998, fig. 39a), which she wrote and directed, she imagines an Indian community where everyday life is like anywhere else except that the people are a little different. This fictional community is "Reservation X," or as named in the film, the Grand Pine Reserve. Niro's strategy is to take control of a medium that has a history of doing the opposite.
The history of “Indians and film,” as a discursive formation, is as old as the medium itself. Raymond Stedman points out that: “With the coming of the movies, the Indian was ensnared, then filmically embalmed” (155). Even the most recent success of *Dances with Wolves* shows just how powerful the western myth of cowboys and Indians continues to be. But, unlike Costner’s sensitive portrayal, “[the Indian in general was] destined to lose the overall struggle, he was a terrifying opponent, the equal of the Japanese or Germans in Hollywood’s World War II movies” (160). Furthermore, the use of “Indian actors in film” has helped construct the controlling narrative of good guy/bad guy, yet: “Since the infancy of the movies the Indian has been given the opportunity with some regularity to enact or even to re-enact the battle against the invader” (164). Stedman points out, however, that non-Indian actors often played the roles of “Indians,” as regularly as they played “Blacks.” The trend today is to use aboriginal actors to play the parts of aboriginal people. They are coached in using the dialogue of the Indian in question, a technique not that far removed from earlier constructions. Finally, the idea of “Indians making films” is like a “coup shtick,” especially in the hands of someone with Niro’s humour.

Niro, who was born at Niagara Falls, New York, and currently resides in Brantford, Ontario, is a Mohawk band member of the nearby Six Nations Reserve. She has a Master’s degree in painting from the University of Western Ontario, London. *Honey Moccasin*, her first feature-length film with an all-aboriginal cast, was shot entirely on location around the Six Nations Reserve. Although primarily a photographer, Niro has done shorter films. But *Honey Moccasin* has allowed her greater possibilities with narrative, perspective, and humour.

In *Honey Moccasin*, Niro reacts against the flat characterizations of aboriginal people as they are so often portrayed in mainstream cinema. She aims to create a narrative that plays on the kinds of subtleties and nuances that animate traditional aboriginal tales. “What I’m trying to do is loosen up the characters a bit so that they’re flawed, and there are multi-dimensions to these people. [...] they’re not going to be perfect, or [...] blasé. They’re pretty interesting in their own way.” Niro’s philosophy is one of focalization. “Focalization is [...] the relation between the vision and that which is ‘seen,’ perceived” (Bal 1997: 143). That is, the story has a certain point of view. The point of view used relates to how the reader will perceive the story. Responsive to the fact that her audience is overwhelmingly non-Iroquois—although she says the film is directed toward a Native audience—she makes adjustments to find a
voice understandable to those on “reservation x,” and the many who will come into contact with modern Indian humour. English is the language of choice; but, what is understood? This is an artistic dilemma. Since film is an expression of experience, Niro intends the viewer to see a side of Indian life that could be said to exist only on “reservation x.” Nevertheless, is this an Indian film?

The fact that *Honey Moccasin* has a totally aboriginal cast is a start. Niro mentions that her target audience was aboriginal people. “I want them,” she says, “to relate to the situations in this film without trying to find a way in.” Although many parts may appeal particularly to aboriginal audiences, Niro manages to maintain the film’s appeal for a general audience. What I found particularly interesting was the discursive position in which we as the viewing subjects find ourselves. Although there are no new filmic techniques presented, no complicated narrative, no overt cynicism, the film does bring us into the secret world of Indians in a way totally different from “ethno-films”—those academic works or scientific reporting called “visual anthropology.” Jay Ruby states that “Ethnographic film has always been a field dominated by documentary filmmakers who fancy themselves amateur anthropologists” (3). But, “Since the Vietnam War, North American anthropologists have been made acutely aware of the need to examine the political and moral implications of their work and the complexities involved in using the Other as the subject of their research” (14). But unlike anthro-films, whose viewing subjects are primarily non-aboriginal, Niro’s viewing subjects include both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. Her filmic text is intended for everyone, whereas the anthro-film’s statement of the world is intended for a specific audience. Since we are constituted as subjects within discourse, film is one medium that allows that reconstruction. For example, in Niro’s film we are spoken to, we are inside the discourse, we relate to the fictional characters; in anthro-films, on the other hand, we are outside the discourse. In the anthro-film scenario, the dialogue is between the filmmaker (the “speaking subject”) and us (“the subject of speech”), as we watch the spoken-about subject. In Niro’s film, we the “spoken subject” (or, third person) watch the dialogue between the “speaking subject” and “subject of speech.” In both cases we are constituted within the discourse as the “projected viewer.” Silverman would say that in Niro’s film, the connection is between the viewer and the fictional characters; in the anthro-film, the connection is between the level of enunciation and the viewer (199).

There may be times viewers think, “I don’t get it!,” because they missed a joke, but these moments are rare. They may find parts difficult
to untangle, such as the climax of the film when we discover the character Zachary John stealing traditional Powwow outfits from local dancers and hiding them. In the privacy of his basement, he secretly practises a woman’s dance, while wearing a “jingle dress.” Aware that his private is our public, unlike anthro-films that are denied access into the private, we are discursively constituted as subjects. We can relate to the pain and angst of this character. It is a rather difficult moment in the film. We have come to know Zachary as gay and Indian, consequently we see him on the fringe. As Niro explains: “[Zachary John] owns a rival bar across the street. He competes with a karaoke set-up, thinking he is keeping in step with modern times. His earnestness towards the community is demonstrated through acts of entrepreneurship, for example, offering vegetarian meals in his restaurant.” Stealing Powwow outfits is his way of playing out his fantasy of being a jingle-dress dancer, of finding meaning in his life. Yet, what eludes him is social acceptance, and being understood. He is repudiated for having multiple identities; instead, he has been culturally written as fragmented. He doesn’t represent only gay Indian men; in fact, he is the post-reservation Indian who must negotiate the discursive boundaries set up by traditional aboriginal communities, which are usually assumed to be free of problems of identity. But this is not always the situation. As Niro herself says about identity issues and community: “The city of Brantford is away from any major art centre, therefore I am marginalized. The reserve I come from is about a fifteen-minute drive from my home. Again, I am marginalized as I am now an urban Native.” The reader may ask: Is Shelley Niro, Zachary John, or vice versa? Film is an expression of experience—one way of knowing and understanding the world.

Niro’s installation (1998, fig. 39b) in Reservation X features objects from the film, including highly imaginative Powwow costumes made from elements as unlikely as audiotape and tennis balls. In the film, these costumes replaced the ones Zachary John pilfered. A short out-take from the film helps explain their identity. These replacements, manufactured out of found materials—rubber tires, candy, broom heads—are encased in large wooden frames decorated with Christmas lights. Niro presents the costumes like a fashion show: on mannequins. Their effect is real, both in the film and in the installation, in the sense that they could be worn to a Powwow. Up close, they betray themselves as inauthentic; but, in the postmodern, post-reservation world, what is real or authentic? The uninformed viewer of this exhibition may see these objects as real, and not simulacra. Here again is that outrageous Indian humour that Niro is so adept at
articulating. These objects are neither artifact nor synecdoche, but a metaphor for disenfranchisement, of being at the edge, or in some liminal space. It is "reservation x." It is commonplace these days to watch "fashion TV," where the creations are just as unreal as these. The signs and meaning change depending on the context. Niro seems to say that these outfits are not any more outrageous than those we find in stores for the consumer who wants to play Indian. Children want to play Indian; Zachary John wanted to be a jingle-dress dancer, but because he is adult, his mimetic experience had to be private. We are unsure if the models in the film wanted to be models or Powwow dancers. Wanting to be something or someone else—that is the post-modern/post-reservation question. The answer is, of course, that one can be all of these.

**Jolene Rickard**

Jolene Rickard's *Corn Blue Room* (1998, fig. 40a,b) is a complex work contained within the traditional Iroquoian spatial concept of the "Longhouse." Like the Kwakwaka'wakw Big House, the Longhouse is the community's centre; it is in the interior space of the Longhouse that two clans cement their identity. The Iroquoian Longhouse was owned
by the woman; the matron with her daughters, her younger sisters, and all their husbands, occupied a Longhouse, while the brothers and sons moved away to live with their wives. The Longhouse was particularly long, often accommodating up to ten families; indeed, the Iroquoian people call themselves "Haudenosaunee," or, People of the Longhouse.

Moreover, the Longhouse has long been conceptualized as a political idea in reference to the union of the five Iroquoian nations, often called the Iroquois Confederacy or the League of Iroquois. The League gave itself the name the "Great Peace," suggesting that for its members to war against each other was no longer an option. The present-day Tuscarora, of whom Rickard is a member, are the Sixth Nation in the Confederacy. They originally came from North Carolina after the Tuscarora Wars in 1711-1713. Rickard says: "We were welcomed by the Oneida people [...] through the adopting nation, the Cayuga. We reside
under the wing of our elder brother the Tonawanda Seneca. For this we are grateful.”

Jolene Rickard, artist and educator, is from the Tuscarora Nation in Sanborn, New York. She studied at the London College of Printing, London, England, completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, her Master of Fine Arts at Buffalo State College, New York, and her Ph.D. at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

In *Corn Blue Room* Rickard explores the positive and negative effects of modern technologies on Native communities. She uses a wall of photographs mounted on two sides of steel frames, which then are positioned to mark out a visual space reminiscent of the Iroquoian Longhouse. Inside the house are several hanging braids of corn, lit with blue lights; as well, there is an interactive CD-ROM and projection. These tell a complex narrative, dealing with the territorial and cultural sovereignty that her people wish to reclaim. Rickard’s installation, centred on the power of the electronic image, ironically illuminates the underside of technology—in particular, the hydroelectric project that took a third of her community’s land. *Corn Blue Room* has two entry points bisecting the conceptual Longhouse: on one side, we see photographic images of the Robert Moses Power Authority; on the other, we see images of corn. At the foot of the back wall lies a row of rocks, metaphors for the line of people as they resisted the Power Authority.

At the computer station, we find a collage of images culled from photographs Rickard has taken over the years. Many of these images refer to events in her own life. In particular, we see images of the annual Border Crossing Celebration that takes place between Buffalo, New York, and Niagara Falls, Ontario. These border crossings are political protests, commemorations, and celebrations. Begun in 1926 by her paternal grandfather, Clinton Rickard, Chief of the Beaver Clan, the Border Crossing Celebration situates their personal, political, and honourable identity. The point of these celebrations is to affirm rights and tradition, the defense of Indian rights against extinguishment by governments, and the endurance of aboriginal life, particularly the recognition of connections with other Iroquoian nations across the border. Each year, hundreds of aboriginal people gather here to participate in a peaceful demonstration of aboriginal rights. Rickard says: “I need to do something that reconfirms our borders—the ‘borders of sovereignty’ the geopolitical borders that mark our nationhood, reservation, self-determination, and our territories.” The photographic images that ring the space were taken by Rickard:
on one side are images close to her heart; on the other, are images that tear at her heart. The computer station stands symbolically in the middle of the Longhouse to remind us that the Tuscarora are very much part of the modern world. We are to understand the computer as a tool that mediates the generations. High technology is not out of keeping with aboriginal people’s ability to adapt and be creative in the surrounding world, provided it does not displace the philosophy and principles of being Tuscarora. Together, symbols of tradition and modernity are able to coexist.

As part of the modern world, the Tuscarora have had to confront other authorities. Since the mid-1950s, they have been fighting the New York Power Authority, in particular the Robert Moses-Robert H. Saunders Power Dam, which appropriated one-third of Tuscarora land. Before doing so, the Power Authority had to relocate the Tuscarora. In a move that reminds us of the lone man facing government tanks in Tiananmen Square, Tuscarora women with their children stepped forward and lay in front of the bulldozers. “They say the operating engineers were told to run them over. They couldn’t do it; instead, they tossed their keys into puddles so that no one could run the equipment until the issue was resolved in a more humane way [...] We lost a lot. Some writers have said it was the first real resistance [...] and catalyst for Native peoples [...] to fight for our homelands.” It was a partial victory, and it remains a sad state of affairs. Today, Rickard regularly travels across the reservoir that floods over the reservation. The images evoke painful memories of powerful forces slowly encroaching upon their land. Nevertheless, it is “art” that provides Rickard with the intellectual and polemic space to synthesize her ideas: “the reformulation of traditional knowledge, of inherited familial knowledge, and of lived experience.” She says that there is irony in how they are so dominated by electricity. After all, how would she be able to operate her high-tech installation? The power is not in the electrical energy; on the contrary, it is in the effects of intellectual knowledge.

I would like to offer a few interpretations of Rickard’s “corn blue” room. First, the corn blue is not the blue corn that is the basis for many of the Southwestern dishes we all love to eat, even though in the installation she bathes the yellow corn in blue light. If she wanted blue corn, she would have used blue corn; anyhow, Rickard presents us with a semiotic problem. Mieke Bal (1998) argues that semiotics privileges meaning. Taking that as my sign, I suggest that the word “blue” mystifies the reading. The word itself in some Iroquoian languages like Mohawk, is orónya, and refers to the idea we know as “sky.” From this, if the blue of
the sky and the colour blue are synonymous, then does that mean that anything coloured blue is of the sky? I would like to read this a little further. In Rickard’s installation, braids of corn are hung from the ceiling and rafters to dry. There would have been a similar practice in the Longhouse. In the Iroquois Creation narrative, it is Sky Woman who falls from a hole in the sky. Her fall is absorbed by geese who gently put her onto the back of a turtle, who is floating on water because there was no land. As the story continues, land is formed on the back of the turtle only after the muskrat is able to deliver a bit of earth from beneath the waters. When Sky Woman fell, she brought with her seeds, which she planted on the earth to grow into all the plants we have come to know. Some of these seeds were likely corn, beans and squash, the “Three Sisters” of the Iroquois. In other interpretations, Sky Woman gave birth to twins, one of whom—the Good—was responsible for the sacred plant. Though corn is of the earth, it hangs from the sky. The blue sky and Sky Woman are likely synonymous. If so, then the hanging corn refers to the sky from which Sky Woman fell. She is the Iroquoian Culture Hero. And as such, her meaning is still part of the indomitable spirit that gives strength to contemporary Iroquois. My final reading is that blue is also a metaphor for being depressed, in a situation offering little hope, and bordering on despair. I would like to suggest that this is another aspect of the reality this room presents, in face of powerful external forces like the Robert Moses Power Authority. The long battles waged by the modern-day Tuscarora over territorial, cultural, and linguistic sovereignty are what gives them their identity. The Corn Blue Room is a struggle between the federal government, the power authority and the Longhouse authority. Somehow corn is what stands in their path. It is both the material and spiritual centre of Iroquoian culture. So long as the Tuscarora continue growing corn, they will know who they are. As Rickard says: “We centre ourselves around it to feed us on a spiritual and cultural level.” The Power Authority harnesses the land, but at a tremendous cost to the people, the land and its resources. Tuscarora people still gather in the fall to celebrate the harvesting of crops as they have been doing for centuries. “We want to keep the seeds going,” she says, “because they will feed our people for the next seven generations.” In this sense, Corn Blue Room is about corn as much as it is about power.

Mateo Romero
The Painted Caves Shrine has been continuously used by the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest. It is located in the present-day Bandelier
National Monument, high in the mountains near Los Alamos, New Mexico, where there are hundreds of ruins of Anasazi cliff houses and pueblo-style dwellings. Though Bandelier’s location is somewhat difficult to access, the descendants of the ancient Anasazi, the modern-day Pueblo people, still regard the Painted Caves Shrine as an especially powerful and spiritual place. Its natural appearance suggests the concave half of an open clam shell; open fully and exposed to its surroundings, it is also a natural amphitheatre. An arduous journey just to get there, coupled with a fifty-foot climb, leaves little doubt the original people who used this site understood its transcendent nature. The Painted Caves Shrine is an immense wall of paintings that reify the relationship and ideas specific to the people themselves who lived in this area. The Shrine contains many inspiring images, from simple geometric marks to very sophisticated images like church symbols, Conquistadores, horses, churches, and dates. As well, there are signatures, names, dates, and Latin-based numbers. In 1880, it was the men from nearby Cochiti Pueblo who first guided the self-taught Swiss anthropologist and historian Adolph F. A. Bandelier to this site, and whom the site was named after in 1916 by the U.S. Forest Service. The very idea of “discovering” these sites today may be contentious, because aboriginal people argue they have always known of their existence. Therefore, they see these sites as “living” and use them continuously to maintain their relationship to all of creation. Today, the idea of adding new paintings to the Shrine may not be as meaningful as presenting the spirit world with various offerings. Far more than a pictographic site for tourists, students and scholars, the Shrine is the spiritual centre for the area’s aboriginal people. “It’s a living shrine,” Mateo Romero reminds us, “because it’s still in use.” Signs of this continual use include offerings of antlers and cornmeal placed in different areas. Thus, today the Painted Caves Shrine gives the Pueblos their identity and is an inspiration for artists like Romero to rekindle its meaning.

Mateo Romero, a Southern Keresan Cochiti Pueblo member, did his undergraduate studies at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, and later completed a Master of Fine Arts at the University of New Mexico. He currently lives and works in the Pueblo of Pojoaque, New Mexico.

Inspired by the Shrine’s physical shape and painted images, Romero in turn depicts an evolving visual historical narrative of his people. His own Painted Caves (1998, fig. 41) is not a reconstruction of the original site; rather it is a distillation of the cave’s concave shape, its painting, and the practice of offering. The semi-circular, elliptical structure in which a twenty-four foot long drawing is suspended, suggests the
shrines inner space and the metaphorical journey of the artist. Atop the curving wall is a "kiva-stepped" formation suggestive of small "beehive shaped" fireplaces, and towards the end of the curve, the walls straighten out. Speakers positioned atop the walls face inward so that the viewer/listener standing at the centre would be totally enveloped by the sound-track of traditional Pueblo singing, reminding us of another way of spiritual communication. Lining the curved wall is his over-sized drawing that is read from left to right. It is a complex allegorical work that has little to do with images from the actual Painted Caves Shrine of Bandelier; rather, he presents us with new themes. Finally, in the installation Romero positions nichos, or small niches or carved shelves in the wall, at each end of the hollow, to intimate the idea of offering, in which he places sand rather than cornmeal.

Romero presents us with two major themes: historical and spiritual identity. First, he suggests that the Pueblo people are affected by a whole series of historical discontinuities (ruptures, breaks, mutations, and transformations) that give them their particular identity. As Foucault (1972) points out: "the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations" (5). Though this idea may seem at first to fly in the face of traditionalists who hold on to the idea of everlasting foundations, we see in Romero's piece his articulations of many historical discontinuities that indeed tell of a greater story. It is further arguable that before the
arrival of Europeans in this area, other ruptures occurred. For example, archaeological evidence shows the existence of an ancient tribe, known to modern-day Pueblo by the Navajo term Anasazi, or “ancient ones,” who lived about 2,000 years ago. They occupied pit houses, cultivated corn, beans, and squash, and lived in small scattered settlements of one or two families. About 800 years ago, a much larger group began living together, creating larger villages or pueblos, some as extensive as forty rooms. These Anasazi scooped out dwellings from the soft volcanic tuff walls of the Pajarito Plateau to create cave-like, multi-story masonry buildings. By 1500, with the arrival of the Spanish, the residents left this area, never to return. Their descendants live in present-day Cochiti and San Ildefonso Pueblos.

In Painted Caves Romero highlights the discontinuities since 1500. In the first instance, the ancient Anasazi enter into the frame, stopping, looking, and pointing across the Rio Grande. In the background we see their primary activity of agriculture, assisted by elaborate irrigation systems. In the river, two women go about their daily chores oblivious to the scene at which the men are pointing. The man’s pointing is a helpless, but portentous gesture, because across the river we are witness to atrocities of immense proportion inflicted on the Pueblo people by Spanish Conquistadores. The people’s dismembered bodies lie in waste as a religious figure prays for them. At the end of the sixteenth century, Don Juan de Oñate led a band of Conquistadores into the Rio Grande valley from Mexico (then New Spain), conquering most of the Pueblos along the river. Acoma Pueblo resisted, and in retribution Oñate massacred the women and children, and severed the right foot from each of twenty-four warriors. Fifteen hundred people died, the surviving fifteen hundred eventually submitted to Spanish rule. In the final scene, we see enormous changes. We follow a road, and on it, we see the modern-day Pueblo walking and dancing into the future. Employment outside the Pueblo is far more attractive than maintaining crops. The entire Pueblo lifestyle is overlayed by a post-industrial, capitalist modernity of planes, trains, and automobiles. The arrival of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1880 helped create an economic revolution in New Mexico. With its signature red and silver “war bonnet” passenger trains, the Santa Fe Railroad played a key role in promoting the arts and crafts of the Southwest and images of the Native American, creating a “romantic” vision of the region and thus encouraging tourism. Ancient kivas, circular ceremonial structures, are overlayed by adobe-styled Christian churches. An “economic pie” floats in
amongst all these other elements as an indicator of competing interests. The artist signs his name near the hand prints as a contrast to a complex bar-code and a bingo chip on the right. Is all that remains of the essence of the Pueblo dancing in the lights of the casino for the tourist? These transformations are problematic for all Pueblo people today. How do they make sense of who they are within this complex reality?

The idea that pulls the Pueblo people together is a profound sense of a spiritual identity. By looking back at the past from the critical distance of the present, we see the urgency of a Pueblo or Cochiti identity. Who are they today? What sustains them? Spirituality and philosophy remain the core of most of the nineteen Pueblos languages. Although the Pueblos are in close proximity to each other, and subject to the same natural forces, each one has its own identity. Language differentiates each of them, though modern-day governance makes them similar. Romero gives us one divine sign of this spiritual identity that draws together a Pueblo identity: it is rain; more specifically, it is the “rain-cloud.” In the desert where there is an eternal hope for rain, the Pueblo people manage to sustain themselves by modern means; yet it is the environment in this “land of enchantment” that gives them their identity. In Painted Caves, cloud symbols are everywhere. We see the rain-bird, and beside it a male figure drips rain (semen) onto the plants and the women—a signification of the people’s eternal relation with the land and cosmos. Another rain element is the large kiva-stepped pattern above the drawing, pulling everything together as a symbol of the clouds. The rains have always come, and they will continue to fall as long as there are offerings made to please the spirits. Although the rain in our era has been turned acid by industrial waste, the people of the Southwest will continue to maintain a strong sense of identity so long as they cherish their relationship to the land. In Romero’s installation, we come to understand that the nichos are here because they signify that eternal relation, and his continuing affirmation that he is a Pueblo and Cochiti.

Romero was born in Berkeley, California, and now lives with his family in Pueblo of Pojoaque, up the Rio Grande from Cochiti. He is part of that new generation he pictures in the last segment of Painted Caves. This work, in effect, signifies “reservation x,” and is a powerful reminder that the Southwest also experiences historical discontinuities, whether its inhabitants know it or not. This is why I believe the Painted Caves Shrine can be used only as a place of offering. It represents a vestige of the culture to which the people must hold.
C. Maxx Stevens is from the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. The name Seminole comes from the Spanish word “cimarrones” meaning “savages or runaway slaves” (some authors use semanoli). This is ironic since many of the Seminole had resisted slavery and fought a war of attrition against foreign invaders. The Seminole Nation was made up of a mix of related peoples whose ancestors were mostly Creek. They once inhabited the southwestern United States. During the early nineteenth century, they were forcibly removed from their territory because of the burgeoning cotton industry’s increased demand for land. The Indian Removal Act 1830 affected the Five Civilized Tribes including the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole. They were all forced to walk a thousand miles in the now infamous Trail of Tears, from the Southeast to an area once known as “Indian Territory,” now the state of Oklahoma. A large division of Seminoles moved in 1836, but the ancestors of the present-day Florida Seminoles managed to conceal themselves in the Everglades and thus avoid the tragedy of their Oklahoma relatives.

The second and third major disruptions to Seminole communities were the systematic removal of children to educational facilities known as “boarding schools,” and the assimilation program that affected entire families. The intent of the boarding school was to remove children from their families because it was believed they were easier to assimilate than adults. They were taken en masse from their homes and sent far away to military-style schools, removed from home, family, community. The second re(dis)location wave occurred in the 1950s, when huge numbers of Indian people were compelled to move into large American cities, because the government believed that by taking them away from the land they would become useful, hard-working citizens. After all, the government was of the opinion that Indian people were not making good use of their lands, as they were leasing land to non-Indian people instead of using it themselves. The Indian Relocation Act 1956 affected many families. C. Maxx Stevens’s family had already moved to Wichita in 1954, just prior to the migration. Most Indian families who moved to the city were often poorly equipped for urban living; yet some managed to find work. The Indian families in Wichita, for instance, survived by building airplanes for the government.

Stevens has drawn on these themes over the past several years. One of her earlier works that dealt with the issue of community and identity, for example, was Dreaming of Circles and Chairs (1991, fig. 42). In the
middle of a room, collaged together with bits and pieces of scrap lumber, sit four chairs, back-to-back. The circle of chairs is a play on the "four directions" philosophy. Either one or four sitters can become the centre of the universe. In this work, Stevens says that you are at the centre of the universe no matter where you are, either in the city or in the country. She also speaks to issues of growing up in Wichita, posing the

fig. 42  C. Maxx Stevens, *Dreaming of Circles and Chairs*, 1991

...
question: “If you’re urban, are you Indian? If you’re not, what are you?” This is a rhetorical question that nevertheless gnaws away at the self. It situates people in a position of “otherness” by questioning their authenticity. In a later work, an exterior installation, *History: True or False* (1993, fig. 43), Stevens started using old school chairs in a circular arrangement around a quasi-excavation. This time the chairs are looking inward. On each desk is a book containing the words: “History,” “True,” “Or,” “False.” In the central excavation pit are figures in various stages of fragmentation. The surrounding desks project a sense of authority, and of discursively evaluating this evidence of humanity. The institutional character of the chairs informs us of the power of the establishment’s text, whose truth is apparently unassailable. Finally, in *Fragments of Life* (1994, not shown), she address issues of her historical, tribal, and urban identity—all components of a multiple modern persona. This piece consists of part of a steel drawer, on the back of which is a collage. The poetic and narrative words, “Fighting” and “Surviving in Cities,” describe the condition of the “Urban Indian.” A photograph of a city and floating houses suggests the disharmony of urban living. It is the most poignant piece in a similar series of works reflecting on the despair aboriginal people faced when they were moved into cities in the 1950s and 1960s. As well, it is an unapologetic look at her life—that of a modern Seminole urban woman.

Stevens’s work is “self-portraiture,” though not in the traditional sense. Rather, she layers each piece with signs from her own life. She says that her commitment is “in creating sculptural environments that tell stories about history, the present state, and our hope in the future.” She describes herself as an “unspeaking visual storyteller,” a practice influenced by her father who often told stories of the history and culture of the Seminole nation. She credits him as having a great impact on her later work, particularly the practice of storytelling.

Stevens’s career includes teaching in art schools. As a result of personal life experiences within pedagogical contexts, she takes the responsibility of teaching very seriously. Though her work is done within institutional frameworks, her strategy is not so much to convince students, as to inform them of alternative ways of seeing. An example she often uses is encouraging her students to “listen to the crows […] watch the winds […] listen to the elders […] watch for signs […] honour their past and themselves.” For Stevens, crows are a symbol of self-reflection because like her, they move everywhere, and are therefore an important part of her life. She considers them messengers.
Her installation, *if these walls could talk* (1998, fig. 44a,b), is a story of educational systems and the survival of community, of maintaining a sense of Seminole-ness in the modern world. This work addresses discordant, contradictory, and confusing messages. The installation is divided in two: on one side are school desks overlaid with books; at the other end of the room is a long table topped with onions. A radio playing the voice of the artist's mother sits at one end. In the school section, the perimeter walls have approximately twenty speakers imbedded in them that continuously play the stories of her former students. *if these walls could talk* is a simple yet complex work that integrates all the thematic elements previously outlined—Seminole and family history, education, storytelling and community. The work asks the question: How does one live in two worlds? This may seem like a reductionist framework, but the idea is more complicated. Stevens asked former students of hers from Haskell and the Institute of American Indian Arts, as well as several friends, to tell her their stories. She took the stories and animated them in the installation by embedding them in the wall. The listener hears voices addressing issues of education and community, with an underlying subtext of identity.

*fig. 44a*  C. Maxx Stevens, *if these walls could talk*, 1998.
Furthermore, on one chair in the classroom sits a cinnamon roll. The artist says: "At the beginning of every year, I would always get kind of nervous and kind of scared. I got up one time and said, 'Hi, I'm Maxx and I'm a cinnamon roll'," This humorous faux pas in the formal context is embarrassing; whereas, in a communal context of an Oklahoma sensibility, her family would see the humour and laugh with Maxx, not at her. The onions on the table refer to a harvesting activity, but in the context of Stevens's faux pas, the onions would undoubtedly make everyone in her family cry and laugh together; whereas in the classroom, the gaffe would make her cry, while everyone else laughed.

"Being an urban Indian has always been a source of dualism in my work, and that sometimes gives the viewer a sense of the conflict it generates." 

*if these walls could talk* articulates contradiction and struggle. The installation embodies a sense of want that tears at the emotive consciousness of aboriginal people. It responds to the idea of "reservation x" in its spatiality of difference, even while it plays on concepts of duality.
Conclusion
We can elaborate upon Mary Longman’s dictum that there is no fixed address for “reservation x,” taking it beyond the radical expanse of spatial movement or nomadism. Thus, we can conclude that this idea conveys not simply agency, but also a position within a discursive field. In the first consideration, the “new tribe” moves continually: for them transportation is ubiquitous, space is not a foreign concept. They see its limitations and its freedoms; they see their place within the shifting parameters of the art world; they see the complexity and latitude it brings to their practice; and at the local community level, they see the limitations on aspects of their practice, but also the closeness of others with whom they can identify. As a discursive process, and from the position of “reservation x,” aboriginal contemporary artists engage in many worlds, productively, creatively, and at times, subversively. As a discursive practice, their address becomes more complex to includes ways of viewing the world, ways of speaking to the world from multiple perspectives, and ways of performing. As we have seen in so many of these artists’ works, they now have a place to stand. They have audiences willing to listen. Their works are multiple and diverse statements of being. Their manner of articulation draws upon tradition and modernity without anxiety; their skill of performance brings them into contact with many artists, locally, nationally, and internationally; and their intelligence often applies both wit and ingenuity.

All these artists were brought together for this exhibition because of their common concern to weave community and identity as an expression of the need to understand a contemporary reality, which for them can only be articulated in art. Thus, “reservation x” is both a metaphor for the “new tribe” and a space to speak and act in the world.

Notes
1 Today, “Indian Reserve” is a problematic term: many tribal governments prefer the term “First Nations Reserve” to indicate their unique historical status in relation to Canada’s so-called founding nations, and it is a circumstance of the post-reservation.
2 In Jack Funk and Gordon Lobe... And They Told Us Their Stories: A Book of Indian Stories, (Saskatoon: Saskatoon District Tribal Council, 1991) 32.
3 Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity is as follows: “for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are uniquely understood through received wisdom.” See “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, Ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) 211.
4 The laconic term, “the rez,” which has been around for some time, is gaining wider usage in the arts. The popular CBC television program The Rez features young aboriginal actors on some Reservation X. “The rez” is a cool expression taken up by young urban Indians to refer to a cool Indian community. Its hip-hop style abrogates our old understanding and infuses the word with new, powerful, and ironic messages. Contemporary authors and artists find this usage resonating with a bold and tenacious spirit. It is a term of appropriation and articulation, of taking something and using it to advantage. “Rez talk” now plays a part in the language of Indian country as does that of the “hood” in Black communities, or the barrio in urban Chicano communities. Though “the rez” may now mean any Indian community, urban or rural, it signifies the complexities, paradoxes, and contradictions of living on the rez.

5 French Sociologist, Michel Maffesoli interviewed by Marco Senaldi in Flash Art News, p.59, on issues of artistic practice.

6 For further development on this idea, see Chapter 3. For more on the “third space,” see Edward W. Soja, Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

7 The American Southwest has had the longest and most continuous artistic development of any place in North America. Artists gravitate towards the art market centres of Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Phoenix, where many make a highly successful living. The Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe has influenced several generations of artists, with its strong sense of identity and community for aboriginal students from all across the United States. Similarly, in northern British Columbia the community of "Ksan, near Hazelton, set up a school to provide economic opportunities for young artists to revive interest in Northwest Coast Indian art. Both these institutions thrived for a short time. IAIA is still clinging to life; "Ksan seemed to achieve its goals, at which point all the artists returned to their respective communities. Unlike the aboriginality inspired universality of IAIA, "Ksan’s focus was regional.

8 Lemert states that changes “are disrupting the most fundamental structures that underlie the modern world—structures that were built up and have endured for nearly half a millennium.” These changes are: the collapse of the Euro-American world colonial system; there are no longer unrivalled and imperial centres; and, the opposition to a universal world culture based on Euro-American values. Lemert goes on to state that new social movements, re-emergence of ethnicities, and reappearance of traditionalist cultures, are the new influences that are changing “the modern world” (31-36).

9 The idea of the “tree of life,” “celestial tree,” “the cosmic tree,” is almost worldwide. It is theorized as the axis mundi, the connection between the earth and sky, the funnel within which the tribal shaman is able to travel. For a number of aboriginal tribes in Canada, the tree of life is from the creation narrative. See Eliade and the reference to Jolene Rickard and “Sky Woman.”

10 Nora Naranjo-Morse, personal interview, March 1997.

11 Naranjo-Morse.

12 HUD stands for Housing and Urban Development, a United States government-sponsored project.

13 Naranjo-Morse.

14 Naranjo-Morse.


16 Marianne Nicolson’s notes sent to me as part of her proposal, summer 1997.

17 Nicolson’s notes.

19 I have been using some of the analytical strategies outlined in Silverman (1983), 195-201, particularly her reading of Emile Beneviste.

20 The political framework of the League is as follows: At its western door were the Seneca, “Great Hill People;” then the Cayuga, “of the Marsh;” next the Onondaga, “on the Hills,” keeper of the central fire; then the Oneida, “of the Boulder” and, last, the Mohawk, “of the Place of Flint,” keepers of the eastern door.

21 Jolene Rickard, personal interview, March 1996.

22 Spanning the Canada-U.S. border at Massena, New York, this hydroelectric facility is supposed to produce the cleanest and cheapest power in North America. The dam’s generating units can produce enough electricity to light Washington, D.C., which has a population of over 600,000. Construction started in 1954 and was completed in 1959, at a cost of over $650 million, shared between New York and Ontario. A total of 95 million cubic yards of earth was excavated. The material needed included: 3.2 million cubic yards of concrete, 2 million tons of sand, 3.2 million tons of stone, 28,000 tons of structural steel, 20,200 tons of gates, hoists and cranes, 59,300 tons of reinforcing steel, and 3.6 million barrels of cement. There was a total workforce of 11,610. These facts were obtained from the New York Power Authority Web-site: www.stl.nypa.gov/power.html

23 During my visit to see Rickard, we conducted the interview in her uncle’s barn, where hundreds of corn stalks hung from the ceiling to dry. It was a powerful sight. It became evident to me how important corn is to who they are.

24 Mateo Romero, personal interview, March 29, 1997. This is how he described his situation: “The boundaries of the culture are so restrictive that I find that I become a refugee, a self-exile, that I live in a northern community, because they are a little more progressive, a little more acculturated, a little more intermarried, a little more open to talking about things, about the art, and things like that [...] they’re not decentred at all, they’re just more open in many ways.”


26 Stevens.

27 Stevens.