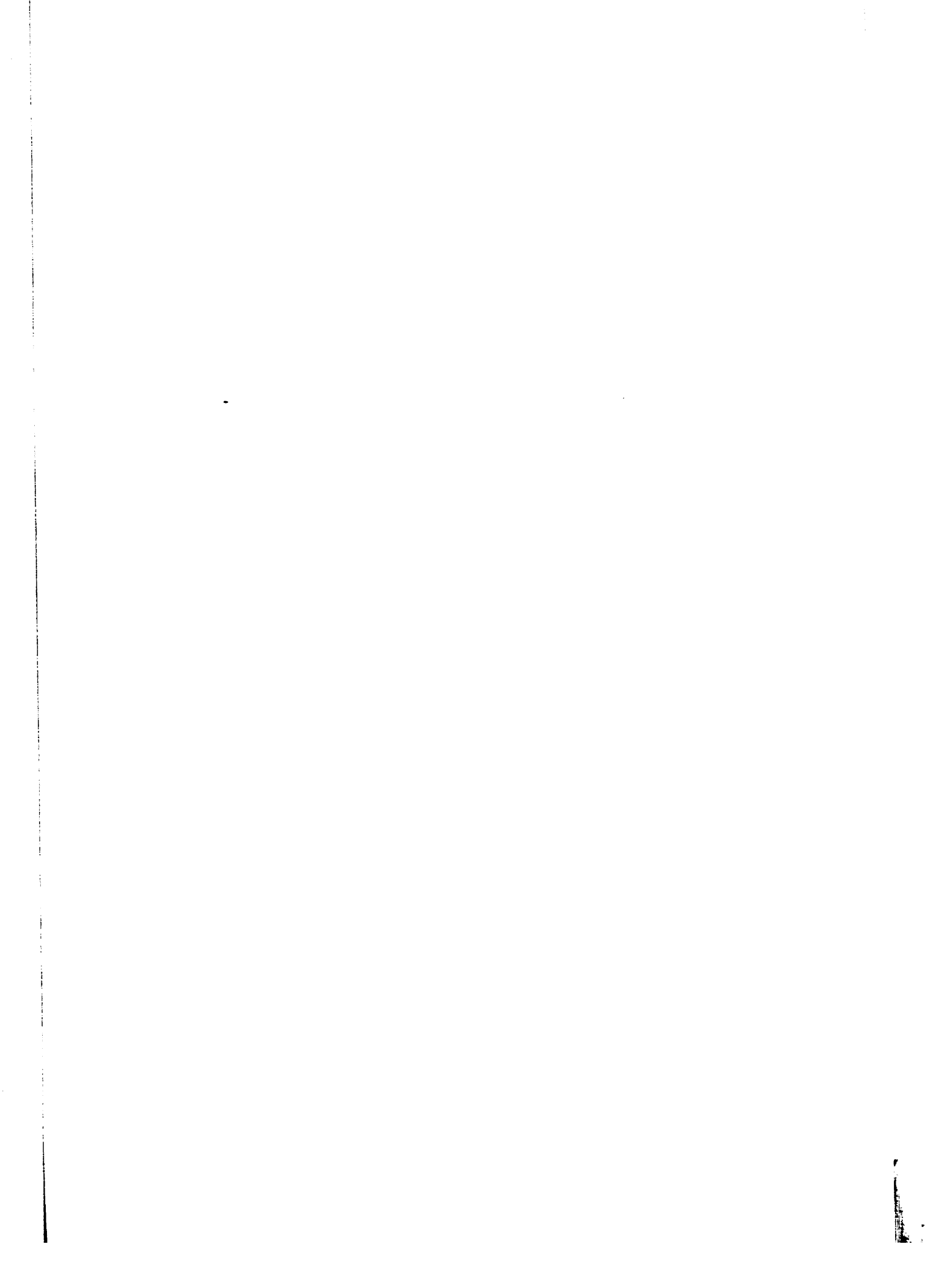


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**UMI**



**Craft, Ritual, and World View:  
Ojibwa Ontology through Transformative Philosophy**

**A Thesis  
presented to the  
Department of Philosophy  
Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario**

**In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts**

**by  
Karen E. A'Llerio ©  
April 1999**



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**Abstract**

The meaning of Ojibwa crafted objects within their cultural horizon is explored through interviews with Ojibwa crafts people. Transformative philosophy is used as a method to bridge the profound gap between Western and Ojibwa world views. David Abram's work in phenomenology supplies the philosophical content needed for cultural shift. Two life-world layers are identified: the deep life-world, shared by everyone, in which perceptual reciprocity forms the webwork of interconnection; and the cultural life-worlds which overlayer the first. Ojibwa crafted objects are seen as animate beings within the spiritual matrix of the life-world. Further, they carry Ojibwa traditional cultural meaning. The artisans work in a mode of spiritual awareness to craft, to create, spiritual and sacred objects.

**My deep thanks to  
J. Douglas Rabb  
and  
Dennis McPherson  
who have been my guides  
these four years.**

**To my family,  
especially Linda, Kathleen,  
and Steve,  
who believed I could do this.  
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## **Prelude—An Object Woman's Drum**

Today began my life. The soft regular beat of the deer-hide covered stick on the tightly stretched hide. My gestation period was long and done respectfully, carefully. Tobacco and prayers were given to the spirits, the deer, the tree, to all the presences which have come together to make me. In quiet, in thought, in love, I was fashioned by the hands of the woman who now holds me. She was not distracted as her hands worked; she focused on bringing together all the spirits into my being. Her spirit flowed into the work binding the parts into my uniqueness.

I am made of the wind that rustled the grasses as this deer moved through the field. Of the plants on which this deer grazed. I am the deer bounding, white tail flashing. Of this I am made.

I am made of the grouse and squirrel perched in this cedar tree. Of the earth anchoring the roots. Of the sigh of air moving about and through it. I am the wood. Of this am I made.

I am the stories of the deer and the cedar tree. I am the stories of the drum. I am the symbol painted on my hide. This is what I am made of.

I am created in peace and love and respect. And now, as I speak with the voice I have been given, I pulse with the sound of creation. The heartbeat, the rhythm of all creation. I am the continuing beat of life.

K. A'Llerio

# **CRAFT, RITUAL, AND WORLD VIEW: Ojibwa Ontology through Transformative Philosophy**

## **Chapter 1: Becoming Oriented**

### **Introduction**

In the spring of 1995, I was introduced to the Native Philosophy Program at Lakehead University by Dennis McPherson, then Chair of the Indigenous Learning Department. I had been frustrated by concepts articulated in the Environmental Ethics class I was taking at Northland College, a small environmental/liberal arts college in northern Wisconsin. In particular, the concept of "person" was problematic. Then I heard Professor McPherson speak on our local Ojibwa radio station, WOJB. He was talking about the program at Lakehead and the differences in world view between Western and Ojibwa culture. I was intrigued and called him. Would there be answers to my questions from a different cultural viewpoint?

Although I didn't start the program that fall, I did enroll for an independent study course in philosophy at Northland and attended the First Aboriginal Peoples' Conference at Lakehead. The first session of the conference remains imprinted on my mind: Meyer and Ramirez talking about Wakan Tanka, McPherson and Rabb discussing their book, *Indian from the Inside*, and Overholt and Callicott's work. I was agog. I remember asking a question which must have been quite elementary, since other people seemed to be completely aware of other-than-human persons. I went home excited and enthusiastic about my independent study. The next year, I was accepted into the Native Philosophy Program and began attending Lakehead for the 1996-97 school year.

When I originally spoke with Professor McPherson, he emphasized the need for Native people to speak for themselves, the need for understanding to form a bridge between cultures, and that one could not superimpose Western concepts on Native thought.<sup>1</sup> Through this process of understanding, I have been brought back to the potentiality of some Western concepts for changing our Western view of the human relationship to the rest of the life-world. Through both Native and Western thought, I have been able to find ways to understand more deeply certain of my own experiences, for which Western philosophy has no vocabulary. This process is allowing me to develop a changed philosophical underpinning to my daily life.

Doing this thesis has, in addition, given me the opportunity to explore several other related areas of interest. The Ojibwa artists' relationships to their materials, the way they collect them and the way they work with them, gives me insight into environmental philosophy. And as a craftsperson myself, my own work has taken on greater meaning to me.

Lastly, my thesis has allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the place where I live. In 1989, I moved north from Chicago to Bayfield, Wisconsin, on the Bayfield Peninsula in Lake Superior. My new home was a hand-built log cabin in the middle of eighty acres of woods and apple orchard. Two Ojibwa reservations are in the area: Bad River and Red Cliff. People told me the area was very spiritual. I'm not sure the people who told me that meant it is spiritual just for Ojibwa people or for everyone. Be that as it may, I didn't think I had had any "spiritual" experience related to place.

On one occasion, however, when my sister's family was visiting, we took the ferry from Bayfield to Madeline Island and visited the old Ojibwa cemetery there. We had been wandering around reading the gravestones and one in particular caught our eyes. It was hung with some bright red cloth and feathers. As we were all leaning closer to read the inscription on the stone,

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<sup>1</sup>I use the terms "Westerner," "Euro-American," and "non-Native" to designate myself and others of European descent, and "Western" and "Euro-American" to refer to our culture.

a chickadee, who had been on a nearby bush, darted through the hanging cloth and feathers. Its movement was so aggressive and startling we all jumped back. There was a moment of knowing without verbalization among us that the bird was telling us we were too close, that it was protecting the offering.

These things have puzzled me. How can people live in the same location and have such evidently different perceptions of it? This thesis has given me the opportunity to look for an answer.

### **The Study**

As a craftsperson my orientation is visual, tactile, and practical. Imagery, color, design, and structure predominate in my thought processes. Most recently I have been learning to work with fleece. As I sort, lightly wash and dry the recently-shorn fleece, I begin to feel its character. A coarse-fibered shimmering grey and tan spins up into a hefty yarn, ready to do work, but still beautiful. A finely-textured white fleece will spin up into delicate strands. Whatever the crafted product from these fleece, I will try to weave something which is visually enticing and touchable. The warp, upon which the structure is built, may no longer be visible, but one knows it is there holding together the final design.

In doing philosophy, I remain concerned with structure and design, and with the often unnoticed concepts upon which our daily lives are built, i.e. our world view. This thesis is constructed in a particular way; it is itself an exercise in transformative philosophy. (Transformative philosophy will be discussed in Chapter Two.) This will facilitate an understanding of the words of the Ojibwa artists in Chapter Three, as well as more awareness of implicit concepts within Western world view.

Lee Hester and Dennis McPherson (respectively Choctaw and Ojibwa, philosophers and legal scholars) suggest that in examining Indigenous thought one needs to "return to a very basic definition of philosophy [as] thoughtful interaction with the world" (9).<sup>2</sup> Transformative philosophy is not incompatible with this definition as it requires an experiential component and acknowledges its effect on lived experience.

Through transformative philosophy, I try to understand the meaning of Ojibwa crafted objects within their own cultural horizon—the meaning of the objects to the artisans and the artists' relationships with their materials.<sup>3</sup> After a detailed discussion of the artists' statements, I reflect further upon the conceptual bases of Ojibwa world view.

My study is crafted from the efforts of the Ojibwa people who undertook to help me; the guidance of my professors; and my own experiences, reading, and reflection. The thesis is in two parts: the text component and a supplemental compact disc. The compact disc contains pictures of four of the artists accompanied by their words in text; photos of crafted work and of Louis Ogemah's installation; and the full transcripts of the interviews.

In describing my work as a study, I do not mean the word as a study of something, externalized and objectified. Instead, I mean, when "study" is used as a noun, "the act or process of applying the mind in order to acquire knowledge, as by reading, investigating, etc.;" or when it is used as the intransitive verb, "to fix the mind closely upon a subject; to muse; to dwell upon something in thought; to meditate; to ponder" (*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, 1806).

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<sup>2</sup>I use "Indigenous" and "Native" to refer to the multi-cultural aboriginal population of North America. Ojibwa is one of these many cultures.

<sup>3</sup>The words "artisan" and "artist" are used interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup>Marge Himelewald and Joe Rose provided information, some of which is on the compact disc, in addition to the initial interviews. Their videotapes are with the Oral History Project, Department of Indigenous Learning, Lakehead University along with the audio tapes.

## **Fundamental Considerations**

Study of indigenous philosophy within the field of academic philosophy is still quite new and there are fundamental considerations to be addressed. I will note several here briefly: philosophy and world view, the potential for bridging the radically different Western and Indigenous world views, purpose for attempting to do so, and, finally, appropriate method.

### *World View as Philosophy*

In *The Sacred*, Beck and Waters (Navajo, writers) quote Alfonso Ortiz's (Tewa, anthropologist) definition of "world view":

The notion "world view" denotes a distinctive vision of reality which not only interprets and orders the places and events in the experience of a people, but lends form, direction, and continuity to life as well. World View provides people with a distinctive set of values, an identity, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and a place, and a felt sense of continuity with a tradition which transcends the experience of a single lifetime, a tradition which may be said to transcend even time. (Ortiz 1973, 91; Beck and Waters 6)

Further: "A world view—provides a people with a structure of reality; it defines, classifies, and orders the 'really real' in the universe, in their world, and in their society" (Ortiz 1971, 136; Beck and Waters 6). We can understand discussion of world view, then, as a branch of philosophy.

Viola Cordova (Apache, philosopher) in an article entitled "Doing Native American Philosophy," says that the "real task of philosophy is to search for [certain] very basic notions. This is done ... through an attempt to discover some essential descriptions or definitions of the world and of the human being in that world" (1996, 15). She suggests that the question to ask when looking at Native American myths and stories, or in speaking with Native Americans is "What is everything, really?" She also advises that the

philosophical exercise of questioning and analyzing the offered "data" [e.g. stories, myths] should not be undertaken with preconceived notions. Native American thought should not be approached as an archaic form which sheds light on contemporary

humans of European descent. It should be approached as a complete, alternative explanation for the world and for human nature. (15)

Cordova believes that it is Native Americans themselves who should articulate Indigenous philosophy (18).

I noted above that Hester and McPherson define philosophy as the "thoughtful interaction with the world." As to who is a philosopher, "[n]o one goes through their entire life without at times reflecting upon the world. Some people spend almost their entire lives engaged in this activity. Every nation in the world has had such people. These are their philosophers" (9). We see in both these approaches to philosophy that we need to seek meaning from within the "alternative explanation for the world."

In calling my study *Craft, Ritual, and World View*, I am seeking to understand elements of Ojibwa ontology in how the Ojibwa craftsperson interacts with the world. My use of "Ojibwa Ontology" in my subtitle recognizes (Euro-American anthropologist) A. Irving Hallowell's contribution to my work. In his article, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," he focuses on the Ojibwa concept of "persons," having first noted that the human person is cognitively oriented to a world in which the objects other than self are

likewise culturally constituted, [presenting] a unified phenomenal field of thought, values, and action which is integral with the kind of world view that characterizes a society provided for its members. ... there is "order" and "reason" rather than chaos. There are basic premises and principles implied, ... We are confronted with the philosophical implications of their thought, the nature of the world of being as they conceive it. (20)

Hallowell calls this "relatively unexplored territory—ethno-metaphysics" (20). Mary B. Black-Rogers (Euro-American, cognitive anthropologist) followed Hallowell in this area. In one of her articles, "Ojibwa Taxonomy and Percept Ambiguity," she further explores the Ojibwa perceptual world, particularly the differences between individual perception within the world view.

[Individuals] displayed the typical tendency to speak only for themselves and of the things they had known through experience. The experience of each individual being different, and also private, they explicitly anticipated that others' accounts would differ from their own, even on factual and cognitive matters. ... This tendency, coupled with beliefs about the objective reality of certain private sensory experiences, yields an expectation of individual diversity of perception ... (91)

Both Hallowell and Black, working within an anthropological framework, were particularly conscious of the need to understand the Ojibwa world view from an Ojibwa perspective, while still recognizing the difficulty in doing this. They introduced me, not only to the difficulties, but to a different perceptually-structured world.

### *Bridging Radically Different World Views*

It is clear from statements made by Native Americans that there are fundamental, if not completely incommensurate, differences between Native American and Western world views. (I discuss this in more depth below in "Articulating the Difficulties.")

For instance, Vine Deloria, Jr. (Lakota, philosopher), in *God Is Red*, the 1994 revised edition, dramatically describes the great disparity between Native peoples and Euro-American (or as he identifies them, the "peoples from the near East—the peoples from the Hebrew, Islamic, and Christian religious traditions").

I suggest ... that we have on this planet two kinds of people—natural peoples and the hybrid peoples. The natural peoples represent an ancient tradition that has always sought harmony with the environment. Hybrid peoples are the product of ... ancient genetic engineering that irrevocably changed the way these people view our planet. I can think of no other good reason why [these people] first adopted the trappings of civilization and then forced a peculiar view of the natural world on succeeding generations. (2)

Whether we should take this view literally or figuratively, I don't know, but it suggests, wrongly I think, that Euro-American people may not be innately capable of understanding Native world view.



We are offered a different option by Michael Dorris (Modoc, historian) in an essay on writing Native history. He points out that the Euro-American, in an attempt to understand Native culture starts from "not zero, but minus ten" and must undergo "an initial, abrupt, and wrenching demythologizing. ... and is often required to abandon cherished childhood fantasies of superheroes and larger-than-life villains" (103). However, once beyond the Western stereotype, if we understand

that Indian societies were composed of people of the normal range of intelligence; that human beings *qua* human beings, where and whenever they may live, share some traits; that Indians were and are human beings—then we have at least a start. (104-05)

Dorris also argues that:

native people have had to cope, for the last 40,000 or so years, just like everyone else. Their cultures have had to make internal sense, their medicines have had to work consistently and practically, their philosophical explanations have had to be reasonably satisfying and dependable, or else the ancestors of those we call Indians really would have vanished long ago. (102)

If Western and Indigenous peoples share the commonality of being *Homo sapiens sapiens*, we should have the same apparatus with which to engage the world, i.e. we are *not* two different species. Therefore, we should have the ability to develop cross-cultural understanding, if we have had the appropriate experience.

In *Indian from the Inside: A Study in Ethno-Metaphysics*, McPherson and Rabb (Ojibwa and Euro-American, philosophers) propose a "polycentric perspective" as a philosophical base for doing ethno-metaphysics (the study of world view):

[P]olycentrism recognizes that we finite human beings can never obtain a God's eye view, a non-perspectival view, of reality, of philosophical truth. Every view is a view from somewhere. ... Though none is privileged yet each culture's world view, each different metaphysical system, contributes something to the total picture, a picture which is not yet and may never be wholly complete. (10)

Does this imply that we will or will not be able to understand cultures that are radically different from our own? McPherson and Rabb argue that as it is possible for an undergraduate philosophy student to understand ancient metaphysicians, "[s]urely it is also possible for any of us to use these same skills to get inside the minds of people from a radically different culture and to see the world as they do, in other words to gain a sympathetic understanding of their very different culture" (14).

In Chapter Two, I develop this position further. I suggest that both Western and Indigenous peoples share a common life-world. Cultural world views are derived from and overlay the common life-world. If we all have the same initial inherent ability to experience this life-world, and if we make the effort to understand how the other culture engages this life-world, we should be able to begin to understand the organizing principles of the other culture, although specific cultural knowledge and expressions may be less accessible to us.

#### *Why Western/Native Cross-Cultural Understanding?*

With the imposition of Western culture upon Indigenous cultures, understanding the Western becomes almost a necessity for the Indigenous person's survival. Native people have had to deal with the disruptions caused by imposition of reserves or reservations, legal definitions of their identity, forced 'education', reorganized tribal structures, changed daily living patterns from diet to health care to welfare, etc.

But understanding Native culture is not an apparent necessity for a person born into Western culture. Euro-American people have the luxury of dabbling in Native culture on a superficial level, for example, participating in appropriated 'rituals', portraying stereotyped 'Indians' in film or story. (See Churchill for particularly pointed discussion of this topic.)

However, Native Americans have indicated quite serious reasons why Western people should engage in study of Indigenous culture. Joe Rose (Ojibwa, teacher), who has participated

in this study, often speaks of the teachings the Ojibwa hold and the importance of these teachings for everyone, not just Native people. And, as expressed by Viola Cordova, Westerners need to study different cultures "in order to learn about other means of adapting to the conditions that the planet offers ... "(1997, 36).

With his installation, *Regeneration* (see Chapter Three), Louis Ogemah addresses what he calls the "disease of colonization" and the healing process needed for *both* Natives and Euro-Americans. Louis is saying that the colonizing attitude is a component of Euro-American world view and is destructive not only to those whom it is imposed upon, but to the carrier as well. By becoming aware of the juxtaposed Native and Western aspects of colonialism, one may be able to see its enactment in other ongoing ways.

The imposition of a particular world view on others (i.e. humans, animals, place, etc.) through the use of power can be seen in such actions as withholding political self-determination from Native communities, dumping toxic wastes into the earth, patenting natural-occurring botanicals for development. The pattern of all these actions is a component of Western world view which may be brought to awareness when one learns more about Native world view.

Those of us who live on the "spoils of conquest" (Hester in conversation) can learn about and from the people we have affected and develop a deeper sense of responsibility to them, ourselves, and the places we now all inhabit. Gerald Vizenor (Ojibwa, writer and philosopher) uses a quotation from D. H. Lawrence to introduce a chapter in *The People Named the Chippewa*: "A curious thing about the Spirit of Place is the fact that no place exerts its full influence upon a new-comer until the old inhabitant is dead or absorbed" (13). Let us not prove Lawrence correct.

### *Are There Appropriate Methods for Western/Native Cross-Cultural Study?*

The issues raised by the Native philosophers whom I discuss in this section address two

basic points. These points are applicable in whatever field one is working: philosophical analytic research, archaeology, art history, etc. These two basic issues are that one should consult Native people about their own history and contemporary culture, and from a Native perspective there are not pre-colonial and post-colonial 'Indians'. There is continuity in Native cultures in spite of suffering disruption from colonization.

In other words, one issue is that Western academicians tend to rely on work done by other Western academicians; they also prefer to consult historical documents written by Euro-Americans about Native people, rather than talking with Native people themselves. In a class discussion about archaeology, Viola Cordova described the white archaeologists who come to the Southwest U.S. and "invent" theories about the Ancient People. She laughs at what they "discover" and says, "Why don't they just ask us?"<sup>5</sup>

In a similar vein is Hester and McPherson's concluding suggestion: "The Indigenous person engages in philosophy by thoughtfully examining the world. The outsider examines Indigenous philosophy by thoughtfully interacting with the Indigenous philosopher" (9).

In regard to the second issue, Cordova notes that Western scholars tend to make a distinction between the "pre-colonized Indian" and the contemporary "Indian," as if the only "real Indian" were the pre-colonial, "uncontaminated" one.

The value systems and ideas of contemporary indigenous people are not sought out; these are the *contaminated* sources. Contemporary Native Americans represent a perverted form of the original "noble savage," ... The present "polluted" stage of contemporary indigenous groups is credited to postcolonial contact.

The easy dismissal of contemporary Native Americans as sources of information concerning their religious beliefs, their value systems, and their attitudes toward their world allows those who would present Native American ideas or "philosophies" for examination to avoid any possible checks on the authenticity of such interpretations. (1997, 31)

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<sup>5</sup>Philosophy 5411: Methodology, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1996-97. Also see Cordova's article "Ecoindian: A Response to J. Baird Callicott."

In respect for these concerns, I chose to talk with four contemporary Ojibwa artisans from the area where I live on the Bayfield Peninsula in northern Wisconsin, and one artist from Ontario. Clustered around the Bayfield Peninsula are the Apostle Islands, one of which is Madeline Island, site of the historic Ojibwa village of La Pointe. Two of the artists I interviewed are from Red Cliff and two from Bad River. The fifth artist is from Lac Seul, Ontario, northeast of Lake of the Woods (see Figure One). Vizenor's comments about Place also influenced my decision to interview people whose history in the area goes back hundreds of years.

### Articulating the Difficulties

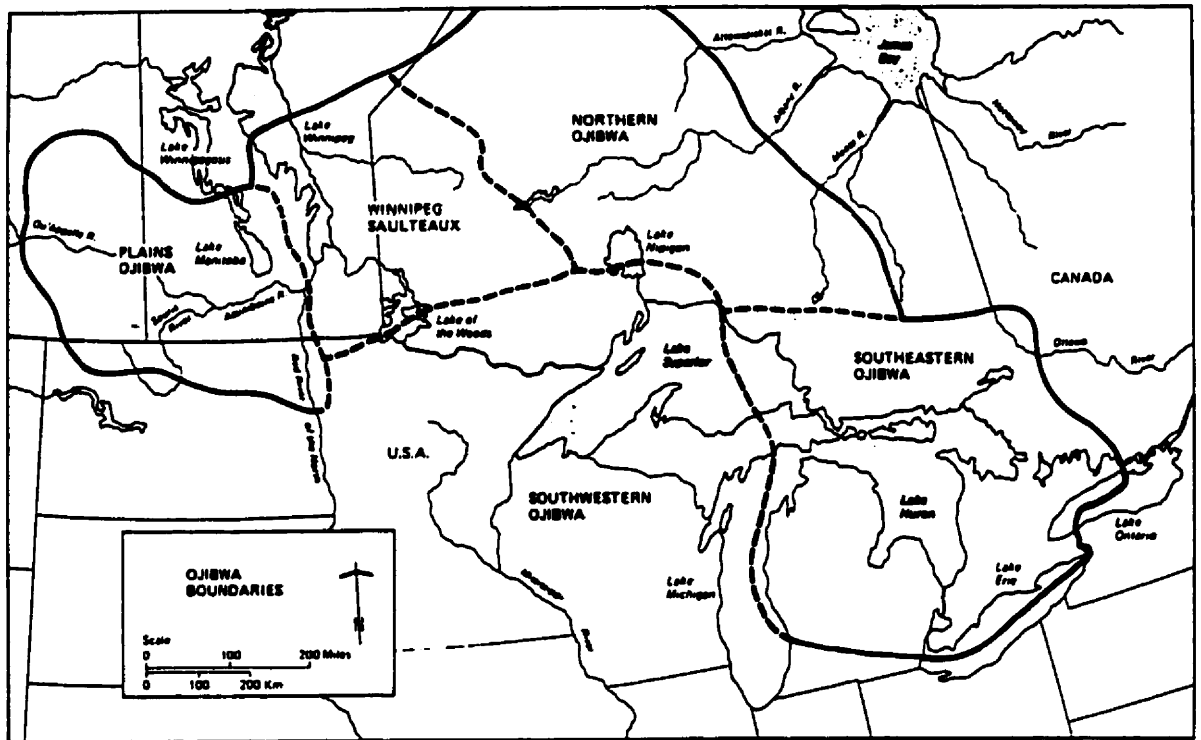
The hurdles one might encounter in such a cross-cultural study seem formidable with language, conceptual framework, and styles of reasoning foremost. The Ojibwa and English languages are from different linguistic families, and, whether communication is in English or Ojibwa, there is the potential for different meanings to be given to the same word depending on whether it is being used by a Western or an Ojibwa person.<sup>6</sup>

Meyer and Ramirez (respectively Euro-American and Lakota, philosophers) in a paper discussing the difficulty for Western understanding of the Lakota/Dakota concept of *Wakan Tonka*, say that "to have a perspective at all, one must think within some conceptual framework" but that framework may be so different from another that it will be impossible to understand one from within the other. They point out that "a problem of relativity might be overcome insofar as there is a 'style of reasoning' shared by members of the society, which could, in principle, be

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<sup>6</sup>The problem of cross-cultural language meaning is explored in Matthew Zieske's Master's thesis topic *Bridging the Language Barrier: The Concept of Autonomy as a Case Study*. Zieske is in the Native Philosophy Program at Lakehead University.

Figure 1. Map—Location of Southwestern Ojibwa (Johnston 1976, 10)



learned over time by someone from outside" (103).

This indicates that we may not be faced with the incommensurability of single words or concepts, but with complete "styles of reasoning" between Western and Ojibwa cultures. For instance, Gerald Vizenor in his story "Oshkiwinag: Heartlines on the Trickster Express" identifies "natural reason on the heartlines" (256) as his Ojibwa characters' style of reasoning, and "the bungee lines of reason" for "the others, the educated canons" (246). I mention this, not to delve into Vizenor's meaning here, but because it should give us a clue that we're on two different trains of thought. Whether these hurdles can be overcome remains to be seen in the attempt. However, being aware of the problems we may encounter allows us, at least, to prepare.

For example, as I worked on my analysis of the transcribed oral interviews, I began to notice a particular area of difficulty. This was a nexus of meanings around the words "spiritual" and "spirit." The artisans seemed to use the words in a variety of applications, meaning different things at different times. And these meanings did not seem to coincide with my Western interpretation of the words. I began to think that one of the uses of "spiritual" was what I had sometimes experienced as a "different" awareness for which I had no name. I suspected this might be similar to what W. T. Stace calls "extroverted mystical experience." "[T]he extroverted mystic, using his physical senses, perceives the multiplicity of external material objects—the sea, the sky, the houses, the trees—mystically transfigured so that the One, or the Unity, shines through them" (61).

This introduced a difficult problem from my point of view. For the Ojibwa people talking with me, this particular mode of consciousness was not considered unusual, but, rather, an integral component of being, a mode of awareness and thought utilized in various ways and on many levels. But "mysticism" is not usually accepted as being within the realm of Western philosophy.

At this point, I was introduced to John Taber's work on transformative philosophy.<sup>7</sup> His stated purpose is "to establish the transformative pattern as a distinct type of philosophy" (3). The pattern Taber describes for transformative philosophy can "provide a principle of interpretation" (95), a framework which seemed appropriate for this study. The components of transformative philosophy are an experience (often preconceptual) of wider consciousness, a method with which to develop this wider consciousness, a body of knowledge "which constitutes the main topic of the system and articulates the experiential component," and "transformation—a dramatic and thorough rebirth resulting from this insight" (95). The "term 'transformative' is meant to characterize a certain relation between the statements of a philosophical system and experience. It has nothing essential to do with the specific content of those statements" (96). Where Meyer and Ramirez describe a "Gestalt shift" needed in cross-cultural understanding (105), transformative philosophy can provide a specific framework for the process. (See discussion in Chapter Two.)

### **Why Not Western Philosophy of Art?**

Now that we are aware of some of the hurdles we may face, can Western philosophy of art provide a starting point from which to understand the meaning of Ojibwa crafted objects? Very briefly, I will mention a few approaches.

Since Aristotle, "art" and "craft" have been considered (until recently) two different types of activities and objects. We might sort the artisans here into people who produce craft and those who produce art. "Art" would be the higher form—"pure" art for its own sake distinguished from "craft" which would have been envisioned and "crafted" with a utilitarian purpose. Some philosophers of Western art discussed, for example, the aesthetics of fine art, relegating the

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<sup>7</sup>Dr. Rabb, my advisor, and Professor McPherson have written several articles exploring the application of transformative philosophy to the vision quest in particular, and Lakota and Ojibwa philosophy in general. See 1990a, b, c.



crafts to a different, and less worthy, category. (See Collingwood for this classic approach.)<sup>8</sup>

Within the Western horizon, there are now approaches to art other than the classic one, e.g. Dewey's *Art as Experience*, Dufrenne's *The Phenomenology of Art*, or Baxandahl's *The Pattern of Intentions* in which he considers the art object as evidence of intention. More recently, Western and Indigenous crafts are often given the status of "fine" art and exhibited as such. The objects are appreciated for their aesthetic qualities; they may be judged by the quality of their craftsmanship. For instance, aesthetically, I find the webbing on a well-made pair of snowshoes extremely beautiful; I admire the skill and knowledge that was needed to produce them.<sup>9</sup>

If we were to use a Western analysis in this study, we might categorize the artists' work by design or type. Or we might look at how their works relate to the linear history of the type. Vastokas, for example, notes that Western art historians have generally ignored the study of Native artifacts. Among the reasons she cites are: Native artifacts don't fit into the European context, "many have not yet been identified as aesthetic objects," and many artifacts are simply not accessible, because they are stored in collections. (10-11)

Here, I refer back to McPherson's comment that we need to be careful not to apply Western concepts to Native thought. If we begin from *within* Western philosophy of art, we would be doing exactly what McPherson cautions against. The words "art" and "craft" are not part of the Ojibwa lexicon. Native use of the English words describes what these words mean in English, i.e. "art" may be paintings prepared for gallery exhibits, "craft" may be bead work or tanning. There are Native arts and crafts classes at schools and colleges. But if we try to eliminate these two concepts from our thinking, then we may begin to see what the Ojibwa crafted object means *within its own horizon*.

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<sup>8</sup>Since I began this study, it has been interesting to me to discover, when I mention the word "craft," how many people, philosophers and friends alike, think I am looking into how to make, for example, birch bark baskets. The popular idea of craft seems not to have kept pace with the academic philosophy of art.

<sup>9</sup>As an example, the Thunder Bay Art Gallery does a magnificent job in exhibiting the full range of "art and craft" and Native and non-Native work.

Looking at "art as" something else leads us into a similar problem; we are beginning with the concept of "art," classifying certain objects, and then attempting to describe how they function "as" something else.

These approaches are legitimate from a Western point of view and within Western culture, but they are not necessarily applicable to Ojibwa world view. In this study, I'm not concerned with how Westerners see Native arts or crafts, whether we find them aesthetically pleasing, nor with our struggles in classifying Native objects. I'm interested in how Ojibwa artisans see their own work; which ultimately will help us understand how they see the world. We must look at Native art in its own cultural context rather than trying to fit it into Western criteria.

#### **Notes on the Interviews and Their Analysis**

Because of their importance to this study, the interviews (in edited form) with Ojibwa artisans appear in Chapter Three.<sup>10</sup> I include them in the body of the thesis because, as "teachings," they form the core "truth" of this study. They are the hub around which this work is oriented. In a philosophical analogy, I could say that they are the premises from which I have worked. They are also included in this position within the text relative to their meaning in the transformative process.

All the interviews or conversations were oral, i.e. not conducted in written format. In the case of the one untaped interview, I orally recorded my memory of it the same day. If there were conversation off the tape, I made written notes of it afterward. I then made full transcriptions of the audio tapes.

For inclusion in the text, I have edited the interviews for a number of reasons: as full transcripts they are unwieldy; some of my own questions and comments are intrusive in the flow

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<sup>10</sup>As also noted elsewhere, the full unedited transcripts are on the compact disc for readers' reference.

of what the artist was saying; I did not refer to some of the discursive conversation; and in reading, rather than listening, repetitive and overlapping conversational elements are distracting. Throughout, I have made every effort to retain the voice of the speaker and not to alter the meaning of what was said.

In trying to understand the content of the conversations, I did not limit myself to, but did stay generally within the hermeneutic model. I circled from the interviews—the lived experience, to my growing understanding, and back. My choice to interview artisans, of whom one is a flute maker and performer allowed me to bring to the interpretation my own experience as a craftsperson and flute player. I hoped my basic understanding of the physical processes and musical performance would be helpful.

Richard Palmer states that the "[e]xplanatory interpretation ... must be made within a horizon of already granted meanings and intentions ... called preunderstanding (24)" He continues, the interpreter "must preunderstand the subject and the situation before he can enter the horizon of its meaning. ... a fundamental problem in hermeneutics is that of how an individual's horizon can be accommodated to that of the work. A certain preunderstanding of the subject is necessary or no communication will happen, yet that understanding must be altered in the act of understanding" (25). I found that knowledge in the areas noted was helpful. At first I worked in a very (Western) analytic manner, studying the transcripts, looking for themes, commonalities, sorting into categories.

However, this was not adequate. My own experiences in the interviewing process were very intense; the "concentration" of the people while talking to me seemed "different"—particularly focused. What I came to realize was that during the interviews we were engaged in a different type of awareness. (I don't believe this experience comes through in a transcription.) This realization caused me to reassess how I had felt, what the "mood" was. Then, I decided to try to do what I was being told about in the interviews. This, in turn, caused me to focus more

closely on some of the topic areas, especially the way thought *and* action form experience and how they are put into the world. I don't believe that a strictly analytic study can access this material.

Also, because of the importance of experience in the transformative process, I have bracketed in a particular way. Within this study, I have identified certain of my experiences, which seem to be illustrative of the process, and have, literally, bracketed them within the text.

When the interviews posed questions for me, I researched other material looking for answers, supplementing the interviews. Some of that material is presented in the discussion in Chapter Four. In addition, I elaborate on certain concepts, such as circularity and time, which are mentioned but not explained in the interviews. As I worked, I realized it was necessary to try to envision the pre-contact world in which Native crafted objects originated; I have included a short discussion of this.

In Chapters Five and Six, I draw upon my own study to reflect about Ojibwa world view and the meaning of the crafted pieces.

## CHAPTER 2: Finding Common Ground

In beginning this study, I noted that there are fundamental, possibly insurmountable, differences between Euro-American and Ojibwa world views. To address this I have organized this chapter in three main sections. The first discusses transformative philosophy which I use as the structural method to provide guidance from one world view to another. The second discusses general cognitive/conative orientations of the two cultures; this gives specific direction. Lastly, to provide common ground both literally and philosophically, I present my interpretation of David Abram's work which he develops in *The Spell of the Sensuous*. From this context I can begin to understand the meaning of Ojibwa crafted objects.

### Transformative Philosophy

A philosophy can be designated "transformative." Transformative philosophy describes a movement in experience and thinking from one state of awareness to a wider consciousness.<sup>11</sup> John Taber's work examines Śaṅkara and Fichte whose philosophies exemplify the pattern. Śaṅkara relies on religious texts; Fichte on dialectic. Transformative philosophy itself is contentless. The contents of transformative philosophies will be different, but the pattern will be the same.

Different cultures whose philosophies may be described as transformative can be

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<sup>11</sup>My discussion of transformative philosophy is based on John Taber's *Transformative Philosophy: A Study of Śaṅkara, Fichte, and Heidegger*. In general, Taber uses the term "higher consciousness." I have chosen to use "wider consciousness" which, I think, is more appropriate to this study.

compared, as Taber did with Śāṅkara (Indian) and Fichte (German). Also, Rabb and McPherson have recently compared Lakota and Ojibwa philosophies in this way (1999b).

My use of transformative philosophy in this context differs somewhat from the above. I am arguing that the process necessary to go from a Euro-American world view to understanding Ojibwa world view is a transformative process which fits Taber's description of transformative philosophy. However, in this application, I am not describing one cultural world view, nor am I comparing two. I am suggesting that transformative philosophy can be used as a method. This thesis is also constructed in a transformative pattern designed to move from one way of understanding to another.

#### *1) A Preconceptual Experience*

The thrust of transformative philosophy is movement toward, and change to, a wider consciousness. It consists of several components: a preconceptual experience which the individual may or may not be aware of. The person may lack awareness because he or she does not have the necessary conceptual framework to identify and define the experience. Or, the individual may be aware of having had *some* experience which is non-classifiable. This experience "is a precondition for the intelligibility of the system" (Taber 95).

For example, after doing the interviews and reflecting on their content, I realized that some of the times I have worked with fleece have been an experience of this type. At the time, I experienced a complete involvement with the fibers, one could almost say a communication with them and literally saw them in a different light.

#### *2) An Experiential Method*

The second necessary component is an experiential method which will cultivate this consciousness. Within a culture with a transformative philosophy, this will be an overt,

developed method. For example, in Ojibwa culture, fasting, dreaming, sweat lodge, and vision quest are accepted cultural methods which may lead to a transformative experience expressed in appropriate cultural iconography. In my application, there is no Euro-American cultural practice (which I am aware of) designed to facilitate this cultivation. Borrowing practices from other cultures may be an option, but the wider consciousness which we wish to understand may be different for Ojibwa than, for example, Buddhist. Methods tailored within one culture may be inappropriate for another.

The following are the methods which I found in the course of this study, but certainly this can be expanded or refined with more experience. First, I needed a "sense of direction"; this is what I am trying to provide in this chapter. Understanding the usual limitations of Western intellectual thinking and finding a philosophical position which reaches beyond that position are important—beginning from a Western world view is almost synonymous with beginning intellectually. However, intellectual *knowing* that this is one's orientation and *recognizing one's experience of it* are two different aspects which one must learn to identify.

I reviewed my own life-experience for possible "preconceptual" experiences. I am now continually (re)discovering these experiences, for which I had no language prior to this study, and reinterpreting them.

An experiential component of which I was unaware at the time was being with the people during the interviews. They were interacting with me from a state of wider consciousness. This included experiencing Louis Ogema's installation as he was speaking about it, and then returning to it later by myself. It is important to learn to listen, to attend to *what* one is being told and *how* it is being told. At the beginning of the interviews, in spite of the fact that I had been told to "notice everything," I was still jumping in from my own point of view. During my first interview, I noticed moments of disconnection between what was said, what I replied, and the response to that. I was cautioned again to *listen*—to open up one's senses.

A method I used consciously was *doing* what I was being told about in the interviews. At the time of the interviews, I was beginning a crafted project. I tried to collect the materials and work in the way which was being described to me (see Chapter Five).

Keeping a journal of one's interactions with the natural world can be a formal experiential activity. This exercise can be done even within an urban or suburban area. For instance, in Chicago an old, rarely visited, unkempt cemetery provided haven for birds and other creatures. An overgrown and walled vacant lot buzzed with the activity of birds, insects, and plants in the summer, and provided quiet isolation from city-sounds in the winter.<sup>12</sup>

### 3) A "Body of Knowledge"

The third component is "a body of doctrine which constitutes the main topic of the system and articulates the experiential component" (Taber 95). The body of knowledge places the experience within understanding, and removes it from ineffability. When it is accessible to the understanding, it can be lived consciously. Transformative philosophies are ones which "demand ... commitment and must in some way be *lived*, and the statements of [the] systems are themselves instrumental in effecting this conversion from reflection to life" (96). The statements of the systems are not revisionary nor speculative; they do not propose a *new* way of understanding or ordering reality. Nor are they simply descriptive, describing something already accessible to consciousness. Instead, Taber says the statements "define" a matter of fact, i.e. the precognitive experience. It "tells us, in effect, not simply that experience potentially extends beyond what is known in daily life but that there are other *modes* of experience" (101).

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<sup>12</sup>Recently, Dr. Rabb assigned the journaling exercise to his introductory Philosophy class (for which I was a teaching assistant). The students were assigned the task of being in "nature" once each week for about an hour. They were to write about their interactions. Notable among the experiences was a response to rocks and water which many students described. Also notable were flashes of relationship with individual animals: a crow watching a student eat his lunch, a fox frightened by another student riding his snowmobile, and a student's encounter with an old tree (which he later rationalized cutting down!).



In this study, the words of the Ojibwa artists regarding the crafted objects and, especially, the state of mind the artist must be in to produce a spiritual or sacred object, function as the defining philosophical statements. For instance, when Frank Montano tells us that the flute becomes alive and through ceremony communicates its purpose, without the other transformative components we have no way from a Western position to recognize what this means.

#### *4) Transformation*

Through these statements and the interactive experiences, it may be possible to understand and experience the crafted works, and understand how the artisan works. This is the fourth component which Taber calls "transformation—a dramatic and thorough rebirth resulting from this insight" (95). It is the result the individual may (or may not) experience from the process. The personal experience of the transformation can be expected to cause the individual to look with "new eyes" upon his/her former world. This shift in understanding should cause the individual to reorder his/her experiential world and to reevaluate his/her actions within it. One does not "leave behind" one's former orientation (or world view), but learns to look at it with new understanding.

#### *Comments about the Components*

While it is possible that "enlightenment" in an Eastern sense may be a sudden flash of intuitive experience (what Stace calls "introverted mystical experience" [61]), my sense is that our endeavor here is different and quite complex. First, the list of four components above belies the difficulty of the process. There can be a long period in which praxis is interspersed with the study of the "body of doctrine." Transformation in this cross-cultural context may be many small "enlightenments," many small realizations which gradually transform the experiential world.

The Ojibwa state of "widened consciousness" ("widened" only from our Western point of view) is lived within the natural world. So, instead of one moment of enlightenment, we are presented with an entirely different way of interacting and understanding on a continual basis. In other words, it is a lived state of awareness. As with any lived state of awareness (even the Western intellectual state), it is imbued with cultural practices, meanings, and nuances.

### **Western/Ojibwa Cultural Cognitive Patterns**

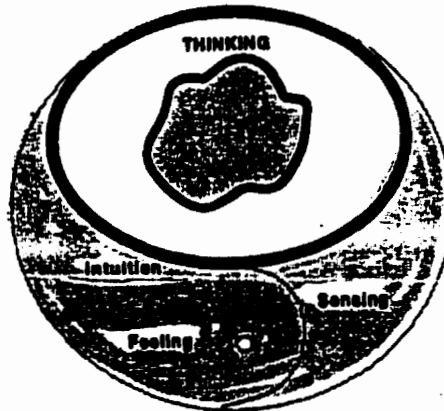
Now that I have established transformative philosophy as my framework toward understanding, I will look at the specific shift in thinking which will need to occur.

In her Master's thesis, *A Jungian Bridge to Native Philosophy*, Marie Taylor states: "The gap between Western and Native world views is much more profound than the West has imagined" (iii).<sup>13</sup> In a Jungian interpretation, the psyche consists of Thinking, Intuition, Sensing, and Feeling all of which are equally important and which should be "available to consciousness, and contribute to knowledge" (55). However, Western reliance on pure and empirical reasoning, and the search for logical certainty has isolated the thinking function from contact with the others—creating an immense chasm, a "stark divide between the humanly knowable and unknowable" (64). Taylor's diagram graphically illustrates the thinking/intellectual function as an island, from which the other three components are separated and, often, inaccessible. (See Figure Two.) The separation and domination of our intellectual function gives currency to various philosophical positions such as radical individualism or mind-body dualism, faith in "pure reason," search for unyielding foundational knowledge, as well as objectified modern science.

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<sup>13</sup>I have used Taylor's Jungian interpretation of psyche and her diagram to give a graphic sense of contrast between Western and Ojibwa cognitive/conative orientation, and, thus, direction to our movement. My thesis does not require acceptance of this Jungian interpretation.

**Figure 2. The Western Intellectual Island (Taylor 56).**



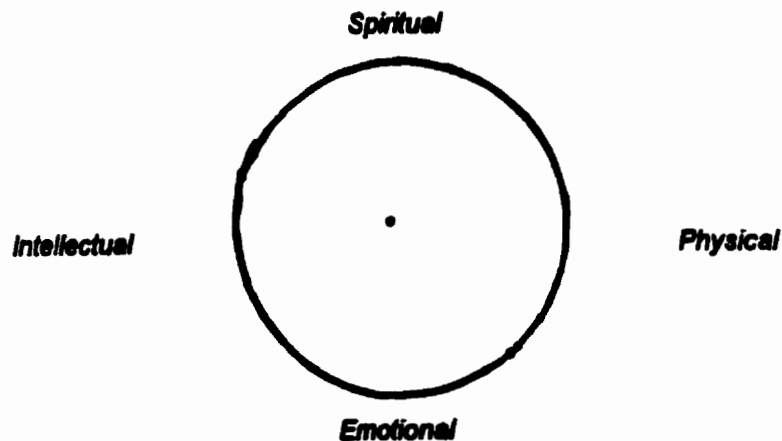
Another result of the intellect's isolation is pointed out by Edward Conze who contrasts Buddhism with Western intellectual philosophizing:

In Europe, we have become accustomed to an almost complete gap between the theory of philosophers and their practice, between their views on the nature of the universe and their mode of life. ... [The philosopher] is judged by the consistency of his views, not with his life ... in short, [he is judged] by purely intellectual standards. (20; Taber 65)

This kind of separation allows us to act inconsistently with our philosophical positions. An intimate connection between thought and action is not recognized.

In contrast is an Ojibwa perspective. In Chapter Three, Marge Hmielewski talks about the four aspects of the person: Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual.

**Figure 3. The Four Aspects of Ojibwa Being (after White 118).**



Because four parts of the psyche have also been identified in a Jungian approach, it is tempting to find parallels between it and the Ojibwa. However, I will resist the temptation. For instance, it is not clear that the Ojibwa term "spiritual" equates with "intuitive." The first would seem to indicate a mode of awareness, whereas "intuitive" refers to a process of acquiring knowledge. Nor would the highly differentiated meaning of "feeling" in Jungian terminology be comparable with "emotional" (Taylor 56, note 83). The Ojibwa interpretation can be illustrated with the medicine wheel which serves organizing, teaching, and healing functions within Ojibwa thought. These four aspects of oneself need to be related and in harmony within the circle of the whole. As well, one must seek balance. (See Figure Three). Harmony and balance are important in thought as well as action; how one is in thought goes into one's actions and relationships in the world.

Succinctly, the difference between Western and Ojibwa modes of thought is between an isolated and dominate intellectualism, and a harmonious interaction of the four aspects and a balanced mode of being in the world.

I will give a personal example of the difficulty of communication between Western and Ojibwa views to illustrate this point. Several years ago, when I was taking philosophy classes at Northland College, I became interested in the Western and Ojibwa concepts of "person." I asked Joe Rose, Ojibwa elder and Director of the Native Studies Department, if he would co-direct, with the Western philosophy professor, my independent study paper. He agreed to do so. I went to talk with him, sure in my Western mode of thought that I wanted to discuss the form of the paper, the concepts, the arguments, etc., which I explained to him, probably at length. I expected him to dialogue with me on these points and discuss the Ojibwa concept of "person," or at least give me references. Instead, there was a long pause. Then he told me the story of an experience he and his son had which I am going to repeat here as I remember it:

My son and I were visiting in Calgary, Alberta, last winter. We were there at the time of their Winter Festival. There were lots of outdoor events. We were walking around and we came to where there was a contest. Men were engaging in something like bowling. They were throwing or rolling frozen turkeys to try to knock down pins. My son and I were horrified. We were very sad. From our point of view, Western culture is insane.

This is all he said to me. Bowling with turkeys seemed callous to me, but I must admit, with some embarrassment, that I had no idea this story had anything to do with my paper and I never went back to him for help with it. (In spite of this, Professor Rose has graciously helped with this study.)

These graphic illustrations should give us a general "picture" of how we need to reorient or relearn our thinking so that we can begin to understand what the meaning of Ojibwa crafted objects is to the Ojibwa craftsperson. At the least, we will need to bridge the chasm surrounding the intellect and recognize, and hopefully reintegrate, the emotional, physical, and, particularly, the spiritual aspects of ourselves. Also, we will need to look at the connection between our thoughts and our actions more carefully. Within the framework of transformative philosophy, we can envision that we are seeking a more holistic mode of awareness, balanced within and without.

### **Changing the Landscape of Western Thought**

The isolation and domination of the Western intellect is not just a psychic phenomenon but influences the way in which we perceive and interact with the world. Basing her metaphor on Kant, Taylor's imagery portrays the island (of pure reason) surrounded by a chasm, beyond which is the fog (of the noumenal) (22). My own imagery is less poetic. We Western people sit on the intellectual island, surrounded by the chasm which allows us to separate, objectify, manipulate, and use the world, which we see as external to us, without responsibility for our actions. In order to change this imagery, to change the landscape of our thinking, I now turn to

David Abram.

I owe this direction to Brundige (Cree-Metis, philosopher) and Rabb who point out the potential of Abram's work in a cross-cultural context. They cite the use of Merleau-Ponty's concept of "perceptual reciprocity" by African-American writer Charles Johnson. In his work *Being and Race*, Johnson argues that persons with different perspectives can transcend relativism "[b]ecause ... we have ... innumerable perspectives on one world; and we know that when it comes to the crunch, we share, all of us, the same cultural Life-world—a world layered with ancestors, predecessors, and contemporaries" (Johnson 44; Brundige and Rabb 86). Where Johnson acknowledges other persons in the cultural Life-world, Abram expands the notion of perceptual reciprocity, or intersubjectivity, beyond reciprocity with human persons to all sentient organisms. The notion of perceptual reciprocity recognizes that we do not perceive in isolation, only "taking in." Instead, all our perceptions are, at the same time, reciprocated perceptions of others. Perceptual reciprocity is ongoing.

The encounter with other perceivers continually assures me that there is more to any thing, or to the world, than I myself can perceive at any moment. . . . I sense that that tree is much more than what I directly see of it, since it is also what the others whom I see perceive of it; . . . not just . . . other persons, but . . . other sentient organisms . . . the birds that nest in its branches . . . the insects that move along its bark, and even, finally, . . . the sensitive cells and tissues of the oak itself, quietly drinking sunlight through its leaves. It is this informing of my perceptions by the evident perceptions and sensations of other bodily entities that establishes, for me, the relative solidity and stability of the world. (Abram 39; Brundige and Rabb 86-87)

Using Abram's argument<sup>14</sup> we can transcend the chasm which separates us from the rest of the life-world. We will see that we share this life-world, not only with Ojibwa people, but with sentient objects—and that we experience intersubjectivity with them. We will see that there are layered life-worlds, the common life-world we all share and experience, and the over-layered

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<sup>14</sup>I am using Abram's argument, which he based in part on his interpretation of Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's works, to explicate our intersubjectivity with all beings in the life-world.

cultural life-world. We can begin to connect to and understand the world in which the Ojibwa crafted objects come to be and how they also interact with this world.

### *The Chasm*

Our intellectual isolation is achieved by denying our involvement in and dependence on the natural world.

[O]ne perceives a world at all only by projecting oneself into that world, ... one makes contact with things and others only by actively participating in them, lending one's sensory imagination to things in order to discover how they alter and transform that imagination, how they reflect us back changed, how they are different from us. [P]erception is *always* participatory, and hence ... modern humanity's denial of awareness in nonhuman nature is borne not by any conceptual or scientific rigor, but rather by an inability, or a refusal, to fully perceive other organisms. (Abram 275-76)

In Western society, we have come to regard our material (and virtual!) reality as *the* reality, overlooking our everyday world which "is hardly the mathematically determined 'object' toward which the sciences direct themselves. ... It is not an inert or mechanical object but a living field, an open and dynamic landscape subject to its own moods and metamorphoses" (32). Perhaps those of us who have cuddled a baby, washed the dishes, nursed an elderly parent or grandparent, or exchanged a smile with a stranger will say that we cannot doubt there is a world of subjective interrelationships, an experiential field in which we participate. But I contend that we still see ourselves as radically separate beings, and that even these experiences are couched within the objective, individualistic Western paradigm. (Cf. Cordova 1997) "The fluid realm of direct experience has come to be seen as a secondary, derivative dimension, a mere consequence of events unfolding in the 'realer' world of quantifiable and measurable scientific 'facts.' It is a curious inversion of the actual demonstrable state of affairs" (Abram 34).

### *The Life-World*

Abram builds his work on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

"Phenomenology, as [Edmund Husserl] articulated it in the early 1900s, would turn toward 'things themselves,' toward the world as it is experienced in its felt immediacy. Unlike the mathematics-based sciences, phenomenology would seek not to explain the world, but to describe as closely as possible the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, the way things first arise in our direct, sensorial experience" (35).

For this study, recognition of the life-world is extremely important. The life-world is shared by Western and Native peoples alike, and is our common ground within which we perceive, albeit differently.

The life-world is the world of our immediately lived experience, as we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it. ... Easily overlooked, this primordial world is always already there when we begin to reflect or philosophize. It is not a private, but a collective, dimension—the common field of our lives and the other lives with which ours are entwined—and yet it is profoundly ambiguous and indeterminate, since our experience of this field is always relative to our situation within it. The life-world is thus the world as we organically experience ... prior to conceptually freezing it into a static space of "facts"—prior, indeed, to conceptualizing it in any complete fashion. (40)

### *The Layered Life-World*

If, however, Western and Native peoples share a common life-world, how can our perceptions, organization, and interaction with it be so different—to the point of incommensurability? Abram responds to this apparent dilemma by explaining:

It should be evident that the life-world may be quite different for different cultures. The world that a people experiences and comes to count on is deeply influenced by the ways they live and engage that world. The members of any given culture necessarily inhabit an experienced world very different from that of another culture with a very different language and way of life. . . . And yet, despite this multiplicity, it would seem that there are basic structures to the life-world that are shared, elements that are common to different cultures and even, we may suspect, to different species. Husserl's writings seem to suggest that the life-world has various layers, that underneath the layer of diverse cultural life-worlds there reposes a deeper, more unitary life-world, always already there beneath all our cultural acquisitions, a vast and continually overlooked dimension of experience that nevertheless supports and sustains all our diverse and discontinuous worldviews. (41-42)



Therefore, what appears as incommensurability is such simply because we have not looked deeply enough. We have been seeking understanding between cultural life-worlds, without seeking our commonalities at the deeper life-world level.

*Insertion in the Life-World*

If we are to find common ground in the life-world, we need to understand what "being in the life-world" means. How are we "in" the life-world?

Abram, and Merleau-Ponty, begin to answer this question by saying that it is the living body itself which is the "subject of experience. ... The living body is ... the very possibility of contact, not just with others but with oneself—the very possibility of reflection, of thought, of knowledge" (45). The living body, however, is not the separated and bounded "object" containing our awareness which Western culture identifies.

[T]he boundaries of a living body are open and indeterminate; more like membranes than barriers, they define a surface of metamorphosis and exchange. ... [The body is] ceaselessly spreading out of itself as well as breathing the world into itself, so that it is very difficult to discern, at any moment, precisely where this living body begins and where it ends. Considered phenomenologically—that is, as we actually experience and *live* it—the body is a creative, shape-shifting entity. ... Far from restricting my access to things and to the world, the body is my very means of entering into relation with all things. (46-47)

As we have seen, the embodied subject is not alone in the perceptual field. It is engaged in continuous reciprocity and "comes to recognize these other bodies as other centers of experience, other subjects. ... [T]he subjective field of experience, mediated by the body, opens onto other subjectivities ... [onto] a collective landscape, constituted by other experiencing subjects as well as by oneself" (37).

Those phenomena of the experiential field which we cannot, with our wills, change because "they seem buttressed by many involvements besides [our] own," are called

**"intersubjective phenomena—phenomena experienced by a multiplicity of sensing subjects" (38). Realizing that all our experience is subjective, and distinguishing between subjective and intersubjective, allows us to discard our conventional references to "objective" reality.**

***Perception, Synaesthesia, and the Animate Life-World***

Now that we have seen that there is a continuous interchange between our own bodies and those around us, "perception" can be described more fully: "It is this open activity, this dynamic blend of receptivity and creativity by which every animate organism necessarily orients itself to the world (and orients the world around itself) ..." (50).

With this description in mind, if perception is an ongoing intersubjective activity, where does it arise? Does it originate in me or in the other? Abram answers this by saying that "[n]either the perceiver nor the perceived ... is wholly passive in the event of perception" (53). Both the mosquito and I contribute to a shared perception; she perceiving my skin as I perceive the sting. Or, using Abram's example, the flowering plant provides my fragrant perception, and the perception for the pollinating bee.

Traditionally in Western philosophy and culture, the senses are regarded separately, vision usually being regarded as the primary sense. But Abram emphasizes that the body acts synaesthetically, that is, all the senses act together. One's senses all participate fully in perception and we only identify one from another after the experience. "As soon as I attempt to distinguish the share of any one sense from that of the others, I inevitably sever the full participation of my sensing body with the sensuous terrain" (60).

This full involvement of the living sensuous body in the perceptual and perceiving field, enables us to focus *in* the other things which draw our perception to themselves. Abram goes on:

**My various senses, diverging as they do from a single, coherent body, coherently**

converge, as well, in the perceived thing, just as the separate perspectives of my two eyes converge upon the raven and convene there into a single focus. My senses connect up with each other in the things I perceive, or rather each perceived thing gathers my senses together in a coherent way, and it is this that enables me to experience the thing itself as a center of forces, as another nexus of experience, as an Other. (62)

Recognition that the Other is a "center of forces" or "nexus of experience" which can actively engage us is quite important. Our sensual engagement is not haphazard nor incomprehensible; the Other brings our senses together in a "coherent" way. We remind ourselves that our living bodies are permeable, our skin itself a sensory organ, air flows into us and out with each breath. There is a flow between us and Others, being focused and focusing, perceiving and being perceived. The Others themselves are also foci, like us, of subjectivity, sensibility, and experience.

Abram notes that Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, consistently described "... the sensible thing, commonly considered by our philosophical tradition to be passive and inert ... in the active voice: ... The sensible world ... is described as active, animate, and, in some curious manner, alive ..." (55). In our immediate reciprocal experience, we know the Other

as a dynamic presence that confronts us and draws us into relation. We conceptually immobilize or objectify the phenomenon only by mentally absenting ourselves from this relation, by forgetting or repressing our sensuous involvement. To define another being as an inert or passive object is to deny its ability to actively engage us and to provoke our senses; we thus block our perceptual reciprocity with that being. ...

If ... we wish to describe a particular phenomenon without repressing our direct experience, then we cannot avoid speaking of the phenomenon as an active, animate entity with which we find ourselves engaged. ... To the sensing body, no thing presents itself as utterly passive or inert. (56)

Thus, we find ourselves—no longer the bounded, isolated being our Western culture portrays and which we attempt to emulate—in constant active engagement with other dynamic beings.

That those other beings may be people, other animals, or even insects, is, I think,

comprehensible to us. We can realize that the subject/object categories are reversible. The mosquito is an entity to me as I am to it. Abram says that once we acknowledge this—that we can have an "objective existence for others," we must recognize the possibility "that *any* visible, tangible form that meets my gaze may also be an experiencing subject, sensitive and responsive to the beings around it, and to me" (67).

### *The Matrix of the Life-World*

We recognize, then, that "our sensory perceptions [are] simply our part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations borne by countless other bodies ..." (65). This intertwined web of experience is, of course, the 'life-world' to which Husserl alluded in his final writings ... (65).

But there is more to this "webwork" than the strands which link entities together. There is a matrix to the life-world. Abram discusses Merleau-Ponty's identification of this matrix as

the collective "Flesh," which signifies both *our* flesh and "the flesh of the world." By "the Flesh" Merleau-Ponty means to indicate an elemental power that has had no name in the entire history of Western philosophy. The Flesh is the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity. It is the reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible and of the sensible in the sentient, a mystery of which we have always, at least tacitly, been aware ... (66)

The matrix, or Flesh, is the animate "stuff" which gives rise to the forms of all the entities within it. It is itself "*both sensible and sensitive*" (67), an active power.

If the matrix is sensible—capable of being sensed, with what sense do we do this?

It would seem that none of what we usually credit to our five senses can explain the ability to sense what is apparently intangible and not visible. Abram identifies this as "imagination." It is

an attribute of the senses themselves; ... not a separate mental faculty ... but is rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible. (58)

Abram uses the example of the sleight of hand of a magician who performs a coin trick, having the coin disappear from one hand and reappear in the other. It is the imagination entering into reciprocity with the magician and the coin which Abram says supplies the notion that the coin has gone from one hand to the other. This example is unfortunate. While it does show the activity of the imaginative "sense," the magician deliberately takes advantage of it in fooling us.

Does this happen in our reciprocity with the natural world?

We have seen above that the "gathering of our senses" by another entity has coherency

and comprehensibility. If our imaginations are one of our senses, and it is through use of this sense, in combination with our other senses, that we are able to perceive the Flesh of the natural world, then our perception of it will not be "fooled." Our perception of it will have cogency, because all entities are part of it and arise from it.

I think this combination of what is here called "the matrix," or "the Flesh," and "the imagination" is what constitutes the mystical or transformative experience as discussed by Taber. It is the sensing of the mysterious, the active power, the hidden or invisible. I also think this is what is referred to as "spiritual" by Ojibwa people. The use of "imagination" for this is probably as good a word as any, since English has not supplied us with adequate terminology, nor have I another word to suggest.

It is possible that each of us has had sensual experiences of this matrix, but has not known how to name it. In my own example below, I would describe what I experienced as "sensing" but I would not know how to say what I sensed with. That I did sense this is indisputable, and it had and continues to have a reality for me.

*[Personal Journal, Late at night in early June, 1987. Southeast Alaska on a tiny island outside Sitka.*

*My friends and I are gathered with about twenty people at a small, wooden cabin perched on the rocks by the ocean shore. Huge, ancient trees surround the cabin, inside kerosene lamps encircle us in a soft glow. Those of us with instruments*

*to play have brought them—guitar, autoharp, flute, drum, and the music has taken on a lilting rhythm. I can hear the soft movement of the water on the rocks and the souging of the trees as they join into the music. Gradually, I sense another presence enter the room. It has flowed in from the night; it becomes the music, the lamplight, the cool air. It stays while the music plays, and then as the music slows and quiets, it slips out again, and there is left the water on the rocks, the souging trees, and the murmur of friends.]*

In this chapter, we have moved from a position of intellectual dominance and separation, to one in which we use all our cognitive and conative capacities as entities embedded within a life-world. I will let Abram sum this up:

The human mind is not some otherworldly essence that comes to house itself inside our physiology. Rather, it is instilled and provoked by the sensorial field itself, induced by the tensions and participations between the human body and the animate earth. The invisible shapes of smells, rhythms of cricketsong, and the movement of shadows all, in a sense, provide the subtle body of our thoughts. Our own reflections, we might say, are a part of the play of light and its reflections. . . .

By acknowledging such links between the inner, psychological world and the perceptual terrain that surrounds us, we begin to turn inside-out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us. Intelligence is no longer ours alone but is a property of the earth; we are in it, of it, immersed in its depths. And indeed each terrain, each ecology, seems to have its own particular intelligence, its unique vernacular of soil and leaf and sky. (262)

### **Ojibwa Crafted Objects in this Context**

Abram's main thesis concerns the source and purpose of language, the problem of separation from the land engendered by the alphabetic writing system, and the importance of reconnecting our (Western) language to the land. For my purposes in this study, some of Abram's observations about language will help us later to understand the context of Ojibwa crafted work.

Abram notes that oral language among indigenous people, "[e]nacted primarily in song, prayer, and story, ... functions not simply to dialogue with other humans but also to converse with the more-than-human cosmos ..." (70-71). That we are within a sentient and sensible world

is recognized in this conversation with other phenomena; the conversation is conducted "in the assumption that all things have the capacity of speech" (263). It is within this context of perceptually aware phenomena, of an oral culture interactive with the living world, that Ojibwa crafted work exists.

## CHAPTER 3: Ojibwa Voices

### Introduction—An Ojibwa Migration Scroll

Chapter Two ended as we had shifted from an objectified Western intellectual view to a philosophical position, still within a Western intellectual tradition, which began to recognize the multi-faceted life-world in which we are all embedded. I will begin this chapter with another shift: from the Western intellectual tradition to an Ojibwa world view. Prior to the interviews, the first Ojibwa "voice" presented is that of a sacred Midewiwin<sup>15</sup> migration scroll. It will introduce the Ojibwa people here from an Ojibwa perspective, acquaint the reader with a crafted object which does not fit neatly into the Western category of "crafts," and will encapsulate certain aspects of the following interviews and the later discussion.

Earlier in this thesis, I used a standard Western-style map to show the geographic location of the Ojibwa people whom I interviewed. In that style, we see a static present. The scroll, on the other hand, tells a story. It tells a dynamic story of movement of a people from the coast of the eastern ocean into the mid-western area beyond Lake Superior (present-day Minnesota and northwestern Ontario).

One of the Apostle Islands of the Bayfield Peninsula is Madeline Island or Mo-ning-wun'-a-kawn-ing. It is the seventh and last place the Sacred Megis Shell appeared to the Anishnabe<sup>16</sup> on their migration, and where the Water Drum made its seventh and last stop.<sup>17</sup> There are

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<sup>15</sup>A discussion of the Midewiwin is not within the scope of this paper. I will just note that it is a sacred ceremonial Ojibwa tradition. The reader is referred to, among others, Hoffman, Vecsey, Blessing.

<sup>16</sup>Until now I have been using the name "Ojibwa." "Anishnabe" is a word Ojibwa people often use to identify themselves and I will use it as well as "Ojibwa."

<sup>17</sup>See Edward Benton-Bensai, *The Mishomis Book*, Chapter 14 for a full migration story. Also, Sikas'sige's account in Hoffman, 179-80. Sikas'sige mentions at least twenty-five "resting places."



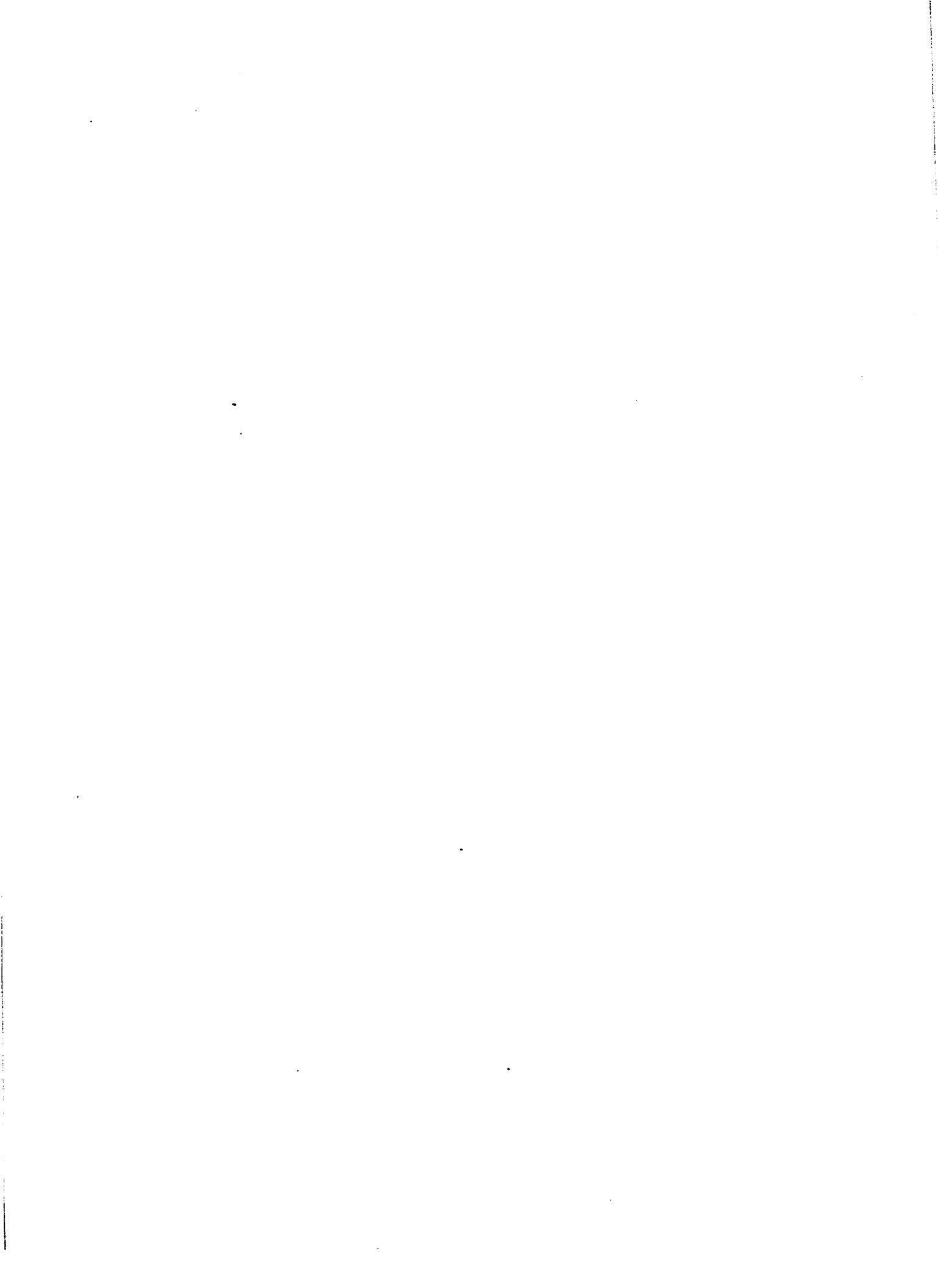
various estimates about how long the migration took—some say about five-hundred years (and that there had been an even earlier migration to the East Coast [Rose in conversation]). Led by the Midewiwin elders, the Anishnabe began to move from Sault St. Marie, the fifth stop; some took a northern route and some a southern route around Lake Superior. The sixth appearance of the Megis shell was at Spirit Island (near present-day Duluth). But there was to be one more place, and both the northern group coming around the end of Lake Superior and the southern group came to Madeline Island.

One of the prophets long ago had spoken of a turtle-shaped island that awaited them at the end of their journey. The southern group had seen an island fitting this description that lay in the water off of a long point of land. The people sought out this island and placed tobacco on its shore. The Sacred Shell rose up out of the water and told the people that this was the place they had been searching for. Here, the Waterdrum made its seventh and final stop on the migration. The Sacred Fire was carried here and here it burned brightly. (Benton-Benai 102)

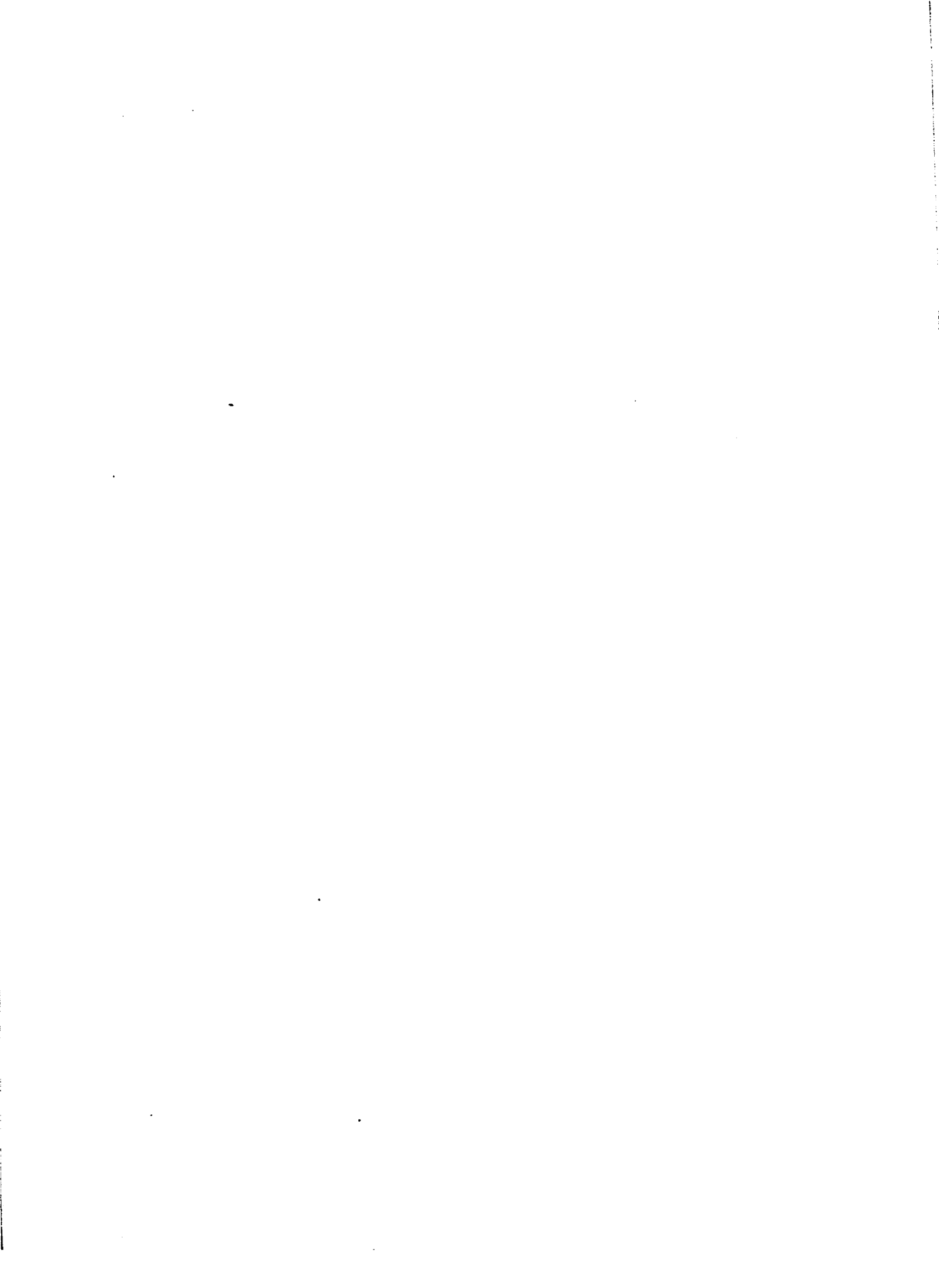
I chose this particular scroll because a copy of it is at the local historical museum on Madeline Island. The original "was collected by William Jones in late 1904 at Leech Lake, ... according to the American Museum of Natural History" (Schenk). This information is from a letter accompanying the copied scroll. Schenk also identifies some of the figures from East to West: the Midewiwin figures which wear headdresses; the otter, across Lake Superior (at the far right of Figure Four) the crane, the Keweenaw peninsula, a Midewiwin lodge, Madeline Island with a Midewiwin figure; a point at the exit of Fon du Lac; Sandy Lake; and Leech Lake. The Megis shell is seen at Sandy Lake and Leech Lake. (It is important to remember, though, that this listing is not the meaning of the scroll.)

From the western end of Lake Superior, the Anishnabe people fanned northwest, west, and southwest to Rainy Lake, Leech Lake, etc. We see that a migration scroll is a sacred compilation of movement, stories, and events. Scrolls other than the migration scrolls might contain the Ojibwa origin story, songs, instructions for Mide rituals and ceremonies.











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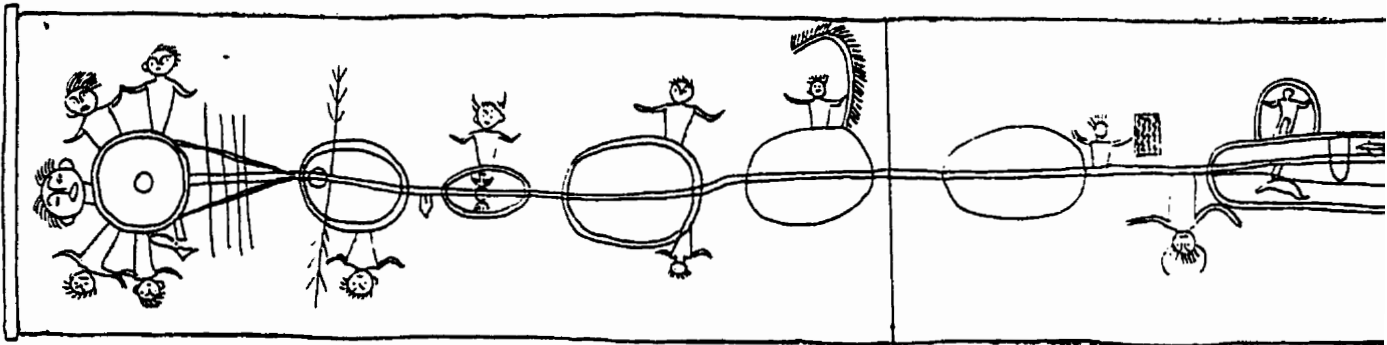


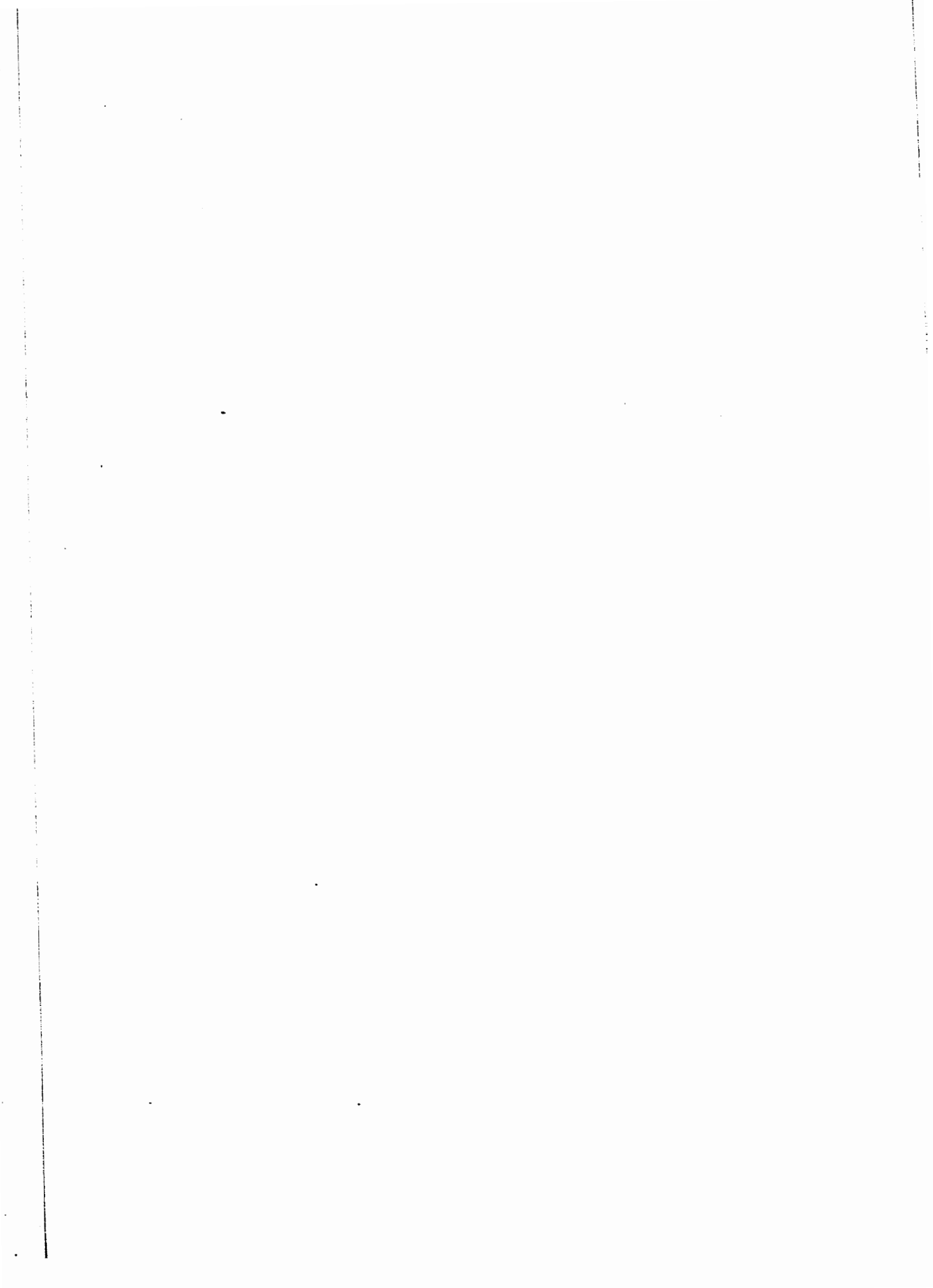


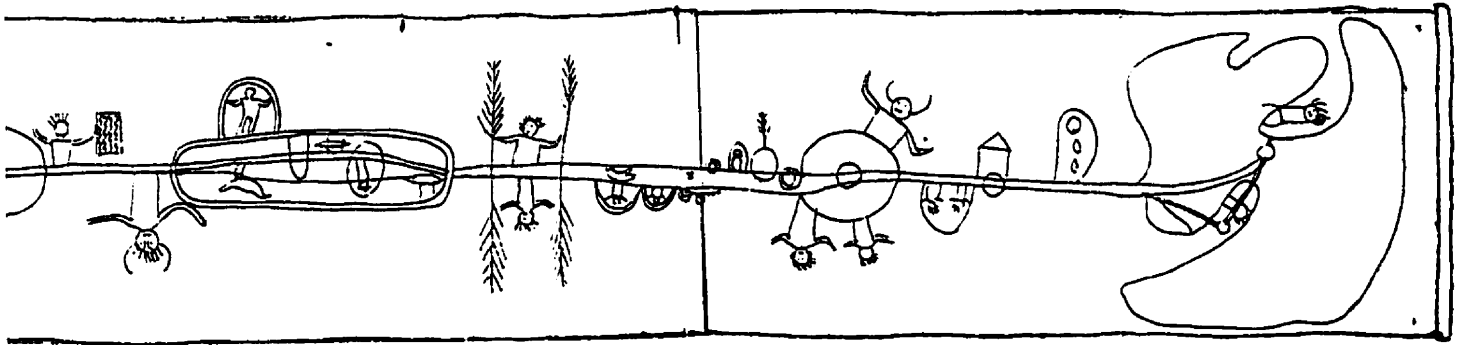


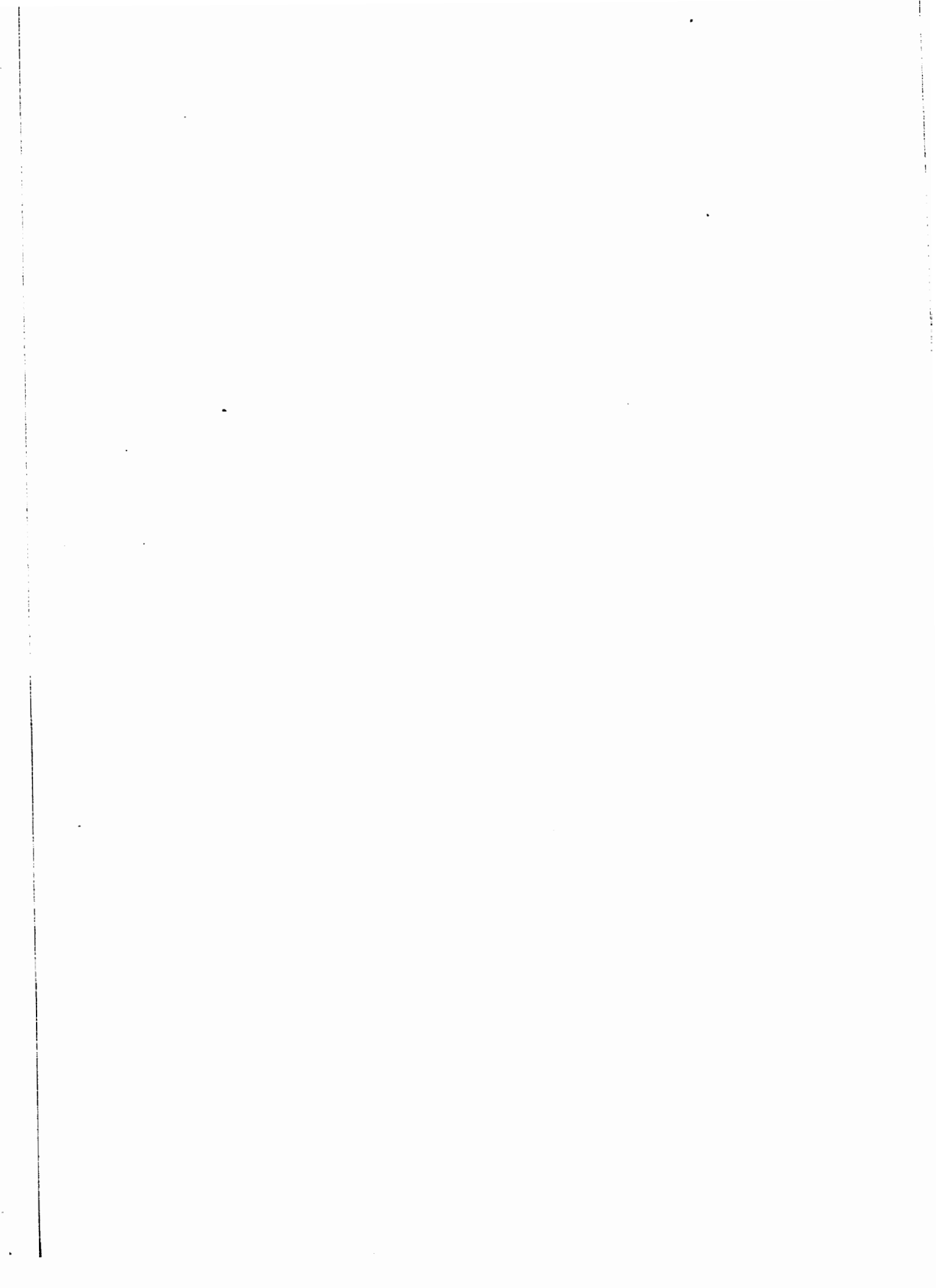


Figure 5. Tracing of the Migration Scroll. (Dewdney 66-67)









The scrolls are also "crafted objects." They are made of birch bark with incised drawings, usually on the inner side. As such, the birch bark serves as the "paper" to which Louis Ogemah refers. On it different kinds of sacred information are recorded. Several pieces would be stitched together with a bast cord, usually from the inner bark of cedar, basswood, or with split spruce root (Blessing 125). The original of this particular migration scroll is 8-1/2 feet long and made from several pieces of birch bark. Figure four is from a copy of the original scroll and shows the three most western pieces, about half the scroll. On the right is Lake Superior and on the left is Leech Lake. Sticks are bound on the ends to keep the bark from splitting, and the scroll would have been rolled. Figure Five is a much-reduced tracing of the full scroll.

The scrolls were passed from generation to generation and were recopied and supplemented as they wore out or new material was added. Many of the rites and legends originated in the east when the Ojibwa were around the Gulf of St. Lawrence and on the Atlantic seaboard. The Mide "religion" developed as the people moved westward. These stories would be recounted as part of Mide ceremonies (Blessing 122, 155).<sup>10</sup> Sections of migration scrolls would have been replaced through usage or added as movement occurred. Frederick Blessing, who began collecting Ojibwa materials and talking with Mide elders in 1935 in Minnesota and continued until his death in 1971, states:

The legends inscribed on recent scrolls are not of modern origin. They extend far back in Ojibwa history. When a Mide is asked about the age of his scroll and says, "It is many hundreds of years old," he will be referring to its contents, not the bark, for his scroll would be the latest of a number of replacements made as the bark wore out. Thus, for example, a certain scroll might be the seventh copy since the original was made. (Blessing 126)

I have noted that the scrolls are sacred objects and would be used for ceremonial purposes. As such they are of "utmost religious significance [and] considered to possess great

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<sup>10</sup>Dewdney claims that the scrolls cannot be "proven" to be of a migration; all they indicate is that a "religious" message moved to people who were already *in situ*. Dewdney's is not an Ojibwa interpretation.

spiritual power." Thomas Shingobe, member of the Mille Lacs band and personal friend of Blessing, stated "that everything used in the Medicine Lodge ceremonies was considered to have life or to be a 'living thing.'" Further, the Ojibwa word used to refer to "the act of incising the characters used in depicting Wicde rituals on birch bark ..." meant "I am drawing some living thing" (nind-oh-j-i-bi-wah). The scrolls, as sacred objects, would be treated with great reverence.

(Blessing 162-63)

### "The Interviews"

*[Personal Journal: Sunday, November 8, 1998.*

*Two eagles, watching, protecting. At the tops of bare November trees. The eagle on the left close to the road. I see him clearly. Eagle on the right a little farther away. I see only her form against the grey late afternoon sky. I pass between them, a fork crossing. From what to what?*

*I am driving on Wisconsin Route 13 which circles the top of the Bayfield Peninsula, leaving home and Red Cliff after having done two interviews. I have been taping my remembrance of one of the conversations. The sight of the first eagle hits me with full bodily impact. I immediately turn off the recorder. Then, I see the second eagle on the right. There is no question that the eagles are communicating with me. But it is non-verbal and I have difficulty thinking it in words. Is it a warning? A watching?*

*Much later: Finally, I have found words which seem to fit: "Be aware of what you have been given." ]*

Connie Burditt, a Lakota teacher, said to me at the beginning of this project "Notice everything—from what a person is wearing to the kind of oil cloth on the table!" I tried to follow

"The interviews included here have been edited without indicating cut material. As mentioned above, this was in order to make them more readable in the non-verbal format to remove repetitive phrases, overlapping conversation, and discursive sections. Should a reader quote from this text, this editing should be noted. I have taken care that the editing does not change the voice of the person, nor alter the content of the interview. The reader may want to consult the full transcripts of the interviews which are on the compact disc accompanying this text.

Within the interviews an eagle signifies a short pause or a change in sentence direction, not an omission from the context. However, when I discuss and quote from the interviews, I've used the ellipsis in the conventional manner. The audio tape recordings are with the Oral History Project, Department of Indigenous Learning, Lakehead University.

All the people interviewed received the materials which were required and approved by the Lakehead University Ethics Committee. These included a letter explaining my thesis and a consent form. See the Appendix for these materials. Copies of permissions granted for the use of other materials are also included. I sent each person a transcript of the tape and a version of my introductory notes.



her advice. These conversations are within the body of my thesis for two reasons: they form the "core truth" of the study; also, they fit logically in this position within the transformative process. These are the voices of the Ojibwa people from whom I learn. I hope you, the reader, also will find them speaking to you.

Marge Hmielewski, Saturday, September 19, 1998.

Marge Hmielewski teaches art and craft in the Native Studies Department at Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin. She is a member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwa and was raised and lives at the reservation which is located in northern Wisconsin on Lake Superior. Her home is about half a mile off Highway 2 on a gravel road. Her blue trailer with a front entry is on a horseshoe drive in a grassy clearing. To one side is a garage/tool shed; back a little to the north of the trailer is a tiny fenced graveyard where her husband and an infant grandchild are buried. Another trailer is on the horseshoe and there are two large trees inside the apex. Marge is always meticulously dressed and today she wore bright royal blue slacks and sweater with matching blue shadow on her eyelids. She asked me in—first through the entryway, then up a step into the kitchen area. She invited me to sit at the kitchen table with its window looking out the back. She had been reading a paperback book which was lying face down on the table by the window. Off the back is a small living room with a step down into it. It is a compact, practical, lived-in, neat, and comfortable home. I felt welcome. I gave Marge some tomatoes and cucumbers I had brought. She put on a pot of coffee. We began to talk while the coffee dripped. We have been acquainted for several years and Marge was already somewhat familiar with my thesis topic, but we reviewed it prior to the interview.

She began by explaining the Native concept of our having four parts: the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual all of which need to be kept in balance, emphasizing that Native spirituality is not the same as Western religion. Marge was raised by her grandmother in a traditional household, but later was placed in several white foster homes and in each foster home she was baptized into another Christian religion: Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist. She had to attend a Catholic school where the nuns were very strict about the children following the organized religion. There she took art classes, learning to draw in Western style, doing still-lives, and painting. The children were not allowed to speak their own language. Anything "Indian" was forbidden. This imposition of authorized, organized religion was, for her, a surface accommodation which did not change her inner, Native spirituality. Ojibwa spirituality, she explained, is a matter between only the individual and the Creator, a matter of seeking

balance according to what the individual needs. There is no authority which imposes organized religion and beliefs on the person.

Marge explained that in her classes at Northland, she includes not just the physical aspect of craft work, but also philosophy, such as the meaning of design, color, etc. She includes beadwork, both loom and applique, basketry, flute-making, quill work including the natural dyes and mordants for the dyeing process.

Since I had not given tobacco to anyone before, Marge explained how it should be done. The tobacco I gave her was loose, so she carefully put it into a small cloth bag with a decoration on it and a drawstring closure. "Now," she said, "I will use this again on another occasion." I asked her about the bag and whether I should, or if it would be better to, put the tobacco into one. She said I could do that. For instance, for large gatherings, she uses calico or other cloth which is cut up into small squares in which the tobacco is wrapped and given to the participants.

I turned on my tape recorder and Marge suggested we go out to the entryway first where she had some animal parts in various stages of preparation on top of her drier.

M. OK. Feathers. My daughter brings me stuff, whenever she can find it. And, then of course, she takes care of it all. People either give them to her and then you can see, she took care of it; dried it all. It's ready to go, whatever I want to do with it. This here is a hawk. This is from an owl. These are owl feet. These are bear claws. She brought me those. This is a deer's tail. And this here a racoon tail. I don't know what I'm going to do with it. This is the foot of a beaver. Salted. We salt them down.

K. Salted?

M. Right. On the end. That's real hard. You salt them down and then they will stay that way. I make fans out of these or whatever. I don't know. I'm still in the stage when all of sudden someone will say something to me or someone will ask me for something and I will make a fan or I will give them this; maybe they need it for a bustle or whatever.

K. I guess one of the things I wonder about . . . From the living animal, the animal that has either been killed or died, to what you do with it, is there . . . I mean, if you're going to kill the animal, or you're going to use parts of the animal, is there something that happens in that period of time?

M. Yes. If you kill the animal, such as a deer or whatever it is, you always leave a gift. Um, even with road kill.

K. If you should hit something on the road.

M. Yes. If you hit something. Tobacco. I've always got tobacco in my car. Of course, I'm a smoker so I've always got cigarettes too. I can do that, but I like the other tobacco. Um. . . . And many people say you can leave anything. You can leave a part of your clothing. But you do have to leave something in return for what you have taken. Now, this I don't have to worry about because whoever gave these to

me should already have taken care of it and these were a gift to me.

K. Is there a difference between, the life of the animal . . . it's the *life* of the animal?

M. Right. The spirit.

K. From my Western point of view, I think of each deer as being a sort of individual and I feel bad if something happens to it. Is that the same kind of thing? That there's an individual relationship with that animal?

M. Yes, there is. And it depends on what you're doing with it. Food. You leave tobacco and you always, you usually say a prayer to the Creator *and* to the animal. Thank you for giving of yourself to feed, whatever. Then it depends upon your own individual . . . however you want to do it. But, yes, that is done. Now, like I say, these I don't have to worry about. These were given to me. OK? And so I had no problem. Now, I have some other . . . *[We walk to the living room.]*

My daughter raises pheasants, she runs a game reserve out here. She brings the birds if they die and I will pluck them. Then I will . . . I do not want to eat . . . you know, I don't know what has happened, why they died.

K. . . . just that they died on their own . . .

M. Yeah. But she will bring them over and I will take what feathers I need and I will go out and I dig a hole and I put the animal back into the earth and I leave tobacco with it also.

K. Because you've had the animal . . . ?

M. Right. Like with road kill. You can't bury road kill, but you can always leave tobacco. Like there's many a time I'll be riding along and I'll see a porcupine and I'll want the quills. OK. I will stop and have something in my car and I'll throw it over and press it down and get as many quills and I'll always leave tobacco, too.

And I use a lot of feathers, real ones. These came off of the neck of a pheasant. So I try to use as much natural as I can. I have a hard time. It's very hard to get natural things. A lady was down in Mexico . . . *[showing me a plastic bag of medium-sized beads, hand-made of a brownish clay body with incised decoration filled with bluish-green glaze.]*

M. These are ceramic beads. No, not ceramic. Clay. And they were made by a tribe down there. I don't know. She didn't know. All she knew was that she gathered some of them up. So, but I'm very chintzy with them. Um. We have what we call secular work and that's this. *[Marge indicates many pairs of beaded earrings.]*

K. These kinds of earrings . . .

M. You could sell, whatever you wanted to do with them.

This dream catcher *[indicates a dream catcher with red feathers hanging between the kitchen & living room]* is secular work. Um. Feathers are bought or like the pheasant feathers or something like that. Um. If I am doing something for religious, and I shouldn't say 'religious'. But a lot of people . . . for

your benefit or whatever you want to call it on there [*the tape recorder*] they say 'religious', ceremonies or whatever, but they are *not* religious.

K. Not religious.

M. No. But most people say, you know, they say, well, that was a 'religious' ceremony, such as a Midewiwin ceremony or sometimes there are what we call different dances done at pow-wows like the honor dance and like that. Then, many times we will use the eagle feathers. I have a few eagle feathers. I don't have that many of them. They're hard to come by. My name has been on the list for an eagle for a long time. [The eagles are] found all over the country. There's a list that you can get on. Native peoples can put their name on it and then you just keep going up the list as an eagle is found dead or whatever. Well, this one woman from over at Red Cliff, she was going to Northland and she was on the list and she got one. And if you get one, it's your duty, whatever, to give most of it away. You keep what you think you're going to need, but, and you give as many feathers away as you feel you should. And so she gave me some. I've got some of those. I don't have many, like I said, but those, usually eagle feathers, and sometimes even the way you craft something, or the way you make it, it's different when it's used for spiritual ceremonies.

K. How would it be different say from doing [secular] . . .

M. Because this could be sold [*indicating the dream catcher*]. And it could be sold to anybody. Eagle feathers are very rare, they're very spiritual to us, very meaningful. So we don't use them and sell them. I mean, we don't sell them, it's against the law, but we wouldn't sell them anyhow.

I have made many dream catchers and I have put, sometimes put eagle feathers on them if it's been for family or, like I say, for different spiritual ceremonies. Then it's different. The same with the drum. There are many different types of drums that are made. Different purposes. Secular drums have no eagle feathers on them. Those are for dances, for pow-wows, for where anybody can come out and dance. Drums that are used for ceremonial purposes or for spiritual purposes, like for Midewiwin lodges, they will have eagle feathers on them.

K. And when you have made them, do you make them in a different frame of mind? I don't know how else to put that.

M. Oh. Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean. *This* I could sit and I could watch television, or whatever, and I could put this together.

K. Just be working with it . . .

M. Yeah. Because it's a craft and I would be working with it. If I were making something for [a] spiritual reason, I would try to do it at a time where I would not have to worry about the telephone ringing. [*Thoughtfully*] I would want to be by myself. Very calm, very . . . hopefully peaceful. Very into what I was doing. Thinking of why I was making it, what it was going to be used for. Keeping my mind on that, so a lot of it is with your thought process. Like I said, now the secular earrings and many of that . . . that

is something that many Native people whip them off. They take them to pow-wows, you know, hit the pow-wow trail or whatever. I do not do that. I have my things here, but I don't go out selling. If people want things and in fact those two pair there [earrings] were ordered. That's why they're in the bag. Yes, if . . . and in fact . . . my children and my grandchildren, most of them, they don't even come in this room. This is where I do my work and I have [we laugh] a television. OK. My daughter-in-law was over yesterday and she says "When did you last turn your television on?" and I said, "Uhh?" She said, "Why are you paying thirty-five dollars a month for that dish out there and you never turn the television on?" I turn it on maybe once a week to watch news. Well, I'm not a television person. Like I say, I read many, many books, all different kinds. I'll read anything that comes along. But . . . when I do my . . . this is my craft, my art. And for me . . . it's very hard for me to put anything away because I work on so many different things at different times.

K. You've got a lot of different ones going not just one that you're . . .

M. Right. I've been wrapping now. I'm doing some dream catchers. They are . . . I don't know for who, I'm doing them. So that's one of the things I do. I'm also making some key rings. These are . . . People come in and they ask, "Don't you have any key rings?" Well, I did a whole bunch one day. I just sat here and did key rings. I said, "OK, now I've got key rings." So that's one of the things I do. Here we go again. We're laughing at this again. [Marge picks up a large plastic hula hoop leaning with a few others against a table.] I use whatever I can. Now, I made . . . This took me forever. this is a hula hoop.

K. Yeah. I see a hula hoop! OK.

M. I have made dream catchers out of these. They take forever.

K. That's a big dream catcher!

M. I know! Have you been out to Joe Rose's? His round house?

K. Not for many years.

M. OK. He built a new round house. Gorgeous. And it's a huge place and he didn't have a dream catcher. He didn't have anything in it. So I turned this, well one like it, into a medicine wheel. I did the white, the red, the yellow, and the black. I have a real arrowhead that somebody had given me years ago. I don't even know where it came from and so I put that on there and then I did all of the long things with the [indicates fringe] . . . But I did not, it was not eagle feathers or it wasn't anything like that because he did not ask for it. He did not want it for spiritual. He wanted it as a decoration to hang in the round house.

K. And there would have been a difference then . . .

M. There would have been a difference, or if he would have wanted it for religious—there we're saying 'religious' again—but ceremonial. Yes, it would have been different. As it [wasn't]. So, sometimes there is a difference. Now, a lot of people do not do this. There are some people who have made different things to sell and have put eagle feathers on them.

K. Oh. But that's not really acceptable?

M. No. That's not acceptable. It's not acceptable to me. It may be acceptable to them. That's their choice if they wish to do it. I do not and I never have. So, I'm careful with what I do. A lot of people will come up and they'll ask, 'make me this or make me that and I want some eagle feathers.' "What are you going to do with it?" "Well, I don't know." No, then. "I'm sorry, then I can't make it."

K. Is that showing disrespect to the eagle and to the things that are involved?

M. Well, that's showing disrespect to the spiritual part, because that is supposed to be part of this spirituality, part of your, quote, 'religion'—or whatever it is, the way you feel. And I would not feel right if I made something and then not known what was going to happen to it. I mean, I don't know where that's going to go afterwards. No. I don't want that. Like I said, for my family, or close friends, whatever it is, I have done things. This is a number of years ago, one little grandson was being moved to a different house and I have gone in and I had purified, but he was having nightmares, so I made a small dream catcher and I did put an eagle feather on it, one eagle feather on it. Got rid of his nightmares very quickly. But that was for my grandchild. Now, that was different. And, you know, something on that order. But, no, not if it's going to be something secular that's going out, then no.

K. Remember one time, Connie was saying how even like the picture on the wall, it was machine-made, it still had energy. Energy? Is there a difference when you work with, say, plastic beads . . .

M. Commercial.

K. Yes. Commercial versus the other.

M. *[emphatically]* Oh, yes! Like I said, now I told you about this. *[the clay beads]* There's an altogether different feeling when I am working with these. They are hand-made. Somebody took an awful lot of time with them. And I use them very sparingly, but when I work with them, there's *[pause]* such a different high *[laughs]*. I feel good that I incorporated this into whatever I had made and I'm very *proud* of it. Hey! This is great! You know, these earrings are fine. I spent time and I did my best on them and I tried to keep the order of the beads and all of that, but that's a lot different than if I worked with something like these.

K. If you do something for a ceremony, do you try to use more natural . . . all natural versus these other kinds of things?

M. Oh, yes. You always do. I have . . . Well, where'd they go? Oh, here . . . *[Marge takes a bowl of smooth stones from the glass-doored dining cabinet.]* These are all stones that I've picked up as I've walked along the beaches. And I incorporate them. I wrap them so that they can either hang or sometimes I will paint them. Or whatever. It depends upon . . . You never know what you're going to do until . . . you're working with them and you get to a point and you say 'Oh, I should do this,' or, 'I should do that, because that would really set it off.'

I . . . these are cheap, but they're wood. *[Marge picks up a straight wooden cane leaning with*

another in a little cranny.] These are canes and I will turn them into a walking stick, because I will sand them down and many times I will cover the top with buckskin, you know, whatever kind I have, and put fringe on them. And I will wrap and put a stone, like that, or one of the beads on here, one of these special beads. Now that might be a gift for an elder who needs some help.

K. When my [former] husband was at home with the hospice care, somebody brought him a walking stick. They did a ceremony and . . . so that was there at the [memorial] service with his things. Is that, like a gift to him to . . . ? That's not secular then?

M. No. That is not. Well, it depended upon who made it. Usually a gift, you don't classify it, especially if they're done for an elder who is ill or something like that. I still would not put an eagle feather or anything on there [indicating the cane she had].

K. Because this started as a commercial item?

M. No, because it would not be used for spiritual, for a ceremony. It would be a gift. Now, many people if they make their own, will put eagle feathers on it which is fine because they make their own walking sticks or whatever it is and they can put anything they want on it and they put an eagle feather on it or they put whatever, because to them that's very important. OK, that is *theirs*. We talk about the birds, the eagle, and, of course, to us the eagle is very important. But so, they can do that. I could make something for myself and, I don't even have a dream catcher in my bedroom, because I give one away as fast as I make one [laughing].

I would sand [the cane] all down. I'd take that color off. I'd get down to the wood again and I would probably paint in here different . . . maybe red, black, yellow and white. I would make it our colors. Something on that order. So it would be altogether different by the time I got it done. But that would be . . . There would be a lot of work that would have gone into it, but I am going to be sixty-five years old. OK? I mean, I am at the age where I'm [not] going to go wandering out in the woods trying to find diamond willow or something to make a walking stick out of. Yeah. My kids will bring me something once in a while.

K. That part you don't have to do.

M. We used to tan our own hides. I don't tan my own hides. I buy them now. I am past that stage. What I get is what is given to me now. Like we were talking about the elk's foot and the feathers and stuff. We used to go and shoot the ducks and I'd keep all of the feathers and eat the meat. The same with deer. I'm too old for that. I've passed that stage. I'll take what people are good enough to give me and use it for that.

If I'm doing something for someone I really care about, for my family, for spiritual, whatever, I'm very careful with it. I feel that if I don't do right by whatever I'm making, then it's not going to do right by the ceremony, or whatever it's being used for. So if I don't take care with it, then it's not going to be careful either.

K. Because it picks up the 'energy' that comes into it from what you've done to it?

M. And I teach students. A lot of them are non-Native, and I always tell them, when you get to the point where you're working on whatever it is, the loom, the applique, and you're finding a problem with it, don't continue, because if you become frustrated with it, you're putting negative energy into it. Even if it's secular. I don't care. Because there've been many a-times I've been working on something and the needle breaks and the thread starts to snarl. Then I go "Whoa! Hey! Set it aside, get away from it." I mean, I would really hate to make this pair of earrings and be angry and thinking of something awful and then have some poor person wear it, because I've already put negative energy in there. I don't think that would be very nice.

K. That's giving them something . .

M. Negative . . .

K. and something that can hurt them.

M. Right. I'm careful with everything I do. Like I say, when it's secular I can sit and watch television and laugh at it. That's fine. But I would never allow myself to become angry or upset when I'm working on anything because I don't feel that I'm doing . . . my art well, and I don't think I'm doing whoever is going to get it well.

*[I've asked Marge about another person's art work which was done in anger.]*

M. Well. I don't know. I've never been put in that position, because I don't believe in allowing anger to take over that.

K. To be the motivator.

M. No. What a waste. Oh, we all become angry. I've become angry. Oh! then blow up. But, can I change it? Can I do anything about it? Is it going to be better if I do something about it? And if it is, then I will try to change it rather than be angry, because anger doesn't accomplish anything.

K. It passes on to other people, like my being at the exhibit [where I felt uncomfortable].

M. You became uncomfortable. I don't know about that. . . . to me, that would be very shameful and very demeaning. I mean, to me personally, that I would do something like that and allow people to see that I did not have that much control over myself, that I had to become angry? No. I'd have a problem with that.

K. To be in the right frame of mind with the right energy to create something sacred, or for a ceremony that will be used in, that [is positive energy]?

M. Right. Because I am putting as much of myself and as much of my positive energy into it that I am sure that it is going to spread. I hope it does. I don't know. Unless someone takes it and uses it for purposes it that wasn't meant for.

K. Then the positive energy can be from secular things or . . .

M. Oh. Absolutely it can. Right. Oh. Well, for one thing, if you're working with natural, you're, like I said,



I can sit here, I can make two pair of earrings. One this woman wants, she's going to be a novice in Midewiwin lodge. I would not turn that television on because I would want to process my thoughts also into that. Somebody else wants a pair I could turn the television on and I could laugh or whatever I was doing, you know, with watching a program. I would still feel good, positive energy going out in both areas, but the mind processes for the young lady who just wants it to wear to a dance somewhere, would not be the same as the one who was going to use it for a ceremony at the Midewiwin lodge, because my mind would be also processing and I think you do that. . . . you have to be thinking all the time. Other times you don't have to think, just . . . it's a rote. You do. When I do things where my spirituality is needed, or my spirituality comes forth, it's also . . . all of me is in there . . . not just my fingers, and whatever, it's my thoughts, my . . . all the positive energy I can give it. because when you're thinking of it, I feel that there's more positive energy going into it. So that to me is the most important thing, that I allow the whole of my spirituality to take over, the whole of it, everything. *[We've moved back to the kitchen table.]*

K. So it's all going into that.

M. Right. Because I know there's many a-times I have sat there and people—we've been visiting. I'm making things, they're making things, because a lot of the women come over and we sit around. We laugh and we talk because it's a very social and which is good. As long as everybody is enjoying there's a lot of positive energy going on. It isn't spiritual, because that isn't what we're doing. We're socializing. Many of the crafts and that done years and years ago were done by the women in the moon hut. You're going to be there three or four days, so they did their craft work while they were in there and it was social, because there wasn't only one woman in there. Sometimes there were three or four depending on how large a community we're talking about. So, it was very social and that was not . . . you do use your spirituality. I'm not going to say that you don't, because there's been many a-times that I've, women sitting at the kitchen table here and we have gotten on very deep, very . . . conversations that dealt with many, many problems sometimes, and talking it over has helped, like a talking circle or, now they say group therapy, but we had group therapy *[laughing]* a long time ago. So there is some spirituality that goes in there, but it isn't . . . because there's different types of spirituality . . . Ah! . . . OK. I live with, or you should, live with your spirituality all day long. OK. I try to do that. I try to keep myself in balance. There's many a-times I will think to myself, "*[exclamation]*" that's all you did is work yesterday. Take a break. You're getting too much into . . . especially if I bring work home.

K. You mean from school?

M. Yeah. And I'll think to myself, "All right. That's enough now. You overloaded as far as the intellect goes. You're working at this and trying to figure it out. You have to take a break. And I'll pick up a book and I'll read or I'll go in there and I'll work on something. So, that's spirituality of a daily basis. I try never to hurt anybody. I try never to say anything insulting or derogatory or whatever. And I try as hard as I

can, sometimes it's hard, people will say you have to talk up, I try to keep my voice low. That's one of the things we were taught. Women do not talk loud. I try that, it doesn't always work. *[We laugh.]*

K. But it's on your mind. You know when you . . .

M. If I were perfect I'd be the Creator. I'm not! So, that is part of my spirituality, but that's *my* individual spirituality. Then, we have what I have always classified as group spirituality. And that's when there are ceremonies, and that's when everybody gets involved in the same spiritual aspect. So, that's what I mean when I say there are different types of spirituality and that's a very strong, passionate, overwhelming spirituality. I've gone to Midewiwin ceremonies, there are other different ceremonies and you get so caught up in it that you're just riding a high, you know. You don't want to come down. And, for instance, I was in the Southwest and I was out in some of the desert areas out there. I felt I was walking six feet above the ground. I was just, I mean I was overwhelmed by the spirituality of where I was. The Peoples that had been there, the Peoples who had lived there, these are different kinds of spirituality. So that's what I'm talking about when I say there are different plateaus of spirituality.

K. So when you're working creating something for ceremonies, that spirituality, that's different then .

M. Right. That's a high plateau. Now that is *my* . . . OK. Other people may not go along with me. Somebody else might say, "Whatever is she talking about?" No. To me that is how I live with my spirituality. And, I mean, I know no other way and it seems to work for me. I know everybody tells me, "You don't have a nerve in your body and you're the most calm person." You know, this and that. And I say, well, there are times when I'm not, but I have learned to live with who I am and what I have to do on this earth, or whatever. I know my children said, "You never raised your voice. You never slapped us, you never did that. And yet we were deathly afraid of you because we knew that sooner or later you were going to punish us somehow." "I don't know how I was going to punish you." They said, "There must have been something you were going to do because we expected it all the time. And the softer you talked, the more scared we were."

K. But you didn't do anything.

M. No. I never did. So I feel like . . . I've lived a good life. Well, I've got lot's of years ahead of me, but I feel like . . . I know who I am and I live very well with myself. I think I've done quite well by my children, my family, whoever's around. I've got eight children, twenty-six grandchildren, three great-grandchildren and another one on the way, so I am, I have no problems with myself or my spirituality because I live with it well. I don't, I hope I don't, need reminders. Sometimes I need reminders to live in balance because my balance gets off-kilter.

K. Do you feel it when that happens?

M. Yeah. You know when you're off balance.

*[Marge talks about taking a break from the intellectual demands of work.]*

... And it's the same way with your spirituality. There are many times that I will not answer the phone. I feel I have got to do something important right now. Maybe I heard of somebody or something that needs a gift or whatever it is and I want it to be a very spiritual gift, and, so I will not answer the phone. I will go in there. I've got drapes that pull across there. I pull them and when I do not answer the phone I have a message machine and my children all know that. I feel that that's important to me too. Sometimes it's with the physical part, too. Your physical balance gets off.

K. I should ask you a couple of other questions.

M. OK.

K. How did you learn all your work? What you do now.

M. The beading? *(and indicates more)*

K. Yeah.

M. I was taught when I was quite small. But, here we go. When you're at a certain age, like when you're five, six, seven, this is fine. This was nice. I did it. Then your hormones kick in, and who cares about beadwork.

K. *(laughs)*

M. I mean, I'm being honest, right? So it got thrown by the wayside and then I got into a little higher grade and the beadwork was classified as 'Indian.' You don't do that.

K. Oh. This was at the Catholic school. Was that here?

M. In Bad River. You are *not* going to do this. So you were given paint and charcoal and whatever.

K. You weren't allowed to do anything that was classified as 'Indian'? And that would include speaking

...

M. Yeah. You weren't allowed to speak your language. Everything went. The pow-wows went underground into the woods and a lot of, much of the art of bead work was lost. Lot of the leather work was lost, the feather work, everything was lost. Well, not lost, but just wasn't done.

K. It wasn't done and if people did do it they would hide it or ...?

M. That was about what they had to do. So, I got into oils and pastels. I mean I did some of that, but then it was feathers ... oh! 'feathers' *(indicating she used the wrong word)* ... flowers ... I mean, I went through that stage. So, there was some of the art that I did. Well, I took that with me. That type of art after I got married. But then as the children started coming, there was no place for any type of art work. You got eight children in the house what are you going to do with it. So, a lot of it I just didn't do it. I read a lot on it. I did an awful lot of reading on a lot of the culture and a lot of the symbolism and why certain things were used and the colors and all of that. So, that I did. And then when the children, the oldest was ... um. I'm thinking maybe twenty-five years ago maybe. Well, maybe twenty, I started back again. Very small, because I still had children at home, but not as many. *(laughs)* So I started back small and then it just kind of erupted ... over the years it's just gotten more and more.

K. And you've . . . Have you learned that from what you'd read, or did you remember back from the days when you were little?

M. Some of it from, you know, what my grandmother had taught me. A lot of it from what I had read, too. And a lot from listening to the elders. What they talked about, what was done years and years ago. That came from there. So it's an incorporation of a lot of things. I'm very eclectic in what I do. I take a lot from everywhere. I don't just follow one area. And you can't. Well, there would not . . . well, there would be no way. There is no way you could go all the way back to the old ways. How could you?

K. Because of the way you've lived . . . I mean it just isn't . . .?

M. Yeah. It's just not feasible in this day and age. I probably kill all kinds of little birds and cut their little fine bones and sit here with [pause] what?

K. Um, what would you be using?

M. I don't know what I'd be using. I could probably do this, go out and gather seeds and everything else, but, I mean, that's not common sense. So you use what you can from other people. Especially, they've got beautiful beads out now that you can do beautiful work with it, that you couldn't before. So why not use it.

K. So the physical material used . . . man-made versus natural has different kinds of energy, but that's not the most . . . it's the expression?

M. There are certain things that . . . yes, they do. Now, I just love the different beads and buttons that she got from down in Mexico. Like I said, and I'm real chintzy with them, too. But, unless I've got something real important that I want to do. Because, like I say, they're hand-made. Somebody took a lot of time with them and I don't want to waste them. That's somebody else's positive . . . I don't know. They'd have to be spiritual because a lot of time went into making those. It was not just something thrown together. I don't want to disabuse anybody else's goodness, positive energy, whatever you want to call it. So, like I say, I'm very careful with them.

I certainly wouldn't want to go back. My [youngest ?] son is thirty-one. Let's see he was born in sixty-six. He was three years old before I moved into a house that had running water or electricity. OK? I had a set of twins in there. I scrubbed my clothes on a scrub-board. I hauled water. We used the outdoor . . . whatever you want to call it . . . privy. I don't want to go back to that. I like my bathroom. I don't want to go running outside. I like turning on my faucets. [We're laughing.] I love my microwave. No, I don't want that. I love making coffee in my [coffee-maker] so it goes drip, drip, drip. I'm not one of those . . . I'm a traditionalist, according to what everybody says. I don't know whether I am or not. Anyhow, they classify me as a traditionalist because of the way that I do my work and the way that I feel and the way that I live. See, I'm very non-materialistic . . . but I don't want to go without my microwave and all of that, too. And I don't think that's materialistic. And I don't think running water is either.

No. I don't want to go back to that. I don't feel you have to go back to that to gain your

spirituality. Or to find your values. Or whatever it is. Those are things that are *you* individually. They are not something that, um . . . you have to go and sit around about the boonies.

I'm certainly not going to go back to tanning my hides and sitting there chewing on them. [we laugh.] No thank you. That doesn't sit with me.

K. Do you find a difference though when you work with home-tanned versus commercially tanned?

M. Yeah. It's an altogether different feel. Right. In some instances I don't care for [home-tanned]. It depends on what I'm doing. Like if you're doing small moccasins for babies, it's really hard. [The commercially-tanned is] a lot softer. And I love smoked hide. I just love the smell of one. I just love to work with them. It smells so good.

K. I've only ever worked with commercially-tanned things and done some handwork with them. I've never done a smoked hide.

M. Oh, it's just gorgeous. To get them pliable and very easy to work with . . . there is *so much* work that goes into it and *so much* energy you expend putting just forth one hide that . . . I mean like I said, we tanned our own, but we didn't do . . . My husband made a kind of round container like chicken wire almost, and open on one end and closed on the other. We lived near a kind of a stream where water ran and when [the hide] was ready to take the hair off of it, we'd put it in there with a bunch of rocks and set it in the water and then it would spin and it would get rid of all that hair. Hey, come on!

And the thing always bothers me and I always tell the people when they're talking about pre-Columbus or that. And I said, even if Columbus had not come, do you think they'd still be doing that? After this many years? They would have progressed over time. Things would have changed. They would find ways to make things easier, because nobody stays stagnant.

K. You don't just freeze in a point of time.

M. No. They would have, things would have . . . they had the copper mines. Naturally there would have been, somebody's intellect somewhere would have come up with at least making, even if they were very primitive machines or whatever. They would have come up with certain things to make their life easier. They would have had to.

[pause]

K. One time you mentioned the designs and how when you work that it tells you what it wants to be in a sense and how it grows from something. Like if you're beading or whatever. And I was really wondering about some of the design work and how that happens.

M. OK. You saw the loom with the belt on it with the Thunderbirds?

K. Um-hm.

M. Very stylized [indicates rows back and forth] and you have to otherwise you don't end up with a pattern. I do loom work but I'm really not into it and we were not that much, the Ojibwa people, were not into loom work that much. Most of our work was applique, because of the creativity. And I find that

that happens to me a lot. I will start out and I'll have an idea of what I'm going to do and by the time I get done it doesn't even look like what it started out as, because as I'm going I think I'd like this to curve a little more or this looks a little too straight-lined, because with our art work most of it was circles, swirls, flowers, you find leaves, curves. That was what most of ours was. Because of where we live naturally.

K. Because it's all wooded . . .

M. Yeah. That's what we saw. We did have some stylized. Like they would make the teepee or the pine tree, that type of thing. But a lot of it, most of it, Woodland style is flowers designs, anything, acorns, whatever you want to talk about. So. It gives you a lot of leeway; a lot of creativity, you can do a lot of things with it. You get on the loom, you get one bead off, you've thrown off your pattern.

K. Is that when you get frustrated and say I don't want to do this one anymore?

M. Yeah. You get them all on and you get them up there and you say, Oh— wrong! Then it's time to put it off to the side. *[pause]*

Symbolism. The colors, the patterns that we've used, all mean something. What they used to have would *[be]* the six-fingered hand. I don't know why that was. On the drums they always had hands. And then a lot of times the figure of a person because that was a drum *[Marge pats table with her hand]* and you go out Southwest and you run into very geometric patterns because it's very flat and you've got the mesas, you've got the mountains. Very geometrical patterns. So you kind of fall into whatever your environment is.

What I find, I have a hard time with the geometric because it's not . . . to me it's very structured and there you go again, very, very structured. Sometimes I have a hard time with that. Sometimes I don't. It depends. There again, I have done loom work and I've made flowers and other designs on it or I've made, sometimes I've done geometric. *[We've moved into the living room again, where the belt is on the loom.]*

Now this is very geometric even though it is the Thunderbird, still very geometric, you've got all the sharp edges on it, but that was done with a lot of love. I'm doing that . . . I have a brother-in-law who is very, very ill and that's going to be a belt for him and that's going to be his Christmas gift from me. Now that I had no problem with. That went very, very fast. Lot of times I will do the geometric pattern, *[but]* I find that it takes forever. It doesn't take forever, but to me it feel like it takes forever. But there's a lot of symbolism that goes into it, a lot of color. And, my brother-in-law, the one that is very ill, he lives down in Milwaukee and I've done a number of things for him. Belt buckles, and medallions, and hat bands, and that. And he has gone down to Indianfest that they have down in Milwaukee and the first time it happened he was very surprised. This one woman walked up to him and she said, "Oh, I know who made your belt buckle." And he said, "You do?" And she said, "Yes," and she named me. "How did you know?" "I can tell her work." And you can. There's a number of people that have done

different things. I can think of two right off the bat. If I see their work anywhere I know it's theirs because they have their own style. They have their own color combinations that they use and they seem to use them over and over again. That's their aura when it comes to their creativity, so Ah! I know that Sis made this, or Esie made that. And that does happen, they know Marge made that, it's . . . Well, it's . . . painters, they know whoever does it.

K. Your creativity is a real important part of it that you put into it.

M. Right. And it shows. People can always tell. I saw this and I knew that you made it.

K. Does that make you feel good.

M. Yes, it does. Because it shows that I'm doing it right then, because then my creativity is coming through in what I do. It isn't something you just do by rote and here it is, just throw it out.

K. Oh, I see. In other words, you're not going to be 'individualistic'.

M. No. I do mine and I did not realize for a number of years that I was being . . .

K. It showed you.

M. Right. . . . I all of sudden realized. Hey! I know that Sis did that. Sis did that because of . . . her . . . just the way . . . the colors, the patterns, what she was doing. That isn't what I want. That isn't what I was doing. I didn't feel like I had to do it that way because she was doing it that way. I do mine my own way, whatever it is, and then I started to think, yeah, you can tell my work, because this is the way I do it. Sometimes I will see something. It won't necessarily have to be someone else's work. I'll just see something and I'll think, Hey! I can incorporate that into a piece of beadwork and that would be great. And I will. I could care less if it's Japanese or if it's whatever art. But it just struck me and I'll take it and I'll incorporate whatever. It may just be a little piece, it may be whatever . . . some little coloring or shading or something that I really like, and Hey, I can use that. I like the way that twisted or I like the way [moved] and I'm going to use that. So we do take from other medias and other art. I mean we all do.

I feel that you still stay with your own individual creativity the way you think and see things, you stay with it, and there would be no way I could follow Sis. She sees things differently than I do. I don't see those colors. I don't see the way she does it. And it's beautiful. Hers is gorgeous, but that's not the way I do it. I love it. Sometimes you go, Oh god, that's beautiful. Of course, you can't say that too often or then she gives you it. You're always giving something away. . . . Symbolism, color, the way you use it. The way you see.

The way you think are all, they're a process and you need them all to come up with whatever you're doing. I know my daughter-in-law, she came over one day. I had been making some dream catchers. She was looking at them and she said, "Oh! I don't like this one." And I kind of looked at her and I said, "Oh, you don't?" "No," she said. "I don't know why," she said. "I don't like this." And I went over and I was kind of looking at it and I said, "I suppose you don't like it because I didn't wrap it." [I had]

used a piece of [wood] and I hadn't wrapped it. "That's what's the matter with it. I couldn't figure out what I didn't like it."

She said, "You didn't take much time with it did you?" And I said, "Well, I didn't wrap it." "That's what I mean" she said, "You didn't take much time with it did you?" I had to stop for a minute and I thought, "Well, no. I didn't." but I hadn't thought about it in that sense.

K. I guess I would have thought about it as natural wood.

M. Well, no. Another thing was that it wasn't natural wood.

K. And you hadn't covered it up.

M. I hadn't even stopped to think of that and she called me on it. I thought, "Oh! I think I ought to be a little more careful from now on."

K. Now if somebody does admire something, [like] if you say to Sis, you really like something, then she will give that to you?

M. Well, if you really make an issue out of it. If you keep saying, "God, is that beautiful, Oh would I ever love that", or whatever, yeah, you're almost obligated. Yeah. It's just . . . I don't know. And you never keep the first,

K. The first?

M. If you make something, right. You know, when you try something new out, if you're making something new, you never keep the first one. You always give it away.

K. But your first may not be your . . .

M. It's usually not too good. But you usually give it away. The first of anything.

K. Why do you suppose?

M. Well . . . because you've tried something new and, um, and you always think, "Well I've made this. I will give it away." You've given it away. All right? You don't even sell it. You always give that first one away, because then the rest of them that you make should all be better or they should be nicer. Because . . .

K. Because you've been generous, do you mean? *[I had a sense at the time and heard it later on the tape, that I had not understood this and 'generous' was not the right interpretation.]*

M. Yeah, right. You've been generous. You've already given. So that the next one that you [make] up, you shouldn't run into a problem. Because if you don't give something away maybe the rest of them will be terrible.

K. Oh, I never would have thought about that. My thinking would have been, oh, I was foisting off my worst, first effort on somebody. They wouldn't want this. They'd want a better one. But that's not is, is it?

M. And it doesn't make any difference. You could give it to a child or whatever, someone who would really appreciate it, even if it wasn't the best.



K. Because it's the generosity that matters and you get a gift back in making better ones?

M. Right. From then on you should be able to . . . Another thing you do is you always make a mistake.

K. On purpose?

M. Well, usually you don't have to worry [laughing]. I mean most people don't have to worry because you always end up getting a different colored bead here or wherever it is. Only the Creator is perfect. You're not. So don't ever try to. Don't try to be perfect. 'Cause sometimes people will get to the end of something and they'll just add on a little extra bead, a different colored bead.

K. Do you lay these things out ahead of time or do you just start if you're on the more creative beadwork, not on the loom?

M. On the applique?

K. Yeah.

M. Well, I lay it out, and I never follow it all the time. Yeah. Usually what you do is. I'll make a drawing of it, whatever I'm going to do. And then I'll kind of color. OK, this is going to be pink, or this is going to be red, or this is going to be green. And then I put it on cloth and then I'll start. But I'm usually pretty careful. I don't try to color too dark because I change all of a sudden and then, you know, I don't want the pattern to show. I usually try to have an idea of what I'm going to do. I try to draw it out first of what I'm going to do, so I've got a fairly good idea.

K. [But] this isn't like straight from the mind to the . . .

M. Oh, no. That's kind of hard to do. I usually spend a lot of time on the drawing part, of getting down what I'm going to do first. That type of thing. You almost have to. It's pretty hard to pick it up and say, oh, here I go, I'm going to do this. Because no matter what you do, even if you're drawing, even if you're going to do something in oil or pastel, or anything, you've got to get your perspective. This is going to be here. This is going to be there. You've got to at least have a rough outline of it.

The only time I don't do that is when I do what I call collages. And this is what I'm . . . I'll show you. I've got so much stuff all over the place that I can't find anything [searching]. See these, those are appliques. Oh, here are collages. Leftover beads. You throw them all in someplace and just stick your needle in and whatever comes up, comes up. They did this years and years ago, you know, because they weren't about to waste anything. So I do quite a bit of that with the leftover stuff.

Marge and I finished up with her showing me different kinds of work she was doing: a beaded turtle for her son to use on a medicine bag, beaded rosaries for some of the Catholic elderly at Bad River, the top portion of a bear skull her daughter had given to her. It was prepared and cleaned. The tape ended while we were chatting.

**Joe Rose, October 12, 1998.**

Joe Rose, Director of the Native Studies Department, spoke with me at his office at Northland College, Ashland, Wisconsin. Joe is a member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwa, and of the Grand Midewiwin Lodge. I've been acquainted with Joe for a number of years. Marge Hmielewski had suggested that I ask Joe about the drum he made for the Midewiwin Lodge. In transcribing the story Joe told, I have tried to give some sense of the pace and pauses by line breaks and extra spacing. No material has been cut from the story itself.

I did not expect to interview Joe that day, but to make an appointment, so I only had loose tobacco with me, which I gave to Joe. He explained to me, as Marge had done, that I should prepare it in a small packet. One he showed me was of red felt tied with embroidery cotton in the colors of the Medicine Wheel. A twig I couldn't identify was tucked under the thread.

I explained to Joe that my thesis was not so much about the technique of making crafted objects, but their meaning.

*[Long pause]*

J. Well, the drum in the Grand Medicine Lodge is called the Little Boy Water Drum.

And there's a long story behind it.

They say that at one time the Anishnabe People were experiencing hard times.

and that the Great Spirit, Gitchi Manitou,

decided to send gifts to the Anishnabe People to help them out.

And these gifts were to be given to the People through the intercession of seven powerful grandfather spirits.

and these spirits are so powerful that

if a human being would stand in their presence, it would be a life-threatening situation.

And so that would take a special person to stand in the presence of such power.

So the Great Spirit, Gitchi Manitou, summoned one of his messengers, the one called the Osh-ka-bay-wis.

And sent the Osh-ka-bay-wis to the Earth  
to search for one who would be strong enough  
and pure enough to stand in the presence  
of such power.

And so the Osh-ka-bay-wis came to the Earth  
and began that quest  
walking the Earth,  
sitting in the councils of many peoples,  
visiting many nations.  
And it's a long story, but they say that  
the Osh-ka-bay-wis searched the Earth six times over,  
and was unsuccessful  
in finding that one.

And so the Osh-ka-bay-wis returned to the spirit world  
to inform the Great Spirit that he had been unable to find the one  
he was seeking.

The Great Spirit asked the Osh-ka-bay-wis if he would go back to the Earth  
to give it one more try.

So the Osh-ka-bay-wis came back to the Earth  
and resumed that quest.  
Sitting in the councils with many elders.  
He came to a certain village.  
While sitting in the council of the elders  
informed them  
of the responsibility that had been given to him by the Great Spirit.

So they pondered what  
he had told them.  
And then they told of a young couple  
that lived in a remote area of the village  
who they considered to be

good people  
and sent the Osh-ka-bay-wis in that direction.  
And so at that time  
this young mother was with child but she had not given birth yet.

And one day the Sacred Bird, the Eagle,  
lighted in the tree  
while she was going about her chores just outside of the lodge  
and spoke to that young lady.  
Told her that the Great Spirit had a special purpose  
for the child that would be born.

So shortly after the child was born  
the Osh-ka-bay-wis came to that,  
came to that lodge  
and Ga-way-ga-say-is, the little boy,  
was hanging in his cradle board from a tree just outside of the lodge,  
smiling,  
happy.

His parents were a little ways away from the lodge at the time, maybe gathering wood or performing  
some kind of chores.

When the Osh-ka-bay-wis saw the child  
he knew that his long quest was ended.  
That this was the one that he had been seeking.  
So he left sacred tobacco, A-say-ma,  
some colored ribbon,  
as an indication that no harm had come to the child. He took the child.

And so he became the mentor for that  
little boy, Ge-wa-ga-say-is.  
And so it was his responsibility to prepare the child for that day  
when he would stand in the presence of seven powerful grandfather spirits.  
And so as time went on,  
the child grew strong and handsome.  
As the child was approaching maturity, of course it's a long story but,

the Osh-ka-bay-wis took Ge-wa-ga-say-is  
to a clearing and they looked into the clearing and there was a beautiful lodge there.  
The Osh-ka-bay-wis pulled back the flap of the lodge and  
he and Ge-wa-ga-say-is, the little boy, entered the lodge,  
and sitting in a semi-circle  
were seven grandfathers  
all dressed in white buckskin  
and all decked out in colorful  
ceremonial regalia.

And Ge-wa-ga-say-is, the little boy, was startled and maybe even frightened at first.  
By this time he had reached that age where he was in transition from youth to adulthood  
and he could feel the presence of great spiritual power.  
And he looked over to the first grandfather  
and in front of the first grandfather there was a wooden vessel,  
a hollow vessel.

The first grandfather asked Ge-way-wa-say-is  
to step forward and to look into the vessel.  
He could see that the vessel was half-filled with water,  
this wooden vessel.  
And in the reflection on the water  
he could see visions  
of this beautiful gift that was to be given  
to the Anishinabe People by this particular grandfather.  
So the vessel was passed on to the second grandfather.  
And when Ge-way-wa-say-is looked into the vessel the vision had changed.  
And he could see the gift  
that was to be given  
by the second grandfather.  
And in turn the vessel was passed to each of the grandfathers.  
The little boy, Ge-way-wa-say-is,  
by this time he was no longer a little boy  
even though he's still referred to as the little boy,  
he saw seven different visions  
in the reflection of the water.

And he received the teachings that were associated with that particular gift.

Seven different bundles were put together,  
sacred bundles that the little boy  
would take back to the Anishnabe People.

And just before leaving those seven bundles were wrapped into one large bundle.

When the little boy began to pick up the bundle  
to put it on his back  
he couldn't budge it.

There was just too much power there and he couldn't lift it.

Osh-ka-bay-wis went back to the Great Spirit,  
informed Gitchi Manitou, the Great Spirit, what had happened.

The Great Spirit sent the Osh-ka-bay-wis out  
to find a helper,

one who would help the little boy  
to bear the burden of that bundle, to bring it back to the Anishnabe people.

And the story goes that, again  
it was a long quest.

The Osh-ka-bay-wis searched the Earth six times over  
with no success.

Went back to the Creator and informed him  
that [he was] unable to find such a helper.

Gitchi Manitou asked the Osh-ka-bay-wis if he would give it one more try so, sent him back down and,  
again

this was on his seventh journey, or his seventh quest,  
that he walked the earth and he visited many places.

And at a time when he was tired and weary and almost ready to give up  
he sat down by a fast-moving stream,

leaned his back against a tree and  
he noticed that there was something in the water.

And he looked over there and it was Nigig,  
the Otter,

who was playing in the water.

And then he realized that this is the one that

he had been looking for.  
So he spoke to the otter,  
asking the otter  
if he would help Ge-way-wa-say-is, the little boy,  
to bear the burden of this bundle to take it back, these gifts,  
back to the Anishinabe People.  
So the otter being very playful in nature,  
irresponsible, refused.

But Osh-ka-bay-wis was finally able to convince Ni'gig, the Otter,  
to take on this responsibility.  
So Ni'gig went against his own nature  
in order to serve the Anishinabe People.

Ge-way-wa-say-is and Ni'gig returned to the  
lodge of the grandfather spirits.  
They take the bundle from the lodge and  
began their journey back to the land of the Anishinabe.  
After many days of travel  
they come to a beautiful valley.  
They look down into the valley and they see the lodges of  
the Anishinabe People.  
The smoke rising and curling  
from the lodges.  
They see a [path] that's leading from the valley to the high place where they're standing  
and they notice an old man and an old woman,  
an old grandmother and an old grandfather.  
They approach the ridge where they're standing.  
Ge-way-wa-say-is, the little boy, by this time is  
an adult man.  
They look into each others' eyes and right away they recognize each other.  
It's Ge-way-wa-say-is' parents,  
his mother  
and his father.  
And so there was a great deal of joy as they were reunited

after many, many years.

Ge-way-wa-say-is and Ni'gig then are invited into the village.

The ceremonial pipe is [turned?].

There is a great feast

to welcome Ge-way-wa-say-is back to his home village,

sponsored by his father and his mother.

The bundles were opened.

The teachings were given to the people

and these were not materialistic gifts,

but gifts

like love,

and courage

and respect

and each one involved a whole body of teachings.

So the little boy, Ge-way-wa-say-is, was turning grey by this time,

middle-aged,

took on a

student just like the Osh-ka-bay-wis had taken him on.

Began to train him

teaching all the things that Osh-ka-bay-wis had taught him.

And so this Little Boy Water Drum was constructed.

It's half-filled with water,

and the drum head is made out of a home-tanned deer skin.

The deerskin is laced to the drum head

by seven round stones that are referred to as the Grandfather stones.

And so

the tying of the Little Boy Water Drum

is a ritual that usually takes maybe twenty, twenty-five minutes

and the story is told as the drum is tied.

They say they're dressing the little boy.

And that the little boy will speak to the people

through the songs that are sung,

through the rhythm



of that water drum,  
through the stories of the elders  
that accompany the ceremonials and rituals that are performed  
by the Little Boy Water Drum.  
That the rhythm  
commemorates the first song that was ever experienced,  
even before the Creation,  
the sound that was experienced by the Great Spirit,  
the first thought.  
So the sound of the Little Boy Water Drum is a heartbeat of all creation,  
the natural rhythms, the four seasons,  
night and day,  
the phases of the moons,  
the tides, the heartbeat.  
So when it's brought into the lodge  
it symbolizes, both the Little Boy Water Drum and the shakers that are used,  
they symbolize that first song.  
The blueprint  
for bringing  
harmony and balance out of chaos.  
So it's a very powerful,  
a very powerful sacred item.  
Oh, we have many stories like that.

K. So that when you make it you're also telling all the stories that each of the things that goes into it?

J. Especially when you dress the drum. When you tie it. It's a ritual.

K. And that's putting the tanned . . . Do the spirits of the animals enter into it, of the things you're using?

J. Um-hm. The spirit of the wood;

the spirit of the animal;

the animal hide.

The otterskin medicine bags are used in the lodge, the medicine bags,  
commemorating the time that

the otter took on the responsibility of assisting the little boy,  
bringing the gifts to the Anishinabe People.

K. When it went against its nature to help . . .

J. It was a great sacrifice.

K. Is there anything else that you think would be important for me to know about or to put in with this?

J. Oh, I could spend years on that.

K. Oh gosh. [laughing]

J. I just thought I'd give you a little example of how, of the meaning of a sacred item.

K. Marge was talking me the difference between secular things and sacred things. This drum would be

a sacred drum, so that it can be used only in certain ways?

J. Yeah. Just use it in Midewiwin Lodge ceremonies. You don't take that out in public. Most people have

never even seen that.

K. That drum or that ceremony?

J. Or song. They're all together different from what you hear at these public pow-wows. That's another

tradition there. That's the northern plains-style tradition that came as a gift from the Sioux People to

the Ojibwa around eighteen-seventy-eight, eighteen-eighty. That's fairly new. Barely over a hundred

years old. But the Midewiwin tradition that goes all the way back to the Creation. [In a further interview,

Joe talks about the gift of the Sioux drum to the Ojibwa.]

[There is external noise on the tape. It becomes understandable again as Joe is describing the drum.]

J. . . . about nine inches in diameter, fifteen to twenty inches high. Surprisingly, see it's half-filled with

water and the head of the drum is also soaked. And when you hit it, it doesn't give a really sharp sound,

but you can hear it over a mile away.

K. It's wet when you use it?

J. Um-hm.

K. That would be different sound from what you hear at a pow-wow.

J. Oh yeah! It's an instrument that you can use right inside of that lodge in a confined space and it won't

hurt anyone's ears. It's a softer sound.

K. Which is more in keeping with . . .

J. More like the sound of the heart, the heart sound.

K. I remember from class when I sat in on one of your classes a long time ago and you were talking

about the sound being the first thing in the universe.

J. Um-hm.

K. the Great Spirit had heard rather than [seen] light or anything else.

J. It was the sound that the Great Spirit remembered when setting everything in motion, when giving

everything a physical form. That was when all the rhythms of nature were created according to that

sound. So that's how you bring harmony out of chaos.

Here I turned off the tape recorder, but we continued talking for a few minutes. I didn't understand what

made a sacred object sacred. Joe explained: The spirits of the things which go into making the drum, or the scroll [*referring to the sacred Mide scrolls*], are there in it—all things have spirit, but that is not what makes the object sacred. It is the ceremony which gives power to the object. For instance, he could make a replica of the Little Boy Water Drum which could be public, or the scroll could be copied or xeroxed and made public. These objects would not have the power invested by the ceremony and would not be sacred.

**Richard La Fernier, Sunday, November 8, 1998.**

Richard La Fernier talked with me outside his brother's home, where Richard is staying, at Red Cliff, Wisconsin. Richard is a member of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Ojibwa. I had not met him before, but had been interested in talking with someone who did brain tanning. His name was given to me by a friend. We were trying to arrange a time to meet, and tentatively set it for Sunday morning. Richard was going hunting, but thought he'd be back early. Sunday morning Richard called and was available. He'd hit a deer with his truck Saturday evening so he hadn't gone out hunting and he had the deer hanging. I said I'd be right over. He said, just follow the power lines down Frog Bay Road. Frog Bay Road is a short, gravel road with several trailers. I remembered driving down it once before when I was out familiarizing myself with the area, shortly after I'd moved north. Several dogs had come out barking at me as I drove down the road, turned around in the turn-around, and barked at me as I drove back. It was the same thing again. A tiny black dog came out and barked. Then there was a gangly pup whose name I subsequently learned was Trouble.

I thought Richard had said to go to the end of the power line, which I did and parked, but there wasn't anyone around. Richard had said I should look for the person sitting out front in grey overalls and a black hat. But no one was there. So I got out, kind of looked around. The little black dog had followed the car, still barking, and a man came out from two trailers back and was whistling. At first I thought he was whistling at the dog, then thought he might have on something that looked kind of grey, and he had a hat on, so I yelled, "Are you Richard?" "Yes," was the reply so I got back in the car, turned around and parked by his place.

The trailers on the road are practical and functional. They look as if people had used what they had and put thought into whatever they built. There were other people around working on a car, kids playing. Richard seems to be about in his late twenties or early thirties, a serious demeanor with a hint of a wry, pointed sense of humor.

I explained my project to Richard and he signed the consent form. I gave him tobacco which I had prepared in a small packet of red felt.

The day was grey and cold. On the tape you can hear the sound of our footsteps on the gravel, our sniffles from the cold, and other ambient noise. We talked as we walked past the last two trailers on the road where the power line ended. Past a track into the woods with a large, hand-painted "PRIVATE" sign next to it. To the turn-around, a cleared space with woods around it. Then we turned around, walked slowly back, the trailers reappearing, the sounds of the dogs and kids reentering the conversation. The timing of our conversation was the length of the walk. When we got back to the trailer, the conversation closed. I turned off the tape recorder. Richard talked a little about Trouble and the wood he was collecting from an old cabin. And then he said he had to get back to work. I thanked

him and left.

*[Personal note: There was a quality to this interview which I find quite difficult to describe. Richard was very intense. He was careful with his words, and seemed to be checking often to see if I were understanding. I remember practically nothing of the actual words spoken during the conversation, except for a few phrases, and was surprised when I listened to the tape, which I resisted doing for several weeks. What I remember were the non-verbal qualities: the intensity, the trees up ahead, looking at the tree-tops. Seeing the 'PRIVATE' sign and wondering who put it up, where the track went. Richard's concentration and seriousness. My own shift in focus.]*

R. Want to walk down the road?

K. Sure. OK.

R. So, your first question was what does it mean to me?

K. Yeah. What does it mean to you.

R. As far as what? Native American? Life?

K. No. About what you do, not just in general, but . . . like if you're going to be tanning some hides. Getting the animal, and kind of how you got started and why you do it. Like that.

R. I got started when I was . . . roughly, maybe about twelve. And, just making different things. Going to a pow-wow, looking at different aspects of the culture, religion, and being introduced to that, just kept going into it more and more, and more of the dancing, more of the songs, and there were all the other things that were kind of getting lost as far as our culture and stuff. That was true for brain-tanning deer hides. And there was also beadwork and the crafts. So I just went through tryin' to figure out all these things that just intrigued me. The beadwork and all these brain-tanning solutions. Talking to different people from all over, from Minnesota and Michigan. And when I was younger, I never hung around with people my age. I was always with elders, making maple syrup or learning to be patient, taking my time in doing things, never too much in a hurry. You never get nothin' done right away. Just takes a little while, [tanning] your first hides or anything that you ever do, it won't come out right. You just got to be patient . . . and take your time and understand what you're doing. When we say that hide, or the buckskin, . . . there's different ways to do it. A lot of people have their own ways. I have my way and I just, . . . when I get ready and prepared to look at that hide I have to manage to look at the size of that hide, and what I'm going to do, and what kind of project, then I prepare that hide by de-hairing it and taking off the epidermis, gettin' the brain ready, keepin' the heart sac. And I do a lot of that.

K. What do you keep the heart sac for?

R. The heart sac is also like . . . it has like a . . . it's almost like a pouch. And then when you have the heart sac in there, you pull it out and you get it just right, it will come out like a bag, when you process it . . . into leather. And then I keep all that. And I thank all the spirits that give me this knowledge, a good

way of life. I count those that are there and . . . so . . .

K. Not just the deer, more than the deer?

R. It's more than just the deer. 'Cause the deer just feeds us, but he also has a spirit that's sacrificed for us, and that spirit gave his life so that we can eat or we can be warm, with this clothing . . . or give us what we need. And that's how we believe. We believe everything has a spirit, like a tree. In the fall he'll tell us things. In the spring comes back with all it's leaves, Mother Nature, the spirits that are out there. So everything that we walk upon, [especially] Mother Earth or . . . all these things that are here with us also have a spirit. We respect everything. And every time that we go get something or go do something we give tobacco. And that's out of respect for a good life. We pray for those that have a tough life, like all the trees, we talk about the trees and stuff, whenever we go into those ceremonies and stuff. We always pray for everything because everything has a spirit. Everything is one in this world. Life goes into a circle and we have to understand that circle. [Said quietly.]

[More loudly.] So, as far as the hides, back to the hides again, nobody . . . I just picked it up. Nobody gave me the interest to do it but myself. And when I first got started I just asked a lot of people and got a lot of opinions and a lot of feedback.

K. Were there many people who actually knew how to brain-tan when you were going to start?

R. A lot of elders did. They gave me some direction and said, "Well if you do this . . ." So I used everybody's idea in some form or another but then I kind of formed my own way. And so I have my own way of doing things, but yet it's all kind of consistent to everybody else. So that's how I pretty much started on deer hides. Really, nobody, like I said, directed me into it. I just wanted to see if I could do it. It was more of a challenge for me. When I got going, I just started. The first two didn't work out so I just kept going.

K. That's how many I've tried so far, maybe there's hope yet, huh?

R. I don't give up. Somethin' ain't right I have to figure out, look at each step that I go into. Like I say, everything is like a circle, so when I start I look at my circle and I say, "OK, here's my first step. That seemed to be all right." Now, I go to my next step, and I say, maybe I did this, or maybe I did that. Maybe there wasn't enough of this. So each time I do somethin' I go into steps where I can . . . those steps, even sometimes I . . . When I go through life I always think of things like in a goal. You have to make a goal in your life. And I make three goals in my life, I have an everyday goal. I have a goal that's kind of medium where I can achieve it, but yet it's going to take me a little while. And I have a lifetime goal. So everyday when I wake up I think about all my goals and what I'm going to do. So I concentrate on one thing and then I look at that one thing today, and I'll say, "OK, how am I going to do this?" And there again I have to go through my steps. And then my next medium goal is kind of like a big project. Maybe I have to do a lot of planning, or I have to draw out plans, or I have to draw this or make up this, make up the difference. And then I have a lifetime goal. My lifetime goal that I live is to live a humble

life, every day. To be humble to all mankind. To be good to all the spirits that are good to me. *[More quietly.]* Those deer, the bear. Everything that we walk with. I've learned that we have to be just as humble. So those are my goals when I look forward to waking up everyday . . . Do you have any questions?

K. When you get a deer, like this deer that you've got now, and it's ready to start working with . . . and you work with it, is it . . . is it like . . . right there with you, like, it's kind of telling you what it's going to become or, have you worked with the deer enough you know which deer will be good for what kind of things?

R. Spiritually that deer's there. And like I say, everything comes like . . . We believe everything comes in a dream. And when we put everything down, we put our tobacco out, and those spirits help us, and tell us maybe in a dream, maybe out in the woods. We don't know. When I started, like I said, I had no direction and I just gave people tobacco, and . . . but when I do it today, I look at that deer, that hide, like I said, figure out how many steps I have to go to process that. But yes, I feel like that, at some point, that deer, that spirit's there with me, giving me directions. You know?

K. Um-hm. And each one is different? In how they're formed . . . or what they're like, or what their spirit is like?

R. Oh, yeah. Sometimes you'll see shapes of animals on their, in the skin when you're all done. You'll see a shape here or there or, you know. Then I smoke 'em and then at some point I give them feast.

K. That I'm not familiar with.

R. You know. Give a feast, or prepare a dish, so that when I'm workin' a hide or something, that I always keep my knowledge and be humble with those spirits like they talk about. And all those spirits have to eat, too. So I prepare a feast to feed all those things and give thanks for what I have, and the knowledge that I share, you know, and all those great things that I do, I guess, in some ways, you know?

K. *[I'm puzzled.]* And as you work with a hide you want to do the best you can with it for the deer too, right? I mean, because you don't want to waste it? What you've been given?

R. Right. Yeah. I don't directly look at one and say, because I've done one hide, *[effect it in any way ?]* say I'm the master. 'Cause being a master's nothin', you know? You just go on through life and be proud of what you can do, but you don't brag, it's just part of being humble. And I'm no master at anything. I just take my time. Put things into perspective for me. And that's how I look at things. So . . . just like deer hides. If you go too fast, you can rip a hide. Fleshing it. You can rip the hide by taking off the epidermis. You can rip the hide at any point, if you go too fast, too much in a hurry. The faster you go, the less you'll ever get done. The slower you go and take your time the more . . . *[Loud sounds on tape]*

K. If a deer has the other animals in the hide, would that mean something?

R. Depends on what I see. Maybe to me, I'll see a face and then somebody else'll see something else. The interpretation of that hide, I don't try to figure, I just think it's a great thing to see. I don't try to interpret what's there. I'm just happy that it is there. 'Cause to me, I could see it one way and then somebody else could say, "Well, it looks like this," and I'm humble, and I'll say, "OK, look at that." I don't have to make an argument or anything like that. I don't try to read into it or interpret it.

K. It's just what it . . .

R. It's just what it is. Right.

[Long pause.]

K. Now, with the deer, you use it for food, too?

R. Right.

K. Will you be doing something with the tanned hide yourself then, or what will you do with that?

R. No. When I tan hides and stuff, I don't . . . I keep a couple maybe to make something for somebody. I have three small boys, so I make them a lot of stuff when I can, I'm always busy on different things. I don't have a lot of time to make a lot of things, but when I do, it's usually for my boys, but if somebody needs something I always help them out. I give away a lot of leather. I haven't quite been doing it lately because I've been busy. I moved away. I'm now just coming back, back here. I was down in the cities for a while.

K. Twin Cities?

R. Yeah. I really never had anything to do with that down there, so now I'm just coming back and now I'm going to get back into it, you know? Takes me a while to get my tools all back together. Figure out for each step what I'm going to use, how I'm going to do it. Go back and gather all my tools again. K. Now the deer you'll . . . when you strip it, I mean take the hide off, do you just do it by hand so you have a minimum amount of cuts to the inside of the hide.

R. Right.

K. . . . you pull it . . . ?

R. You'll have a lot of fatty material, a lot of fat that goes into the hide. And that part doesn't bother me because I'd rather have it on the hide, 'cause I can scrape it off and I save some of that fat just to put into the brain solution. I was just told that you put a little fat in the brain solution. That's just another step I go into, you know. I may be wrong, somebody might have directed me wrong. But I don't think that anybody is every wrong. I think that everybody has one way, and there is no wrong way. As long as you keep tryin', you know? Those are just one of the pointers I picked up from a few elders. And that's how I . . . [pause]

K. If you're going to be making things from the hides, like for your sons, that's teaching them, too, right? About what . . . about how to respect the deer that gave them that?

R. Um. They're pretty small right now. Pretty young. And I don't . . . I'm patient with them as far as



saying what way they're going to follow. I don't know if they'd want this kind of life or not, this being Native American. I mean, it's in 'em, but I don't know what they want. They're so young. Maybe they won't want to be involved, you know. Maybe they'll always help me and respect my way; but they probably wouldn't want to go that way, so I don't push it on them. I don't say, you have to go like this one. That's up to them when they grow up. They'll find a path and they'll be making that circle. It's a process that you have to live. *[We're walking back to the house, the little dog is barking. Pause.]*

K. Are there other things that you think would be . . . to tell somebody about?

R. I would say if anybody was going to try it, I've always said, just be prepared to make maybe ten of them, because the first two aren't going to work, or maybe the first three. It takes a long time to figure that out. It takes a long time and you talk to a lot of people that know how to do it. Just keep pluggin' away, even if it doesn't work right the first time, you'll get it sometime. It has to come, but don't give up, you know? . . .

K. I don't know why I wanted to start doing that. A friend gave me two hides and I tried, and I didn't get too far. . . .

R. They say when you go out to fast, . . . fasting is like for [your ?] spirit, for your people, like a suffering. When you go out to fast, it doesn't matter if you can't make it four days, you know? It doesn't matter if you can't go ten days. Grab the one day and at least try and put your heart into it. That's all that matters. Everything is all recognized. People tell you you're full of love. You help people out. That's what it's all about. It's not the money or it's not about the gifts or anything to me. It's just helping people out.

K. Have you always felt that way?

R. *[Nods.]* Yeah. I don't do anything for money. Money to me is paper. And I'm just consumed with everything else. I'd rather just see somebody happy. I have a lot of compassion for my fellow man. A lot of . . . I don't have any dislikes. I have no judgments. I see a man just for what he is, just a man, you know. I don't . . . I seek some knowledge, but I don't seek *all*. I don't know. I go through life and my philosophy in life is I know nothing. 'Cause I don't want to know everything. I figure if you know everything, then why are you here? So I just figure, if you know it all, then who's your friend, you know? Who would want to . . . 'Cause you'd only be a one-sided conversation. He'd say, "Well, you can't go that way." Who says that you can't. Nothing's ever impossible. So I just don't believe I want to go through life *[believing]* that I know anything. And that's how I go. . . . Do you have any other questions?

K. I don't, not really. You told me how you learned how to do it and, you've told me what it means to you and . . . No, I just like to hear what you have to say.

R. A lot of people do.

K. Do they?

R. Yeah. A lot of people ask me about this or something . . . and I just say "I don't know, but my theory

is . . ." I don't say, "You should . . ., you should . . ." I just say, I don't know, but I have a theory -- and this is the theory.

K. I know one thing I could ask you. Since you use the hide to make things from, like for your boys, does each hide have a different feel to it, or different kind of, sort of . . . message, about what you could be making?

R. No. Just whatever I see.

K. Whatever you see . . .?

R. As a kind of like, . . . from that point there I just see something there and that's what I want to make, part of their regalia, and leggings, or anything like that. But I don't . . . I don't have no 'messages.'

K. I guess I was thinking more, maybe not 'messages,' . . .

R. Like a dream? Like it comes in a dream or something like . . .

K. Yeah.

R. No. I just want to help people.

*[Sounds of dogs & kids on the tape now.]*

K. I guess I was also thinking in a practical sense. Different hides have a different feel. Some are thicker, or thinner, or longer, or weaker . . .

R. Oh, yeah. Softer.

K. Yeah, softer.

*[We've walked up to the deer he has hanging, a small doe, and we talk a bit more before I thank Richard and leave.]*

**Frank Montano, Red Cliff, Wisconsin, Sunday, November 8, 1998.**

Frank Montano is a member of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Ojibwa, and of the Grand Midewiwin Lodge. Frank has become recognized for his flute making and performance, traveling to Germany, Switzerland, and Japan. He was invited to the 1998 Folk Life Celebration in Washington DC, and was in Madison for the Eleven-Tribe Pow-Wow and the state folk life celebration this summer. He has made a number of tapes and compact discs both solo and with other performers. Frank speaks at colleges quite often, holds a talking circle for men who have been in court on various charges, and has been involved in treaty-rights actions.

Frank preferred to talk with me without taping the conversation. I taped my recollections of the interview later that afternoon, then transcribed and edited my own tape. The quotations are not technically accurate; I've used them with some license when I particularly remembered a point of our conversation. While I have tried to be as true as possible to what Frank talked about, it is now inevitably mixed with my own understanding and interpretation. Frank has reviewed the longer version of this interview which is on the compact disc.

I went to Frank's modest, well-tended, and comfortable home on a gravel road at Red Cliff. Frank welcomed me and we sat on either side of the living room's front window, Frank with his feet up in what I surmised was his favorite chair, a small table with an embroidered cloth and a lamp between us next to the window. Frank seemed to be weighing whether he wanted to talk with me. Frank signed the consent form and I gave him a small packet of tobacco I had prepared similarly to the one I gave Richard. Frank asked, "Where do you want to start?" I said, "We could start with how you learned to make flutes or with what the flute means to you."

So, we settled down. Frank, who is now fifty-seven, grew up in Red Cliff. He was one of thirteen in their household. His family lived without electricity. His mother was a Catholic and this was the period of time when all the Indian things had to go underground. So, he wasn't raised with the traditional Indian ways and they were not talked about. People weren't allowed to speak their language or perform any ceremonies. (He reminded me later that Indians in the U.S. got the vote only fifty years ago.) "But," he said, "even as a boy I noticed sounds." He heard the songs of the birds; the music of the water. And so he heard sounds all around him and was fascinated with them. His first instrument, he thought, was a harmonica when he was fairly young. Then he went on to learn to play other instruments. He always heard music; the world was shaped that way for him.

However, it wasn't until in his late twenties or early thirties when he went on a fast and a vision quest, that the flute came to him in a vision. And the way he has learned it is mostly through vision. He started making his own flutes. There were a few elders who could teach him something about it, but he mostly learned on his own through visions and experimenting. Gradually, he began to learn.

Flutes, he said, are actually very, very old in Native tradition. There are some earthenware flutes that have been found in archeological sites. "In our tradition, he said, "the flute is associated with the Deer clan. They say there's no Deer Clan in this area because the head of the Deer Clan was a moose and there aren't any moose here." [I am not sure I understood this correctly.] Europeans misinterpreted the meaning of the flute because 'deer', 'd-e-e-r', began to be associated with 'd-e-a-r'. People say d-e-a-r when you care about somebody; they're 'dear'. So the flute became a 'love' flute, associated with love between men and women, or enticing your sweetheart. The Indian, the Native flutes began to have that connotation, that they were used to woo your lover. "But," he said, "that wasn't it at all." He told me the story of the Deer Clan People.

The Deer Flute was the flute of the Deer Clan. The people were having a very, very rough winter. They didn't have food and they were starving. All the animals were asked who would feed the people to keep them from starving. This was the time when people could still talk to the animals and everyone understood each other. None of the animals volunteered, except the deer. The deer volunteered to give his flesh to the people so that they could live. And so the deer gave his flesh to the people and the people were able to live through the winter.

Frank talked about there being flutes for different purposes, for example, for healing or for burial. Once a flute is made there are things you do to begin to let the flute tell you what kind of flute it is, what its purpose is. And, over the cycle of the year there are things which need to be done to care for the spirit of the flute. One thing is that the spirits need to eat also and need to be alive, so the rituals of having the feasts, of having the food for the spirits, are part of the flute also.

The flute is a very powerful instrument and Frank said he could see that at his concerts, when people are often so touched by it that they say to him, "You know, we didn't know whether we should applaud or not at the end because it was so moving." He also mentioned that some people while they're listening to the flute will be transported spiritually.

"You have to be really, really careful about how you play the flute because it is so powerful. It's a transformation of your thoughts into the flute itself, into the music of the flute." He said the high notes in the Ojibwa songs are the spirit notes, the notes of the spirit, and the low notes/tones are the notes of the people in the world. It's a bringing together of the spirit and people through the music. There's a direct connection between your thoughts and the music that's coming from the flute, so you have to be really aware and careful of what it is you're doing with this really powerful instrument.

I asked him if the high, spirit notes had any relation to the first sound as Joe Rose had talked about with the drum. Frank said he was *Widewin*, too, and that different people had different ideas. There's no one person who is absolutely right. Different people have different ways they teach, or they believe, and what he, Frank, has to say may not be what somebody else has to say. He said that the first sound was the sound of the rattle, with the shah, shah sound. "But," he said, "you're better

off not even thinking in terms of time. The sound of the flute is pure spirit with no time at all involved with it, it's just pure spirit."

He went on to tell me about an Elder who had come to his house for a meeting and who had explained that when you're sitting there having a meeting, not only are you sitting there, but your grandparents are sitting there. Your great-grandparents are sitting there having a meeting. Your children are sitting there having the meeting. And this goes all the way back and all the way forward. If you continue to think about it, it gets quite mind-boggling, so you're better off not even to think about time because there isn't any time. Time is just a creation that people have made. With pure spirit there is not time.

Frank makes his flutes from the wood of the cedar tree. He spoke about the cedar tree being the symbol of life, its importance as a sacred tree, the highest tree in Ojibwa belief. That may be a reason why the wood from the cedar tree is used. But also, he said, it's a very soft wood and vibrates better than a hard wood. He commented on how much technical knowledge goes into the making of the flute as well as the other kinds of things Native Americans have done and do. Many people don't realize that and think things made by Native Americans are really simple because the things are not made by computer or industrially. The flute is constructed with two chambers and a bridge around which the air flows. When you play a flute made from a hard wood, as soon as enough moisture gets into it, the moisture seals the passage of the air between the two chambers and you can't play it anymore. He said he had that happen when he'd tried to play a hardwood flute. But when you play a softwood flute, as you play, it absorbs the moisture of your breath going through it. The tone of the flute will change from when you start playing, and as you play it. The moisture in the flute also coats the wood and provides lubrication for the air flow and the sound. He also mentioned that if the flute has not been played for a while it will be very dry and take some time for the moisture to start penetrating the wood again.

In Madison (Wisconsin) Frank met and talked with a young man, a South American Indigenous person, who made and played flutes. He was attending the University of Wisconsin where his thesis was a technical study of indigenous flutes, recording sounds on computer and relating the quality of the tone to the kind and carving of the wood. He wanted to show the amount of technical facility and subtlety of workmanship needed in making the flutes to achieve quality of sound.

When Frank works on a flute, he said, he has to be sure that he is thinking right while he makes it. Everything he does while he makes the flute becomes part of it. So it's very important to be thinking in the right way.

Frank spoke of the importance of the circle to Native American thought and how the flute is made in a circle [referring to the cross section]. Not only is the flute round, but when the sound comes from the flute it comes out in circles, circular vibrations through the air, like waves. Like a pebble on

the surface of a pond where you can see the waves dispersing. The sound comes out in circles from the flutes and continues reverberating. He said you just never know how far it reaches. This is also why you have to be so careful about your thoughts that are going into the flute, into the music when you're playing it.

Frank told me about a vision he had fairly recently: His grandmother came to him; she's a grandmother with long white hair pulled back and she's in buckskin dress and she's the grandmother who's taken care of him through all his life. She said this was a vision he could tell people about. She said to him, "You know, you've got this word that you use a lot. You use it all the time; you use it a lot, but I'm not quite sure what it means. Do you think maybe you could tell me what you mean when you use this word?" So Frank asked her, "What word do you mean, Grandmother?" She said, "The word 'respect.' What do you mean by that?" And he said, "Oh, well . . ." And he stood there a long time and he couldn't come up with an answer. She pointed to piece of wood that was on the ground and she said what do you see there. And he said, "Well, I see a piece of wood." And she said, "Well, why don't you pick it up." So he picked it up. "Well, it's piece of wood. It came from a tree. The tree was living once." And she said, "Well look at it again." And he said he looked at it again and when he looked at it again, he didn't just see a piece of wood; he could see inside the wood. He could see all of the universes that were inside the wood and in every universe inside the wood was another universe, and it just went on until they were so tiny he couldn't see them any more. And she said, "Now do you see that that wood is not just a dead thing or a piece of wood that came from a tree over there. It's living." He said he could see that what he had was a living piece of wood. And she said, "Look up at the sky." He looked up at the stars and the sky and she said, "What do you see?" He said, "I see the stars and I see the night sky. And she said, "Look again." And he looked again and he could see the universes within universes within universes again looking up into the sky. All the living quality of it. And she said, "Now, look at yourself." And he looked at his arm and he could see first just the skin. Then he could see inside the skin. And he could see all the universes inside his body and again the universes within universes until they were so tiny that he couldn't see them anymore, but they continued on and she said, "Remember that when you breathe, when you take a step, when you move, anything that happens—there are all these universes on universes around you. Do you think the Creator would have made only you to be alive, to have this [gesturing around]? Everything you see is alive and everything has the same depth to it, universe on universe in it." "Respect," then, is something that must take into account all these other living universes, the spirit of everything. [ ... ] We are nothing without spirit. Without spirit our bodies are just part of the earth. It's the spirit that animates the body.

As our conversation was winding down, I had one question about something I didn't quite understand. I understood that the flute has a spirit of its own and is not only the spirit of the wood. I have played flutes since I was quite young; each one has it's own characteristics and each sounds

differently, and I think of my own flute as being alive (in a sense). But I didn't understand when the flutes Frank makes become *that* flute, different from the wood and the wood's spirit that goes into it. There's the wood which goes into the flute, the spirit of the wood, the work Frank is putting into the flute, and his thoughts while he is working, and yet the flute itself becomes something alive in addition to the other components. It is a healing flute, or another kind of a flute. "Well," he said, "until it's played it's just a potential flute. But when you begin to breathe into the flute, the flute is then becoming alive." He explained that when the Great Spirit made man, made people, He fashioned them from clay and He used a Magis shell to blow the breath of life into the clay to make it come alive, and Frank thinks it is the same with the flute.

Now, he said, he has flutes he will play places and that's all that has been done to them, they've just been breathed into and played. But these are not specific kinds of flutes for particular kinds of ceremonies. For these other flutes, the flutes that become a healing flute or a flute for another kind of ceremony, you have to do all the things which let that flute tell you what kind of a flute it is. What direction the flute is associated with is involved with what kind of flute it will become. With these flutes, he said, it's a combination of what you have to do to let the flute tell you what kind of flute it is, plus the breath that goes into the flute. It then becomes alive, and it becomes that particular flute, and a flute like that, if it's a healing flute would only be used in healing, or if it were a burial flute, would only be used for burials.

Frank mentioned the songs he plays on the flute. He doesn't know whether they're all "authentic" or not. "You can go to the Smithsonian and it's all recorded [*written down*]. There are Harvest songs, Feast songs, other kinds. And you can look it up." He said he wouldn't know whether they really were or they really weren't what they claimed. Some things might be missing from them. "It's just black and white stuff, it's just notes written down. It's not the real thing. We're an oral culture and you can't take something and write it down in black and white and call it a 'Harvest' song, for instance."

About here our conversation ended. I thanked Frank for his time, consideration, and information.

Louis Ogemah, Sunday, November 22, 1998.

This talk about his installation, *Regeneration*, was given at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Louis Ogemah is an artist who works in many media. He was born in Sioux Lookout, Ontario and is a member of the Lac Seul Ojibwa. He has lived in Winnipeg since 1975 and received a Bachelor of Fine Art from the University of Manitoba in 1992. He attended the Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School in Kenora.

This installation, *Regeneration*, started out at the Urban Shaman Gallery in Winnipeg in 1997. It traveled to the *Wanshuk Onigum*, Rat Portage First Nation. It is a teaching and a healing work. The installation was in the south gallery of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. Upon entering, one walked into the space Louis had created representing the sweat lodge. Photos of the installation are on the compact disc. It was within this space that Louis gave his talk to the group.

In *Regeneration*, Louis is specifically addressing the problem of the residential schools and the Disease of the Euro-American—Colonization, which he describes as a thread that runs through the fabric of society. "To undo it is a great undertaking." We live in a "universe of ambiguity" and "our humanness is constant in revealing 'truths' about ourselves as people." Further, he says, "We are unique in our humanness, for each one of us has a story to be told." The installation is a "Sacred Lodge." In the space the revelations "are not static." It has a direction and motion. "Regeneration is organic." (Ogemah: Artist's Statement)

After Louis's talk, I arranged with him to use the tape. With the transcription I sent him, I also sent a small packet of tobacco which I had prepared.

Hi. My name is Louis Ogemah. I also go by the name of *Ghzhé Anaquót*, and my clan is the *Addick*, which is the Caribou Clan. I guess the only other name I go by is *Pititwewe Nodin* which is my warrior name, my *Okijida* name. I got that about five years ago and that's probably the last I went to a sweat lodge. My purpose for going to sweat lodges vary. I go to sweat lodges only if there's a purpose for me to go to. When this piece was being developed, this was a few years ago prior to that and I was thinking about this project I was supposed to work on for the Canada Council which were able to fund this idea I had about the exodus of First Nations in major cities and towns. But from that point on I was sort of doing a lot of introspect, looking into myself and trying to discover certain things about *me*. And in doing that I opened up this little Pandora. And it turned out to be a lot of different things about my family, where I am today, why I am the way I am today. Why my family is the way it is [*Louis laughs softly*]. Why my cousins, my uncles and all my relations are across Canada. And of course, I took Native Studies in school so I had an understanding of colonialism. And using that as a means of everything that I do, that cuts through all the b.s. in all aspects of my, what the system is like, because



It is a systemic kind of thing that we through our society, and that's how I see it. And if you cut away all that, you begin to see certain truths, and that's what happened for me in developing this project, or this exhibit, this installation.

My pursuit for an installation was because there's more that you can do with an installation, that I feel you can. There's performance, there's also a discussion. It's also a means to create some discourse about the work or about the issue. Present-day residential schools for myself, I was researching it already. And looking at all aspects of it. And this is a generational, kind of familial thing because it starts off in the nineteen-twenties and then goes into the nineteen-fifties, into the sixties and seventies and to present day on the northern direction. [Louis is indicating four wooden boxes on end, on each of which there is a birch bark photo album.]

I'm using this particular framework only because I have an understanding of my culture. That was passed on to me by my kokoum, my mother as well, my father, and all other family people that were there. And a good thing about Lake of the Woods and that area was it went underground during the turn of the century. Prior to that, before the subjugation of First Nations and, I think, the thing about it is Native People around this kind of belt-line could see what was happening in the south with the Americans and the Native People down in the south. And knew that there was something happening and could see it happening. So a lot of the stuff went underground -- the religion, everything that was very important to First Nations went underground.

And, unfortunately for the northern, there's a northern belt-line and the missionaries came up there and they did their work that they were supposed to do, so presently, I notice that there's this sort of Bible belt in the north and there's a very traditional belt in the southern regions and that's the reason why. And I know for a fact from my mother and from my kokoum that it was underground in Lake of the Woods, because my mother used to tell me stories about going from the reserve and going out into Lake of the Woods and building their lodges, building their Akkewiwin lodges and my great-grandfather was a high priest of the Akkewiwin Society. He was a Sturgeon Clan and he was the one that conducted the ceremonies. And they would only go there because they wanted to avoid the Indian agent who was keeping an eye on all the Indians, cause no two-three Indians could get together and dance, that kind of thing, or they'll start planning something. [Audience laughs quietly.] And that was the whole idea. So, I think, Indian Affairs had this idea that they can't do anything that reminds them of their religion, or their practices, or anything of that nature, so that's why they had to be stopped. And their children had to be taken from them and put into these schools.

So the acting agents were the Christian institutions. And, they're seen as being . . . even though from their perspective they were doing a good thing, because that is the colonial mentality of the European mind that's been passed on, is that the colonialization is the disease of the European. They bring it here. And as any host to a parasite, that's what happens. They come over. Colonize and they

spread out. And the whole thing is that it's also a conditioned state for First Nations because on the opposite side, we are homeless in our land. The last piece of land that we have is some . . . what is it? . . . I think it's . . . most of the land, it's ninety-nine something percent, is all Crown land or whatever, and less than one percent is reserve land which isn't really ours, anyway. So it doesn't really make sense, but that's what we call legislated theft. In that sense of the word, it was legislated by the government. But that's a whole different discussion because we're talkin' about larger politics here and my piece in itself is a healing process.

It takes place within a sweat lodge. And the reason why you can see me is because it's a conceptual piece. The best way to see the piece at first is probably to close your eyes. If you'll just, you know, humor me. Close your eyes. *[We do.]* And this is what a sweat lodge looks like. Total blackness. And if you open your eyes, . . . Open your eyes. *[We do.]* you'll see my vision. Cause, often, the insights are . . . come out of unconscious state, you see things. And for me as well, because of my background I've seen lots of weird things when I was growing up. My mom tells me it's because of the kind of inclinations to being, I guess, shamanistic practices in my family. My great-grandfather was a weather-changer, a shape-shifter. All those kind of things. They did conjuring; they did the shake dance. They did all these things and that was in my family. So I had the ability to see certain spirits when I was growing up. Nobody ever believed me, of course. So, that's something totally different. I even met people who are agnostics or atheists and we talk about these things. When we do talk about it, I say that, you know, this is my experience. Whether you believe in God or not is not my business. My thing is, it's happened to me and I know there's something stronger than me out there. I know we have a control of it; it also controls us. There's a power out there. There's an energy out there. And atheists and agnostics are really good to talk to because, compared to religious people, if we look at them, some of the most spiritual people are atheists or agnostics because it's how you treat other people. What it comes down to is, being spiritual, is how you treat other people. You want to be treated the same way. And a lot of these agnostics, they are probably a lot better than a lot of religious people that I know because [the religious people are] so caught up in their dogma. They're only good on Sunday. Well, I shouldn't pick on the Christians. Or, only good on Saturdays. Or only good on Wednesdays. You know, this kind of thing? *[The group laughs quietly.]* But these atheists and agnostics kind of, are very consistent, in that sense.

And the idea of the sweat lodge, as you open your eyes, is this is the vision I have of a bed. The bed, much like what I was discussing about ideologies, is there's a discordant, the image itself is discordant. There's an inversion at the bottom. There's something that's quite different, it's the funeral pyre on top and that is discordant from the institutional bed. The ideologies as well are discordant. The politics is discordant. The religion is discordant. It's one trying to get over the other. It's a power relationship. All those kind of things. And that's what the bed represents. When you first look at it, you

see that there's some form of life at the bottom. You see that there's, . . . it's very institutional, it's very antiseptic. This is much like the design of the bed that I grew up, or I was in the residential school, it was a bunk bed. Two parts to the bed. It's dual. That shirt is from that school. Same with the jeans. The blanket, I picked up along the way because I was looking for a certain kind of color to go with the piece. And red was a very powerful color to me. And seeing as the shirt as being part of that school, I found it at my grandma's and I kept it with me during that time. It's actually my brother's shirt, and I used it as part of the piece, because it was there, and that's how we used to put it at the foot of the bed by the fire blanket. A bunk bed is used by institutions which house many people and this is, you know, as children we were put in this place so on this bottom part you see this thing as being life, or somebody living there. And on the top part, it's this representation of death. It's something that a lot of people recognize as being, if I may say so, a pan-Indian kind of image. But I think a lot of our practices prior to any kind of contact was a lot of . . . we put a lot of our people on levels, whether it was trees or other means of levels. And today we use boxes. We use little houses over the grave yards. I don't remember ever seeing houses in pre-contact. So, my imagination is where it takes me, and I've seen lots of paintings that had scaffolds in trees in the periods of sixteen-hundreds, seventeen-hundreds. So that's where this idea came from. I wanted to do something that was ancient, that was something that was a part of me, that was innate, that was where I felt it had to be was this place of, I guess, the last resting place for us as a people.

But when you turn it around, it's also got a lot of ideas behind it, because at the bottom it represents the government's agenda against First Nations. It's an institutional bed. It talks about genocide. One of the things I learned when I was going through my studies was the process that the government had in the past hundred years was to Christianize, to civilize, and to assimilate, trying to [make] Native peoples white. That was the whole idea. In that sense, if you're trying to make somebody who they're not, that's genocide. It's not assimilation. It's pure and simple, it's genocide. And that's what the bed represents at the bottom. It's a cultural genocide. It's a genocide of trying to destroy a whole nation. And I think that's what part of the White Paper was about, this whole idea of taking status away. It's something that has to be discussed, I guess, at great length because where we are right now, it's still something that's a healing process. We're in this sort of state, I'm no psychologist, but we're in this state of denial. We're in various states of fear, anger, those things that we have to deal with within ourselves as a nation, a macrocosm, or, . . . yeah, macrocosm, as a whole nation. We're a pretty dysfunctional nation, in that sense of the word. And I don't mean on one side. I mean on both sides, I believe. And I think that's what the bottom part represents. To me it's genocide. What has happened to our people. Myself, and my family.

On the top part is more of an honorable, as I see it, an honorable death. So this bed is about death and two aspects of it. One is the highest esteem of where we go in the end when we pass on.

You know, there's a place that we do go and for me that's where all these things, these other items are there. The eagle feather which has great value to us in terms of its, what it represents. It's all in our religion; it's in everything that we do and it's usually right across North America. And the war shield up here is also another piece that symbolizes many things. It's a personal shield of mine and it also has a lot of things on there. It's got my two babies up there and it's got other things that my *kokum* gave me. It's an eagle feather, actually it's another different kind of feather. And, on the other part we have sage. So that's what I use to smudge the bed with. And the whole thing is smudged on a daily basis. It's part of the process that I put the thing through. And ever since the beginning, it hasn't missed a smudge. This is the vision that I've had, and I use the cardinal directions. This is the East and it starts here and this is where my *kokum* started. Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School had its first building in nineteen-oh-three on Shoal Lake, Ontario. But because it was hard to get to, it was moved to Kenora, Ontario, just outside Kenora. It was a much larger building. I seen the smaller building. It's actually torn down, but I seen the foundation of it. Then there's this new one they built in nineteen-twenty-seven, I believe. My *kokum* went to both of them. She went to the small, the one in Shoal Lake. Then she went off to the one in Kenora. And in this photograph, she's the centre one, she's the centre woman. And just after that, it's a photo emulsion process, and it all deals with my *kokum* and her period, and then, of course, the children. Her, my mother, my uncles and all that, are in those images as well. So the books are meant to be touched because they're like a photograph album, but I use birch bark because that's our paper. That's what we used in our *Mide* Society, our scrolls, in recording, as a certain device to use.

And so that's why I wanted to use this piece and also the way the whole design is made. Because I used sixteen poles, and the sixteen poles are what we use in the *Mide* sweats and they make the star in the centre and they do this kind of thing, [Louis indicates a star shape at the apex of where the poles would meet] except I couldn't build the whole sweat lodge, so I figured I'd do the representational thing. I used red willow as the main poles because red willow is another strong medicine in our usage. When we don't have tobacco we peel the red bark off and we take the inner bark and we use that as a tobacco. And we use a lot of it for offerings. And tobacco is one of our most, I guess, . . . powerful exchange, cause tobacco is something that we use all the time. I've been taught, this since I was a kid, to always put tobacco out -- put tobacco in the water when we go canoeing, or boating, or whatever because *Ashtupeshu* is in the undercurrents and this kind of thing. So everything I did was always using tobacco and acknowledging the world around me and that was the way I was taught. Everything that in the room has been picked up -- if it was organic it, was picked up, and I had to take the bark. The poplar wood is from The Pas, north, and they were as a tobacco offering as well. And the willows were from the south and they were also an exchange to the creative force. And that's

the kind of practice and the process that I go through in anything that I do.

So, anyway, the birch bark, this sort of describes my *kokum's* time, the late twenties and the thirties. And that's where the first Eastern side starts. And East usually starts with the sunlight. It has a lot of symbolic representation to it. It has the rising, the spring. It has all those new things—birth. And that's where it started. And it starts with my *kokum* being in this school. Then as we move along, we go into my parents' side [*the south compass point*]. This is the fifties, nineteen-fifty-six and nineteen-fifty-seven. And I got these photographs last year, actually, just before the exhibition opened up. I worked on these photographs and I picked them up in Kenora. I found a guy who used to be an administrator and he told me about a woman who's in her nineties or something. He said she used to work in the kitchen, but she used to take lots of pictures. And she was a spry little old lady, but she had all these slides, so she gave me the slides and said, "Well, I won't have any more use for them, but you can have them." So she gave me about fifty slides of the period in the fifties and in fifty-six—fifty-seven, I found my father in it and my mother in it. I don't have pictures of them in that time period, so it was quite the experience to find that. And so this really worked well for the piece and that's my father's period and my mother's period. They're both in that school, in C.J. at the same time in the fifties or mid-fifties. And the South, too, has lots of symbolic representation. That's summer and it's the second direction. It's got a color that goes with it and usually it's green or else, it's another color like yellow, or . . . but it depends on which tribe you're from, it's got a different color which goes with it. And the summer, it's also the child, like the growing up of a child, there's a certain age group. So this is where the growing period is, and this is in the fifties.

By this time in nineteen-fifty-one, [with changes in the Indian Act] the religion was brought back. I guess it must have been after the United Nations Declaration thing that they realized that maybe they weren't doing the right thing by outlawing Native religion, and so in fifty-one they repealed the Indian Act that stated that kind of thing about the religion. But they still kept it underground, you know, they kept it underground for a long time because of the fear that was attached to it. Even today, we still have a lot of things about . . . because fear seems to hold us back. I'm always approached by elders or people who ask me about some of the practices that I do as an artist. And my thing is always that I'm an artist-shaman and my purpose is to heal. It's also to teach and one of my main objectives is the children. If you're going to keep it a secret from the children and it dies with you, I mean, what use is that. So my job is to try to give it to the youth, to give it to the seventh generation down the road. My brother asked me about that, too. He says, "Why do you do these things?" And I told him, "Like its, it's . . . I do it for your son." And his son happened to be just there, he was like five years old at the time. "And that's who I do it for," I said. "I don't really do it for you. I do it for him." So I'm always thinking about, you know, giving it to them. If everybody else learns along the way, that's great. That's just fantastic, but I try to do it for the children, you know. That's what my main objective is.

And this is the Western doorway. The West is another part of that process where East it begins and West it ends. In the *Mide* lodges the doorway always points to the East. And it goes into a four-to-ten day ceremony that initiates go through certain activities happen in the *Mide* lodge and the Western doorway, always where it's blocked off, because that's where you go through when you're finished. And it's also where the, I guess, . . . when you pass on, this is where the road goes when you pass on to the next world. And I think that's the whole idea about the bed, too. It's kind of pointed in this kind of direction where the head's on that side [*Louis indicates East.*] and the feet are in this direction [*He indicates West.*] So it's sort of a traveling kind of a process as well. So I'm trying to keep all these things in this . . . I guess, process, keep it working in that direction. And this is the Western doorway. This is my brothers and my sisters that were actually in the school and there's certain parts in here but also some dysfunctional. One picture that I used in there is my brother and sister, and we were partying so I used one picture in there. It just shows the dysfunction that we were going through at the time. Some people think of it as just having experience, but I seen it as something else eventually.

There's also one picture I use all the time, is after a vision quest I had in nineteen-eighty-nine I came back to Kenora, and I did all these things and then I came back to this place, Round Lake. That's where the Cecilia Jeffreys School is and went across the lake and I told my brother, "Take a picture of me." I said, "I'm going to do an exhibit in nineteen-ninety-nine . . ." No, I didn't say that. [*Soft laughter*] I said, "Take a picture of me." 'Cause the school was in the back at the time. Well, it was supposed to be in the back, but it was torn down in nineteen-seventy-eight. But it's supposed to be here, but it's not here anymore. It's supposed to be in the back of me, across the lake, but it's not there and on the beginning of that book [*Louis indicates the book at the South, his parents' book*], it's in there. It's got the school, what the school looks like, in that picture. So this is sort of like East to West. It's sort of like this is where the school leaves at this point. And that's all I wanted to say that part.

Then this is the Northern doorway. And this book describes my sister, my one sister, my baby sister, that's J.B., and also my nephew and nieces today. And this is the book I call *The Book of Hope* because this is where regeneration actually occurs, where we actually regenerate in more ways than one and that's regeneration of the spirit for us. Even though they were never part of that school system or that system itself, they're still indirectly affected by it, by the way they are. The way my sister is or the way my nephews and nieces are. There are certain things about things that are passed on that we learned in that system. And from my parents' perspective, and my aunties' and uncles', and what happened to them. So this is *The Book of Hope* and this is where the cycle ends. And I end this book with a picture of my dad's funeral. Because it deals with death in many ways, in many layers, at a conceptual level, at a political level, you know. It also deals at a level of personal, family, myself and my . . . well, my parents and that's how I deal with that.

There's lots of symbolism that I'd also like to say like in addition. There's the cedar, there's

another important medicine of ours and I use that as a means of protecting the bed. The glowing underneath is the Grandfather Rocks. In the sweat lodge there's usually a mound outside. It's a half-crescent mound. And depending on who's conducting the ceremony, there's a certain amount of rocks, anywhere from seven to thirty rocks. And they're placed in the fire and they're heated up until they're red hot. Then they're brought in. And there's a cedar trail that goes around the mound, down the centre, and into the lodge. And in this particular place this cedar is around the fire. And what they used to do, they'd sprinkle cedar onto the rocks as well to give it a smell also. It's one of our medicines; it heals in its aroma. And the glowing part represents the Grandfather Rocks. And the bed is over that. And that's where I seen the vision. And that's how I want to show this particular piece here. And the two rocks at either end are personal rocks of mine. This is my buffalo rock here. The other one in the front is my bear rock. And that's what I use for any smudge ceremonies I have. I've had it for almost ten years. That one was given to me by my uncle. He found it at a site where there was spear heads and things like that. And he gave me that one and also some arrowheads. And so I use that piece all the time for any smudging that I do.

What I want to talk about, though, is all this stuff, everything that's included in here. I go through a process, as well as trying to find a means of healing, because that's how I see myself as a healer. For myself, it's healing, but as well for others, it's healing as well. There's a couple of experiences I want to share with you.

The first time when I exhibited in Urban Shaman Gallery last year I was sitting in the back in the administration office and I was doing things. And then I heard the door open, 'cause it had a squeaky door, and then I heard somebody walkin' through. Then this head poked into the office and it was this old guy. Well, not old, he was around thirty-forty [*the group laughs.*], around my age. [*Louis laughs, too.*] He just looked old. He came in and he started talkin' to me. He says, "Eh, what are you doing?" and all this stuff. I could tell he was half-cut. I said, "Oh, I'm not doin' much." I was writing, trying to write, finalize my grant and doing some letter with the Winnipeg Art Gallery thing and trying to finish off the one with Canada Council, and immediately in my head was how I had to shoo this guy out. This was like the second or third week in the opening and so I was talkin' to him and we went out into the gallery and he looked around and he said, "What the hell is all this," he says, "eh?" "Oh," I said, "Oh, it's an art exhibit." And when I went out in the gallery with him, there was this other older guy, much older. He was like fifty. That's old. [*Group laughs.*] So he's out there, too, and they were kinda lookin' around, standin' in one place. So I was talkin' to the old guy and the other guy was standing in front of the bed, looking at the bed, and the old guy was asking me about "What's all this all about?" and he wasn't about as half-cut as the other guy, but then I started talkin' to him, "This whole thing is about my experience with residential schools, about my *kokoum's* time, my parents' time, and our time. And my sister's, and my nephews and nieces are in this time. Explaining all this to him and he said, "Well, you

know, I was in a residential school, too," he said, "up north." And he started talkin' about his experience. And while we were talking, then he explained the story to me and stuff. And the other guy in the front turned around and he was crying. And he was saying he was in that school, too. And he came and shook my hand. He said, "You know, I know I'm drunk and I know I'm not supposed to be in here because, you know, you're using the sacred feathers, eagle feathers, so I'm really sorry I'm here, but I think what you're doing is a good thing." And they both walked out.

I only say this because I'm only a block away from Main Street; the gallery is only a block away from Main Street *[in Winnipeg]* and with my focus on trying to satisfy Canada Council and WAG, I totally forgot what my objective was which was my own people. And they're on the . . . I guess, they're in the front lines, because Main Street is the front line. And the way I see it, it's a psychological warfare, is what we're in, even though it's not like *there*, it's still there. It's a conditioned kind of state that we're in. And, my parents both died on the front lines. My father died on Main Street and I found my mother in her apartment. And . . . she died from alcoholism as well. So those kind of things really look . . . they all just come tumbling down on you so fast, and I started seeing where my objectives were supposed to go again. So as soon as they left, I realized I was humbled again and that was really good for me.

But I think this is what this whole thing is about. You know. It's about sharing our experience. We have to rip the bandaids off because in order to heal we have to take all that off. No more little bandaids, you know – that's not what heals us. We have to really look at what's there and this is what part of this piece is about. It shows certain discordant images, you know, that work in one sense, but don't work in another sense. And trying to follow through with some kind of discussion, to talk about those things. And that's basically what I wanted to do with this project, or this exhibit, was to talk about it. 'Cause I want people to talk to me about it. What do they feel about it. How do they feel about certain things. For me, this is homage to all my relations. It's sort of like an altar. It's, for me it's a quiet place to be. And to me it's my family and this is something I pay my respects to, in the highest esteem.

I remember this seven-year old, at Rat Portage and he come in and he says "What is this? This is not art." *[Everyone laughs.]* "Yeah, this is art," I start explaining, you know. "Just think of it as one big painting that you can actually walk into." He says, "Oh . . . like virtual reality." *[Everyone is chuckling.]* So he got it right away. I showed him other paintings I did. He says, "I want to walk in that one next. Could you build one like that?" *[Louis laughs with the others.]* So anyway, that's what I explained the piece to him. It's an installation that I think that's supposed to invoke those kinds of feelings, you know. It doesn't matter which part of the community you're from or understanding our society or understanding Canadian history. That's something we have to look at. This is how I see it. This is my vision and I just want to share it with people and have people see it or empathize or . . . I don't know, or just talk about it, or not talk about it. That's it and thanks for coming. But if you have questions, please ask.



**Q:** Is this tobacco around here? [The person indicates the 'compass' circle set within the 'lodge poles'.]

**Louis:** No, actually, this is willow leaves. Because I use four different kind of willows. Black, green, red, and there's one other one. I think it's a white willow. So I use, on the ten in between the red willows, then I use the leaves and I use them as a mix—mix them together. So I tried really hard not to waste anything that I took.

**Q:** So you went out and got the red willows, and went out and got the white willows . . . ?

**Louis:** Everything came by accident, I think, in a lot of ways. I went to the south, not by saying "Oh, I think I'll go south, that's where I'm going to get that stuff." I just happened to be there and I thought, "Oh, while I'm here I guess I'll get the willows." I just happened to have the truck or the car and picked up the red willows. And in the north, I was in The Pas, I can't remember what for. I had a van with me at the time. My brother was up there because he lives up there, too. So I said, "I think I need to get some stuff here."

**Q:** It seems like with death above the residential school it would be very depressing, but it doesn't strike me as being very depressing. It seems very hopeful. Do you get the feeling when you work with the materials that it brings you closer to people who have gone before you and the way you want your children to go, when you do this?

**Louis:** Yes, in many ways. I'm working with organic material, but I also have an understanding when I'm working. Because when you're doing things it's . . . your mind goes, too, but at the same time it's what I'm doing. 'Cause I have knowledge of the wood I'm using, also other, like the shield and certain things that I'm using, so I have that connection. Like I can almost feel my parents behind me, or I can almost feel my *kokoum* behind me, you know, because I know they're there. So I'm doing these things and I know what I'm doing. So I'm in my unconscious state of mind, I'm actually communicating with them in that sense.

The way the bed was designed before, it could hold up people. I had to redesign it for travel. My brother looked after the show in Kenora, because I looked after it the first three or four days. It was there for ten days. He looked after it after that and while he was there. He's very superstitious. He gets scared of ghosts and stuff like that. And the old band office where the show was at, apparently has ghosts because St. Mary's Residential School, it's a Catholic school, used to be built right on the place, and apparently people used to be able to hear kids and stuff like that. He gets very, he gets all kind of funny about those kind of things. But he said he wasn't scared. He laid on the bed. He knew the cedar was around him. He knew the eagle feathers were there and he said he felt he was in a very powerful place, sleeping on the bed. And that's where he slept. He looked after . . . he wanted to look after the Lodge because that's what he felt about the piece.

So, what do you think of my painting? Thank you for coming.

**Notes from my conversation with Louis after his talk.**

At the first opening of this installation, it had no interpretation, and Louis realized that viewers, Native and white, had little idea of what was going on. So he prepared interpretive material which, he said, helped a lot. People began to understand that there were layers of meaning, and something about the symbolism. He had layered 'time' in the present, incorporating both 'past' and 'future'.

During the talk he mentions the center as the center of power. I asked him if, because there was power at the center, it was a sacred place and/or experience. Yes, was his reply. It was his vision and it was sacred. When we shut our eyes and then reopened them, we were seeing his vision through his eyes. I wondered about people walking into the sacred space. Did it cause disruption? He said he smudged it every day, but this was not because of the different people coming into it, but to honor his family who are in the pictures and who are there. He said, the sage and the cedar in the exhibit usually calmed people, so they were calmer and in the right frame of mind when they entered.

Since it is sacred, did he work in a particular way on it? Yes. You have to work in the proper state of mind.

## CHAPTER 4: The Ojibwa Crafted Object: Discussion

*[Personal Journal. Early June 1987. Sitka, Alaska.*

*Behind the Sitka Native cultural center is a path through the old trees. I stepped out on it and after a short walk felt a presence to my right. There among the trees and set slightly back from the path was a carved totem pole. The light filtered down around it and it glowed with life. I went on. Again, there was another one! There were several carved poles on the path, set in their natural environment. I walked around the path several more times. It was the first pole that continued to surprise me. Each time I got close to it, I could sense its being there, but would not actually see it until I was right next to it. It was like trying to see the moment when the spring buds open their leaves, not something to be captured so easily, nor a point in time.]*

Bead work, a drum, a flute, brain-tanned hide, a gallery exhibit—can this variety of objects tell us about world view? Ojibwa artisans are all working with different media—do they share similarities through which we can learn about the world as they see it? In this chapter, I will explore the commonalities among this seemingly disparate grouping.

All the artists here talk about traditional meanings which are part of what they create, and it will help us to try to envision pre-contact North America in which objects like these were made and used. That world, of course, is still here today.

### *Pre-contact Setting*

The traditions from which these objects come were oral (and pictorial as we have seen in the scroll). Native North American cultures did not use alphabetic or syllabic written languages until after contact. The rich world of meaning which Western culture has consolidated primarily (although certainly not exclusively) within the written languages, was embedded, and still is,

within many forms. Euro-Americans take written language so much for granted that we tend to think of a culture without a written language as somehow bereft, without the fundamental resources to retain knowledge (therefore, the body of knowledge must be small), and less able to "remember" and pass on knowledge accurately to the next generations. This, of course, is entirely inaccurate!<sup>20</sup>

Accumulated knowledge and meaning are stored in stories, processes, ceremonies, rituals, plants, stars, animals, etc. Nature both stores knowledge and teaches. Nothing is without its lesson. The Western concern for "accuracy" over "time" is again irrelevant, and, if anything, misleading. When one must interact with balance and harmony within a dynamic world, sensitivity to the immediate situation required (and requires) evaluation and flexibility. The body of accumulated knowledge, which remains quite stable, can guide one, but not provide the exact answer in each unique situation. "Accuracy" can be measured only by the appropriateness of one's actions.

For instance, in *The Sacred*, Beck and Waters point out that Native American sacred bodies of knowledge "limit the amount of explaining a person can do. In this way they guide a person's behavior toward the world and its natural laws." Further: "One of the great strengths of Native American sacred ways is their viability or adaptability. These ways are viable because they were aboriginally, and in many cases still are, *practical systems of knowledge*" (4).

In addition, the crafted objects were created and functioned within the breathing presence of the land. I think experience of someplace where this presence has not been overcome by modern Western technology is helpful to understanding this. For instance, Basil Johnston (Ojibwa, writer) describing the "corporeal spirit" of place created by plants says, "Each valley or any other earth form—a meadow, a bay, a grove, a hill—possesses a mood which reflects the state of being of that place. Whatever the mood, happy,

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<sup>20</sup>The reader may wish to consult Walter Ong's *Crafty and Literature* for a comprehensive discussion of this topic.

peaceful, turbulent, melancholy, it is the tone of that soul-spirit. As proof, destroy or alter or remove a portion of the plant beings, and the mood and tone of that valley will not be what it was before" (1976, 33-34).

One can add to this the land forms themselves—sea, lake, prairie, mountains—and all the living beings in that place. Each artist existed within a particular living Place when doing his or her work.

### *Transcendence, Immanence*

Before I discuss the crafted objects in more detail, some additional points might be helpful. A difficulty I have, and still struggle with, is what is meant by the Ojibwa use of the word "spiritual" or by something having "spirit." From my Euro-American cultural background, my notion of "spiritual" refers to transcendency. For example, I might go to church and pray to a transcendent god. Or, in a non-religious sense, I describe an experience of heightened awareness "mystical" (but probably would not describe as "spiritual"). By "mystical" I would have meant transcendent or connecting with something beyond or out of this world. But I generally think of "spirituality" in association with organized religion (e.g. Christianity, Judaism), and the thought of a non-aligned atheist or agnostic being "spiritual" produces in me a sense of inconsistency.

Vine Deloria points out that the Western religious concept of transcendency is a function of linear time which allows the Western thinker to postulate a future transcendent experience of a heaven or hell which will reward or punish deeds done in the immediate life. Applying the notion of spiritual transcendency in an Ojibwa context, I think, would be a misunderstanding.

Viola Cordova in discussing the Apache concept of *Usen* (a term which coincides with other Native words for the concept: Blackfoot—*natoji*, Lakota—*wakan tanka*, Navajo—*nil'ch'i*, Ojibwa—*manitou*), uses Basil Johnston's description of the term as signifying something "of substance, character, nature, essence, quiddity beyond comprehension and therefore beyond

explanation, a mystery; supernatural; potency, potential" (1998, 27) She goes on to say: "The concept of this mysterious force also shares the notion of its being all-pervasive. It is everywhere and in all things. Perhaps is all things." Again, she quotes Johnston: "[Scholars] continue to labor under the impression that the word 'manitou' means spirit and that it has no other meaning. ... They do not know that the word bears other meanings even more fundamental than 'spirit'" (27).

According to Cordova, the terms

encompass the notion of something that simply *is*, that remains unidentifiable, mysterious, "supernatural" in the sense that it is beyond pointing to. Nevertheless, this mysterious *something* precedes everything else; it serves at the same time as the ground of things and the manifestation of itself. (28)

Cordova finds an approximation to this concept in two Western thinkers: Spinoza and Einstein. Spinoza maintained a concept of God/Substance/Nature which was immanent and the one substance which makes up the world. Cordova notes that matter or nature, which Spinoza called this substance, "he saw no problem in calling ... sacred ... Albert Einstein, when asked whether he believed in God, replied that he 'believed in the God of Spinoza.'" Einstein offered "us not a world that was composed of the dualities of matter and energy but of something more clearly akin to "matterenergy"—there was only one 'substance'" (30).<sup>21</sup> Cordova notes that the new developments in physics present a world similar to the theory of Usen, a world of interrelationships and interdependencies, but it has had little effect upon "the sharp dualities typical of Western thought (matter/energy, mind/body, material/spiritual, animate/inanimate) ..." (31).

This "mystery," then, is all around us. It is within nature; it is within us. Perception of it is immediate, present experience. "Spiritual" references and thoughts are not sent to or received from something beyond, but are a part of the daily matrix.

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<sup>21</sup>In a conversation with Joe Rose on the problem I was having understanding "spirituality," he also used Einstein's "matterenergy" in explanation.

*Circularity, Cycles, and Movement*

As noted above, in *God Is Red Vine* Deloria discusses the linearity of Western time.<sup>22</sup> There is a past *receding* from us as we progress *toward* a future. We can see neither end of these. "Infinity" stretches beyond and *something* must have given us a beginning. It is this linearity, Deloria says, which allows Euro-Americans to posit the transcendent god and to see our history as an irretrievable, but examinable, past.

Frank Montano tells the story of the visiting elder who spoke about removing the idea of "time" from one's thoughts, that we are all sitting here, myself, my ancestors, and the future children. Also, he talks of the sound of the flute as being "beyond time."

"Time" in the Native American sense is cyclical. One of the most obvious ways to observe this is in seasonal changes—the return of birds in the spring, the maturing of plants in the summer, the changing leaves and cooler weather of autumn, and the chill quiet of winter into the melting of spring again. The circling of the sun, the moon, the seasons, the ebb and flow of tides. The cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. There is constant creation and decay. For example, Louis Ogemah shows the "history" of his family in a circle, and he "layers time" in the present.

Even though we can see these observable examples around us, it is still an extraordinarily difficult notion for a Western acculturated person to grasp. How can things not move forward? There are observable changes in these patterns—they are never the same; doesn't that mean there is linearity?

I have heard an altered version of the concept of circularity several times now, once in a class and recently in an academic presentation: This version says that the circle of time is not a true circle, but a spiral. There is circularity in that we can observe the cycles, but because we

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<sup>22</sup>The linearity of Western time is discussed by many authors and Native teachers. I simply have chosen Deloria as appropriate here in this short discussion. Cf. Shain, "Time and Pluralism," in *Ayaengwaemizin* 2:1.)

observe that there is never an exact repetition of occurrence, there must be a movement forward to accommodate this observance. My sense is that this version merely accommodates the Western inability to grasp the concept, the inability to let go of linearity and all the notions that accompany it—progress, improvement, upward mobility, etc.

And while my own understanding may change, my sense, as I write this study, is that this is a true circle, not a spiral. Also, that "time" as an additional concept is superfluous and irrelevant. Changes in the cyclic flow are the visible recombinings of all the constant metamorphoses—the continual reorganizing from the cycles of birth and death, creation and decay. My grandparents are part of that, as I am, and as my future nieces and nephews are. That is why they are here with me now. It is also why there can be unique combinations of things, why I am different from you, or that tree is different from another. The ticking of the clock is just another rhythm in an entirely immanent world. There is no time to be measured; it would only come back upon itself.

Movement, rhythms, changes, metamorphoses are this dynamic Native world. When one engages this fluid and constantly changing world, the balance and harmony of one's actions are critical.

As an example, we can look at the Native expression of responsibility for the "seventh generation" which Louis Ogemah uses. Westerners borrow the reference and think of it in a linear way, trying to think of seven generations away from us in the future. It is difficult to imagine something that seems so distant, so separated from us. But if we look at seven generations in a circular way, as the recombining of all that is within the very present, the idea is within our grasp. We don't have to predict what the consequences of our actions might be in some distant future, we simply see what is around us. What we have put into the world as pollution and imbalance, will recombine into our offspring.

Now that we have supplied ourselves with several orienting concepts, I'll move to the



crafted objects themselves.

### *From Secular to Sacred*

We can see a spectrum of objects made and used in a secular way through objects which have a spiritual purpose, but which are not sacred; and sacred objects. The range which emerges from the interviews suggests that crafted pieces can have qualities anywhere within the spectrum depending on a combination of what materials are used, how the object is crafted and by whom, and what its purpose is.

Marge Hmielewski and Frank Montano identified secular objects which could be used in daily and public contexts.<sup>23</sup> Secular work can be sold and can contain materials which would not be used in a sacred object. It can be made in a social context, and one need not concentrate one's spirituality into it as one would do with a gift, for instance. Yet it is still important that positive energy flow into the work.

Secular objects may be the beaded earrings which Marge will sell, or a dream catcher with purchased red feathers. Further, these items could be sold to anyone. Secular drums would not have eagle feathers on them. They are for dances at pow-wows where anyone can dance.

Secular work can be made while watching television or during social gatherings, for instance, when women are visiting.

I'm making things, they're making things ... We laugh and we talk because it's ... very social and which is good. As long as everybody is enjoying there's a lot of positive energy going on. It isn't spiritual, because that isn't what we're doing. We're socializing. Many of the crafts and that done years and years ago were done by the women in the moon hut. You're going to be there three or four days, so they did their craft work while they were in there and it was social, because there wasn't only one woman in there. Sometimes there were three or four depending on how large a

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<sup>23</sup>When I discuss the interviews, I use the artisans' first names, yet I use authors' last names in other sections. I have not meant this with disrespect for either. The convention in academic reference has determined the use of last names in those sections. Because I know the artists and have worked with them, I would find it quite awkward, for example, to refer to Marge as "Hmielewski" throughout the thesis.]

community we're talking about.

One still uses one's spirituality when making secular objects, because one lives with it, but it's a different type, a "daily spirituality." Even though the object is secular, the artisan would still want to be in positive frame of mind when making it. As Marge puts it, "I would really hate to make this pair of earrings and be angry and thinking of something awful and then have some poor person wear it, because I've already put negative energy in there. I don't think that would be very nice."

Gifts aren't secular, but they also aren't classifiable in a category "gifts," nor are they sacred. For example, one might not use the purchased red feathers with the wooden canes Marge was working on, but she could put the special beads on them. They might be a gift for an elder. However, she still wouldn't use an eagle feather.

The use of an eagle feather is reserved for particularly spiritual or sacred purposes. In the case of a gift of healing for a family member an eagle feather could be used, such as on the dream catcher Marge made for her grandson who was having nightmares. This is a more spiritual gift and working on it would need to be done in an equally suitable way.

Works that are sacred can be either personal, as Louis identifies his vision, or for ceremonial purposes, as Joe identifies the Little Boy Water Drum. Midewitin or other ceremonies, honor dances at pow-wows, and visions are examples of sacred activities. For these sacred purposes, only natural materials would be used. Eagle feathers may be used with sacred objects. This type of object would not be sold, and Joe mentions that few non-Native people have even seen these objects.<sup>24</sup>

One works in a particular manner if the object is to be for sacred or ceremonial

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<sup>24</sup>At times Native American sacred objects have been sold. Often in the past it was because people had no one to whom to pass on ceremonial objects. For example, James Red Sky sold his Midewitin scrolls with the interpretations to Selwyn Dewdney for the Glenbow Museum in Alberta (Dewdney, ch. 1). This was not an unusual occurrence, but, of course, this does not account for all the sacred objects in museum collections.

purposes. Marge explains: "If I were making something for a spiritual reason, I would try to do it at a time where I would not have to worry about the telephone ringing. I would want to be by myself. Very calm, very [pause] hopefully peaceful. Very into what I was doing. Thinking of why I was making it, what it was going to be used for. Keeping my mind on that, so a lot of it is with your thought process. ... even the way you craft something, or the way you make it, it's different when it's used for spiritual ceremonies."

### *Ritual in Collecting Material*

In collecting or obtaining material, the artist must make a tobacco offering. In this ritual<sup>25</sup> the artisan recognizes the spirits of the deer, the tree, the plant, the bird, the rock—whatever is taken to be used in the crafted piece. With tobacco the artist thanks the creator and the other-than-human beings for the gifts given, makes an exchange for what is taken, and recognizes his or her responsibility to respect that which has been given.

As Richard explains, "every time that we go get something or go do something we give tobacco. And that's out of respect for a good life. We pray for those that have a tough life ... We always pray for everything because everything has a spirit." He continues,

We believe everything comes in a dream. And when we put everything down, we put our tobacco out, and those spirits help us, and tell us maybe in a dream, maybe out in the woods. We don't know. ... When I started [learning] ... I had no direction and I just gave people tobacco.

As Louis says,

tobacco is one of our most, I guess, [pause] powerful exchange [to the creative force], 'cause tobacco is something that we use all the time. I've been taught this since I was a kid, to always put tobacco out—put tobacco in the water when we go canoeing, or boating, or whatever because *Mishupeshu* is in the undercurrents and this kind of thing. So everything I did was always using tobacco and acknowledging the world

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<sup>25</sup>In general, I am using "ritual" to denote those rites of a more personal nature between the artist and the "mystery." At times, I use the term "creator" because that is what was most used in the interviews. It can be synonymous with "great mystery," "master of life," "gitché manitou," etc. "Ceremony" will be used to denote the more formal set of acts of which, within the ceremony, a ritual may be one.

around me and that was the way I was taught. Everything that's in this room has been picked up—it if was organic it was picked up and I have to [make] a tobacco offering.

And as Joe relates, "When Osh-ka-bay-wis saw the child, he knew that his long quest was ended. That this was the one that he had been seeking. So he left sacred tobacco, *Ah-say-ma*, some colored ribbon, as an indication that no harm had come to the child. He took the child."

Sometimes other things are used in place of, or with, tobacco. As we see in Joe's story the Osh-ka-bay-wis also leaves some colored ribbon. Marge mentions that if one doesn't have tobacco something personal can be left. Another substitute used traditionally is red willow which Louis refers to: "I used red willow as the main poles [of the sweat lodge] because red willow is another strong medicine in our usage. When we don't have tobacco we peel the red bark off and we take the inner bark and we use that as a tobacco. And we use a lot of it for offerings."

We see, then, that *how* the material is obtained is very important. The ritual of exchanging, thanking, and acknowledging responsibility maintains balance and harmony and allows the spirits of the materials to pass unimpaired into the object being made.

### *Spirituality of the Materials*

The spiritual component of the materials varies. Some materials which have been purchased (red feathers on the dream catcher) or manufactured commercially such as plastic-simulated-wood have spirit in that "everything has spirit." But materials like these would go only into common items. These materials wouldn't be used for more spiritual or ceremonial purposes. However, commercially-made and purchased glass beads can also be used in something made to be worn in a ceremony. Joe has told me that the Ojibwa word for bead is "little spirit berry." (One finds a similar meaning for the shells used in wampum.) Or natural material such as birch bark may be made into items which are to be sold in the tourist trade, yet can also be a component in a sacred object. The "spirit" in these materials allows them to be used in a

utilitarian or social fashion. How it is determined which material is suitable for spiritual or sacred objects seems to be a function of whether the material is natural, and, e.g. in the case of glass beads, the time taken and the attitude with which they are worked.

Another consideration is the relative sacredness of the material. For instance, an eagle feather is inherently sacred, but a pheasant feather is not. Use of an eagle feather on a secular object would be "showing disrespect to the spiritual part ..." (Marge)

The spirits of the physical materials, the deer, the cedar, the eagle—of the living, natural, organic beings, come to live in the crafted object. The deer who gave the hide for the drum, the cedar which becomes the flute, the eagle whose feather is used on the dream catcher whose purpose is to heal—the spirits of these beings reside in the drum, the flute, or the dream catcher. In these instances, the crafted object is being made for a specific spiritual or ceremonial function, beyond everyday or utilitarian purposes.

### *Technical Knowledge*

In the interviews, the artists talk about the practical challenge of learning and doing their crafts. Richard works in steps:

When I get ready and prepared to look at that hide I have to manage to look at the size of that hide, and what I'm going to do, and what kind of project, then I prepare that hide by de-hairing it and taking off the epidermis, gettin' the brain ready, keepin' the heart sac. The first two [hides] didn't work out so I just kept going ... I don't give up. Somethin' ain't right I have to figure out, look at each step that I go into. ... everything is like a circle, so when I start I look at my circle and I say, 'OK, here's my first step. That seemed to be all right.' Now, I go to my next step, and I say, maybe I did this, or maybe I did that. Maybe there wasn't enough of this. So each time I do somethin' I go into steps."

The skills and knowledge needed to create any of these objects are demanding as Frank, in particular, explains. But there is more than skill in working with the materials. There is an interchange with the material as one works with it physically. As Richard says, sometimes

he feels as if the deer is there helping him, giving him directions. One wants to do the best one can, regardless of the skill level achieved. The effort reflects one's responsibility to the spirits of the materials and to the finished piece, what one is putting into the world.

In an earlier conversation, Marge mentioned that if she beads a leaf and "I had to think of what to do next, I wouldn't be able to do anything else, the leaf would stop. It's the flow of energy from the hide, the design, and through me—circular—that let's the design flow. From the leaf comes something else and it moves outward."

### *The Spiritual Attitude Guides the Work of the Hands*

The mind-attitude of the artisan during the object's creation will become an integral part in the life of that object. This state of mind is put into the object as the artisan works with his or her hands and tools. The artists talk about being peaceful while working, hopeful, undisturbed, thinking "right," thinking of one's purpose, and working with positive energy.

Marge explains: "If I'm doing something for someone I really care about, for my family, for spiritual, whatever, I'm very careful with it. I feel that if I don't do right by whatever I'm making, then it's not going to do right by the ceremony, or whatever it's being used for. So if I don't take care with it, then it's not going to be careful either..."

The same is true for how one plays the flute. Frank talks about being very careful about how he plays because the sound reaches out and one doesn't know what or whom it will affect.

Especially for the creation of a sacred object, investment of one's intense being is needed. Marge again: "When I do things where my spirituality is needed, or my spirituality comes forth, ... all of me is in there—not just my fingers ... It's my thoughts, my—all the positive energy I can give it. ... I allow the whole of my spirituality to take over, the whole of it, everything." Creating something for ceremonies is a "high plateau" of spirituality.

The artist is not alone when creating. We saw above that Richard feels the spirit of the deer with him. Louis says,

I'm working with organic material, but I also have an understanding when I'm working. Because when you're doing things ... your mind goes, too, but at the same time it's what I'm doing. 'Cause I have knowledge of the information of wood I'm using, like the shield and certain things that I'm using, so I have that connection. Like I can almost feel my parents behind me, or I can almost feel my *kokoum* behind me, you know, because I know they're there. So I'm doing these things and I know what I'm doing. So I'm in my unconscious state of mind, I'm actually communicating with them in that sense.

Taking one's time in creating something seems an important aspect of "thinking in the right way." Not rushing, attention to detail, taking care in what one does. The actions reflect the state of mind, and the state of mind needs time.

As Richard says about the deer hides, "If you go too fast, you can rip a hide. Fleshing it. You can rip the hide by taking off the epidermis. You can rip the hide at any point, if you go too fast, too much in a hurry. The faster you go, the less you'll ever get done."

In talking about the beads she had been given, Marge notes, "There's an altogether different feeling when I am working with these. They are hand-made. Somebody took an awful lot of time with them ... and I don't want to waste them. That's somebody else's positive—I don't know. They'd have to be spiritual because a lot of time went into making those."

### *Life Attitude*

In the story of the Little Boy Water Drum there are seven teachings associated with the drum. Benton-Bensai tells about them in *The Mishomis Book*:

- 1) To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom, 2) To know love is to know peace, 3) To honor all of the Creation is to have respect, 4) bravery is to face the foe with integrity, 5) honesty in facing a situation is to be brave, 6) humility is to know yourself as a sacred part of the Creation, 7) truth is to know all of these things. (64)

These teachings around the drum allow the elders to teach the young people. "This relationship

provides a link between the knowledge that must flow between generations. It provides the links for an unbroken string of lives all the way back to our origin as a people" (72).

The ways the artists work and their attitudes toward the materials are part of this greater life-attitude. For example, acknowledging what one takes with the gift of tobacco is important. It is not, however, a separate action but part of this life-attitude toward what one is given.

As Richard works with the deer, processing it into all the parts which will be used— the hide, the meat, the organs,

I thank all the spirits that give me this knowledge, a good way of life. I count those that are there. ... It's more than just the deer. 'Cause the deer just feeds us, but he also has a spirit that's sacrificed for us, and that spirit gave his life so that we can eat or we can be warm, with this clothing ... And every time that we go get something or do something we give tobacco. And that's out of respect for a good life.

Of the necessity to be humble Richard says: "My lifetime goal that I live is to live a humble life, every day. To be humble to all mankind. To be good to all the spirits that are good to me. Those deer, the bear. Everything that we walk with. I've learned that we have to be just as humble. So those are my goals when I look forward to waking up everyday."

Louis was reminded of the importance of being humble when the two men wandered into his installation at the Urban Shaman Gallery on Main Street. "I started seeing where my objectives were supposed to go again. So as soon as they left, I realized I was humbled again and that was really good for me."

The value of patience and persistence is shown within the story of the Little boy Water Drum as the osh-ka-bay-wis, "servant" or "helper," carries out the tasks given him by the Great Spirit. Of trying one more time. Also the otter, going against one's nature to help others. And in hearing this story, we can see its relationship to the life-attitudes of the other artisans. The teaching is in the story which is related through the tying of the drum. The learning is again re-circled as the artists practice their crafts. The teaching is once more living in the crafted object.



### ***Symbolic Meanings in the Materials***

All organic or natural materials used in the crafted pieces carry their own traditional teachings. The tying of the drum is an overt, direct teaching of cultural knowledge and tradition. Other knowledge, teaching, and meaning may be implicit: colors are often associated with the medicine wheel and represent the meanings of the four (or six) cardinal directions. Design may be symbolic such as in the use of the Thunderbirds in a gift of healing. Animals carry teachings, for example, the deer reminds one of its sacrifice to feed and clothe the Anishnabe; the eagle is the sacred messenger of the great spirit.

Another example are plants which are used. All the artists use tobacco as an offering. Frank uses cedar to make his flutes. Louis uses cedar, sage, and different kinds of willow in *Regeneration*. "[The] mysterious powers ... might be found in objects— thunderstorms, charred wood, obsidian, feather. Each plant has a special power and personality which doctors, medicine people, and other specialists learn to know and address" (Beck and Waters 10).

Tobacco is one of the four sacred plants sent from each of the four directions. The others are sage, cedar, and sweet grass. All four plants are indigenous to North America. Tobacco is from the East; the direction of new beginnings. Stories are associated with each plant. As well as medicinal qualities, they each have spiritual characteristics and particular uses. (Benton-Benai 24)

### ***The Object Becomes Alive***

As we have seen above, all the artists who spoke with me acknowledged a great responsibility for their thoughts and actions; everything they put into the crafted object will live on—the object putting back into the world what the artist has put into it. The artist is not doing something separate from or "like" what the "creator" did, but participating in the Act of Creation which is continual.

We see this in Frank's description of when the flute becomes alive. When it is first crafted, it is a potential flute. When the breath is blown through it, it becomes alive—again an act of re-creation. And, through ceremony, the flute will communicate what kind of flute it is, what it will be used for. Louis's vision as he re-creates it in the installation has its own life and being, *as it did when he saw it.*

Because the objects are alive, they need special care. Louis smudges the installation daily (or arranges to have it done), to honor his family and to show his respect to all the spirits which are there.

Feasting is a ceremony "taking care" of or respecting the flute, the drum, the spirits, the art. For instance, part of the care of the flute is feasting it on a regular basis.

As another example, I attended the opening of Amoo Angecoombe's (Ojibwa artist) mother's drawings at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. He, with his daughter's assistance, conducted a feast for the drawings. He said the Elders had told him this should be done for artifacts and art, because they were living.

Richard also feasts the spirits: "At some point I give them [the deer whose hides he tans] a feast. ... Give a feast, or prepare a dish, so that when I'm workin' a hide or something, that I always keep my knowledge and be humble with those spirits like they talk about. And all those spirits have to eat, too. So I prepare a feast to feed all those things and give thanks for what I have, and the knowledge that I share."

### *Regeneration—the Installation*

Louis works in modern ways by exhibiting a work in an art gallery, crafting an installation, and sharing a personal vision. These are accommodations to the contemporary situation and issues through which the traditional practice of healing can take place. The shamanic and/or Midewiwin purpose to heal is directed toward all those people Louis sees as affected by the

"disease" of colonialism—a mind-set and import of the European.

He crafts the installation consciously using the traditional ways, offering tobacco for the organic materials, using plants which have powerful medicinal and spiritual qualities. Re-enacting the place of the vision and the vision itself. The space becomes the sweat lodge, and the people who need healing are invited into it. He layers time and meaning. We can see the medicine wheel in the installation.

As in more traditional work, each material has its Ojibwa cultural meaning, but by choice of plants and materials, non-Native people can feel the spirituality of the work without knowing the traditional cultural meanings. Even if one is not aware of the Midewiwin sacred scrolls on birchbark, using birchbark is familiar to non-Natives. Louis also uses the funeral scaffold, a more generic Native image, to invite the non-Native to connect with something recognizable in order to find further understanding within the work.

Meaning is circular. Death becomes honorable death, becomes life. The family "history" in the birchbark photo albums circles hopefully toward regeneration in spirit as it cycles again to the East. Regeneration of spirit, healing, may also be regarded as transformative for all who participate in the installation.

### *Powerful Objects*

I have talked about all the things which make up the crafted object and its becoming a unique being. What I have not addressed is the power of certain objects. For me, trying to understand what "power" means is quite difficult, and perhaps the way to approach it is to look at those objects which are said to have "power" or to be "powerful." In this study that would include: the Little Boy Water Drum (sacred items "consecrated" by ceremony); Louis's vision (personal visions); the center of Louis's vision; the sound of the flute, the sound of the drum and the rattles; certain plants such as tobacco, red willow, cedar, sage, and sweetgrass; the eagle;

and things made for ceremonies which are done with an intensely spiritual state of mind.

Why is something said to be "powerful"? Joe described the Little Boy Water Drum as being a sacred, powerful object, the ceremony investing the drum with the power. Louis also identifies his installation as a "sacred place" a "place of power". Power, then can come from what the object is or from the sound. The flute when played, whether it is secular or sacred, is powerful. Ceremony can invest power, and power is associated with vision.

Power, then, seems to be an intimate participation in the sacred, participation in the power of the "mystery" or matrix, the hidden or unseen spirit, through ceremony or vision. Marge talks about participating in ceremonies and getting a "high" which she wouldn't reach individually. In *The Sacred*, Beck and Waters call this spirituality "collective-mindedness." Power in sound is especially sacred, touching the heartbeat of the world, the first sound, the rhythm and pulse of life.

We have seen that what the artist makes takes on its own life and is a living presence in the world. What is created takes up the characteristics and spirits of the materials which go into it. It takes on and carries with it the attitudes and energy, the spirituality, which the artisan puts into it. And what is created carries all the cultural meanings and traditional knowledge associated with the materials, the artist, and the kind of object it is. In addition, the crafted object has its own character and spirituality. The crafted object—whether it be a flute or drum, is a being in itself, one which has the breath of its own life. It *is* the same way I *am* or the hawk flying *is*.

An object may be a humble pair of earrings or a sacred drum, but the object lives its life putting forth its own spirituality and power.

In a contemporary context with which the reader may be familiar, if we understand the crafted object as alive, and especially if it is a sacred object, we can picture these in museums,

catalogued or exhibited without the proper ritual care. These objects have been taken from their meaningful, natural environment and home. They have been taken out of their context, their lives diminished or dormant. There are some museums and galleries which are sensitive to this and allow for the proper rituals and respect for the crafted pieces.

It is important, then, to realize that the crafted objects are themselves beings in the life-world.

## **Chapter 5: Transformative Philosophy: Supplying Content**

In Chapter One, I noted that my corollary objective was to find a framework within which to move from a Western to Ojibwa world view and that transformative philosophy seemed to offer that structure. Transformative philosophy is specifically moving to a state of wider consciousness which, in Western terms, is called "mystical." This philosophy does not apply to understanding a culture which does not itself cultivate or practice a wider consciousness, for example, moving from American or Canadian to French or Swedish.

I believe the artisans with whom I spoke function within a state of wider consciousness or awareness when they craft spiritual or sacred objects. They use the English word "spiritual" to describe this awareness. Further, I think this state of awareness is not confined to the aspects of revelatory, transcendent mysticism of Western religious experience, but is a highly developed mode of consciousness *within which* the intellect functions; one has ongoing holistic interactions with the sensible world.

Stace gives several examples of what he calls extroverted mysticism. These examples are momentary experiencings of the oneness of the natural world. People "see" and experience this oneness, but do not interact within it.<sup>26</sup>

Stace also describes a less usual occurrence in which the person lives within the mystical experience for a period of time. The person functions in the ongoing state of mystical

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<sup>26</sup>I am confining myself to the experience of creating and experiencing the objects, but am not addressing the visions from which some of them arise, e.g. Frank's learning flute-making through the help of a Grandmother in vision, or Louis's experience of the vision in the Mide sweat lodge.

experience. It is my contention that this is generally the state of mind in which the Ojibwa artists work. But, now that we have used Western terminology to describe this state of mind, and tentatively identified it from the Western view, we need to throw away our Western concept.

Let us return to some of the descriptions of Ojibwa spirituality and of how the artists work.

Marge said that Native spirituality is not the same as Western religion. The imposition of authorized, organized religion was, for her, a surface accommodation which did not change her inner (Native) spirituality. Ojibwa spirituality is a matter between the individual and the creator (here meaning the mysterious power or force which was discussed earlier), a matter of seeking balance according to what the individual needs.

This state of working focuses the mind in a particular way and the physical work expresses and transmits this into the object for which spirituality is needed. "I allow the whole of my spirituality to take over, the whole of it, everything." As Marge explains it, there are different plateaus of spirituality. There is daily spirituality which

is part of my spirituality, but that's *my* individual spirituality. Then, we have what I have always classified as group spirituality. And that's when there are ceremonies, and that's when everybody gets involved in the same spiritual aspect. ... that's a very strong, passionate, overwhelming spirituality. I've gone to Midewiwin ceremonies, there are other different ceremonies and you get so caught up in it that you're just riding a high. ... You don't want to come down. ... that's a high plateau.

The life-attitude of humbleness, thanksgiving, respect, is the outward appearance of spirituality the way Richard expresses it. This keeps one in a proper relationship with the "mysterious force" with which one is connected. As Louis states: "What [spirituality] comes down to is ... how you treat other people." Losing one's spirituality is loss of orientation which connection with this force gives. At the North in Louis's installation is "... the book I call The Book of Hope because this is where regeneration actually occurs, where we actually regenerate in more ways than one and that's regeneration of the spirit for us."

Richard was the least conscious of my own lack of understanding of this life-attitude. Marge, Joe, and Frank were conscious of my limitations and made an effort to explain to me what they were talking about. Louis was aware of this lack of understanding of non-Native people in general and made a conscious effort to have the spirituality and power of his installation accessible to the non-Native through experience and discourse. I think my experience of the intensity of the conversation with Richard was because he was not making an effort to talk "at my level" but allowed me to experience with him what he was describing— the spirits of the trees, the felt spirit-presence of the deer, the attitude in which one *is* connected.

Beck and Waters in *The Sacred* call the ceremonial experience "collective-mindedness," which Marge calls the "high plateau" of spirituality. The artist, working alone with the materials to create an object/being to be used in a sacred or ceremonial way, has a particular responsibility to invest it with spirituality commensurate with its purpose. This entails thinking and acting from within a certain mind-state during the process from collecting appropriate material, crafting the object, and caring for it after it has been created.

I will include here an experience I had shortly after I talked with Marge and she had explained the way to use tobacco and the way in which one needs to work with a spiritual piece. I was planning the making of two bags of brain-tanned leather which were to be very special gifts. I wanted them to include several items of which one would be cedar bark. I took tobacco and went to the woods where I live where there are cedar trees. I went from one tree to another, put down some tobacco, said thank you, took some bark, and went back to the house. Something did not feel right; I was very uncomfortable. What I had done did not seem in keeping with the gifts, nor was there a "response" (the only way I can describe it) in return.

I thought it over that night. It seemed to me one tree in particular was appropriate for the gifts, and the next day I went back to that tree. This day I took time. My dogs were with me and they went off exploring on their own. I thought about that cedar tree and why it was appropriate



for the gifts; why I wanted to include its bark. I thought what the gifts meant as symbols of the qualities I wanted to give to my nieces for whom the gifts were intended. The daily sounds of the woods receded and suddenly there was the squeaky sound of the pileated woodpecker's wings as he flew close to me. He landed on a nearby tree and drilled for a few moments. Then he left. Next came the burst of busy rustling and flapping as a grouse flew up to a branch in front of me where she perched for a few minutes and then left. Then there was an insistent dry rustling noise behind me until I finally turned around. A white-breasted nuthatch was vigorously scrabbling through the curlings of bark on the birch tree. I sensed it was now the time to give the tobacco to the tree. I then took the bark I needed and the dogs returned along with the common sounds of the woods and we all went home. This day I *knew* I had acted correctly. Each bird had given something of itself to the gifts, although I hadn't presumed to ask. I had *thought* what the gifts were for and who they were for. The world ordered itself around me and interacted with me differently than it had the day before when I thought and, therefore, acted in a different way.

This was not the first time I have had an experience of this quality, but it was the first time I deliberately thought/acted in such a way in order to enter into a differently-ordered interaction. I then tried to move into this frame of mind each time I thought of or worked on the gifts. I think this is a rudimentary example of functioning within a widened state of awareness, which, within the Ojibwa culture, is a highly developed mode of interaction ranging from daily spirituality to the most intense collective-mindedness.

This experience, then, illustrates the transformative process, a combination of experience and reflection. I had been given an "experiential method"—how to approach gathering material. I followed the method and had an experience of which, on previous occasions, I had been aware but had no way of explaining. On this occasion, the experience was defined and I understood that I was engaging the life-world in a different way, and it was responding to me. In Ojibwa terms, I was respecting the other beings from whom I was asking

for something. I was acknowledging the gift and my gratitude through giving tobacco—a powerful spiritual presence. Because of this experience I now look at how I am interacting with others differently than I did before. It also gives me some additional understanding of what the artists mean when they speak of working in the appropriate way.

Earlier I discussed Abram's locating of "consciousness" within the sensible and sensing world. We may be able to associate this "consciousness" with the "great mystery," the unknowable force which permeates all things and from which all things form their own unique expression—which Cordova identified as Usen for the Apache, or Manitou for the Ojibwa (or which Spinoza called God/Nature/Substance). For instance, Louis says: "[There were] shamanistic practices in my family ... So I had the ability to see certain spirits when I was growing up. ... It's happened to me and I know there's something stronger than me out there. I know we have a control of it; it also controls us. There's a power out there. There's an energy out there."

Using transformative philosophy as a method to bridge Western and Ojibwa world views, one may experience a transformed understanding. If we can comprehend that the life-world can be conscious and sensible, we may be better able to understand how an Ojibwa artist can regard a flute or a drum or a beaded design as a being with purpose and with which one can interact.

I also pointed out Abram's explanation of the layered life-world, in which all things participate, and from which the cultural life-worlds form. Another way of exploring this is to look at any one of the Ojibwa sacred plants: tobacco, cedar, sage, and sweetgrass. Cedar, for example, has a unique life-force ("special power and personality") which is part of the life-world. This is the life-world non-Ojibwa have access to even though we have a different cultural background. However, our culture may not have given us the tools to understand the cedar in

this way—as a particular power. This does not mean that this understanding is inaccessible to us. This is the job of transformative philosophy: to help us widen our consciousness to be able to actually perceive the cedar in this way; or, at the very least, to understand that others can.

An indication that this is the case—Louis's installation needed to be smudged (i.e. the wafting of smoke from cedar, sage, or sweetgrass over the object) each day. But as he was going back to Winnipeg, he arranged for one of the interns at the gallery, a non-Native man, to do the smudging. In this case, it is not the *person* who is doing it that matters, it is the *act* of doing it with the proper plants. Louis also mentions that the properties of the cedar and the sage used in the installation calm people and help put them in the right frame of mind when they come into the exhibit. The smudging is done to honor Louis's family and the power of the vision.

The cultural layering is the meanings, stories, myths, etc. associated with the particular plant. This cultural life-world is accessible to us from two directions. We may learn descriptively Ojibwa cultural beliefs and practices associated with various plants, animals, etc. while still within our own world view. Or, we can make the effort to participate with the life-world in a "spiritual" way and begin from there to learn the meanings of the Ojibwa cultural "layer."

In the installation *Regeneration*, Louis layers the life-world with personal and cultural meanings in a healing process and within the sacred/powerful space of his vision. In addition, he has invested it with the spirituality of traditional practices in crafting the work. Entering the installation can be a transformative experience.

Another example of cross-cultural transformative experience is the flute music. As Frank describes it, the high notes in the Ojibwa songs are the spirit notes. "The sound of the flute is pure spirit with no time at all involved with it, it's just pure spirit." The low notes are the notes of the people. Sometimes at concerts people tell Frank that they have felt transported spiritually, they haven't known whether or not to clap. He explains this as the bringing together of pure spirit and the people through the powerful music of the flute. Because of this power, he feels a great

responsibility to think and act with care, because what he does will, through the music, be put into the world.

I think with this understanding we can move beyond the Western definition of mystical experience and realize that there is another state of awareness, called "spiritual" by Ojibwa, in which one can function. This mind-attitude can be, and apparently is in Ojibwa culture, a highly developed mode of thinking and interaction within which the intellect functions. When one functions within this mode of awareness, the world of potential experience is ordered differently *of its own accord*. This mind-state is accessible to non-Ojibwa people through the transformative philosophical process as I have demonstrated in this study.

## Chapter 6: Reflection

Mary Black notes that Ojibwa phenomenology is "more advanced than in Western society" (which created a phenomenological dilemma for Hallowell) (93). The move from a Western intellectual view to a basic understanding of an Ojibwa world view offers a considerable challenge. Approaching Ojibwa world view from the grounded life-world may offer a viable route. In this chapter, I reflect on what has appeared by using this route.

The "spiritual" nexus has been particularly difficult to understand. That it is immanent rather than transcendent means that it is in the here-and-now, and appears to be sensible. Abram uses the words "matrix," "Flesh," "mystery," and "power" to describe this invisible presence. We can, I think, with some reliability, identify this with Usen, Manitou, Natoji, Nil'ch'i. Louis, for instance, simply calls it "a power."

We have seen that the "mystery" (one of the words which connects the Western interpretation and the Native) is sentient and sensible, animate and aware. From this Flesh or matrix the perceptually reciprocating entities arise (and are *not* limited to humans). "Everything has spirit" but only natural things and some man-made things go appropriately into a sacred object. The "spirit" of each being goes into the crafted object. And, the crafted object has "a spirit" of its own. How can these statements be reconciled?

If we connect "everything has spirit" with the being of all entities in the matrix, and if the matrix is the "matterenergy" as suggested by Cordova, then we can see that all things—earth, rocks, ducks, humans, aluminum, plastic—since they are composed of this, have "spirit." But the spiritual being of each is different. I would suspect that at the life-world level, each thing's

unique combination of "spirit" or matterenergy gives it its own particular spirit or energy, some appropriate for sacred objects and some not. Frank says that it is the "spirit which animates the body." This sounds as if it were mind/body dualism. However, we can understand it as this unique combining of matterenergy (or one "substance").

How do we account for something "becoming animate"? All entities are animate, simply by participating in the ongoing cycle of birth and decay, the recombining and decombining of spirit. It is somewhat different for a crafted object, however. A person creates the object in a way commensurate with the kind of life the object will have. A utilitarian object has a purpose in daily life and is created with the appropriate investment of spirituality. It is then "used" or becomes alive as it functions interactively according to its purpose. A sacred object, needing more than the human person can put into it, undergoes ceremony to become fully alive in accord with its purpose.

The matrix or "mystery," has its own rhythm or pulse, its own "heartbeat" which musical instruments such as the flute or drum bring within the range of human hearing. Whether for secular or sacred purposes this expression is powerful.

That these qualities can be sensed is acknowledged by Abram, and by Ojibwa and other Native peoples. Searching for a way to identify *which* sense does this, Abram identifies "imagination" as the one which functions in this capacity (in concert with all the other senses). It is possible that a component of "spiritual" awareness, which is part of Ojibwa wholeness, is the synaesthetic sensing of this rhythm.

"Power" abides within the mystery and can be manifested in entities. Is it possible to say what "power" is? I refrain from attempting this. I have not had an experience of it of which I am aware. I have been able to list manifestations of power from the artists' statements, but this does not say *what* it is. Marge refers to a "spiritual high" when participating in ceremonies or when being in the Southwest among the places of the Anasazi. Louis's brother found that sleeping in

the center of *Regeneration*, the place of power, was a way of feeling protected.

Ceremony invests power in a sacred object. Joe talks about the power and sacredness of the Little Boy Water Drum. That particular drum can only be used for that ceremony and would not be seen by other people. Yet, he could make a replica of it which could be seen outside the ceremony. A sacred scroll, also, should be used only in ceremony and not exhibited, for instance, but a copy which has not been invested with power can be exhibited, as I have done here.

In discussing the life of a crafted object, it becomes apparent how important the mind-attitude of the artist is. Thought is a kind of action. And it is thought which directs the artist's hands when he or she works. We have seen how the object becomes alive through the artist's participation in the cycle of creation. To do this is a great responsibility. The artist, working alone, must attain and maintain the spiritual state necessary to create the object, because what the artist puts into the object will go into the world. The artist must also maintain a life-attitude according to the teachings. This life-attitude preserves the harmony and balance between the artist, the life-world, and the materials he or she uses in working.

Working within the state of spiritual awareness, while collecting the materials and creating the object, is, I believe, functioning within the wider consciousness identified by transformative philosophy. Earlier, I mentioned Stace's two categories of mystical experience, the introverted and the extroverted, in order to orient us toward this state. Whether the artist's state of spiritual awareness is "introverted" or "extroverted" is irrelevant in this context. The categorization is inadequate in reference to the Ojibwa experiential world.

The artist maintains this spiritual state and is interactive within it throughout the entire process. One's physical being, rationality, and emotions/feelings all work together with one's spirituality. When acting within this awareness, one offers oneself to a different range of interactions with beings of the life-world. The other beings chose to interact in response to, or

recognition of, the spiritual awareness of the artist.

Some understanding and experience of this state of awareness is what I hoped for by using transformative philosophy. I have structured my thesis in a transformative pattern, and, if it is effective, the reader will have undergone some "widening" ideas. Perhaps the reader might also be motivated to try some practical techniques.

Early in Chapter One, I talked about the warping in a woven piece. I suggested that I was constructing my thesis similarly. One of these warp threads is "colonization." That colonization destroyed, or altered irretrievably, the Native culture, and that there is a pre- and post-colonial "Indian" is a Western notion. (I leave it to the reader to discover the other mini-transformative ideas in the text.)

Using the Migration Scroll, I have tried to show that from an Ojibwa view traditional knowledge has been continuous for many hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Colonization was a disruption brought by Europeans with which Native peoples had to cope, but in spite of which have retained their basic spiritual orientation to the life-world. Louis mentions that ceremonies went underground. Joe Rose (in conversation) also speaks about the ceremonies being conducted out in the woods where the white administrators and clergy would not discover it. Sacred objects were hidden. The daily sorts of handcrafts, however, suffered particular loss. Therefore, Marge, for instance, has had to research techniques, symbolism, and patterns. Frank has learned from vision. New tools and materials (e.g. glass beads) may be used, but as we have seen, they are used within the traditional spiritual relationship. Louis's installation, *Regeneration*, constructed in a traditional manner, addresses the disruption and seeks a healing.

From this thought, I will move to Overholt and Callicott's work *Clothed-Fur and Other Tales: An Introduction to an Ojibwa World View*. The task they set for themselves is to conduct an ethno-metaphysical study of Ojibwa world view from "primary" sources, which they identify



as narratives (xi). They chose narratives collected between 1903-05 by William Jones, an "American Indian" (27), in the northern portion of the Southwestern Ojibwa area (see Figure One). (William Jones is the person who collected the Migration Scroll presented in this study.)

They chose the Jones collection because it seemed

ideally suited to the over-all purpose of this volume. It provides texts in which evidences of acculturation are minimal and avoids brief excerpts and smoothed-out re-tellings or paraphrases of the stories. (26)

In other words, Overholt and Callicott avoid dealing with contemporary Native persons influenced by colonization. They also avoid, as Mary Black-Rogers notes in her Preface, the hours of listening to stories directly from elders. More importantly, they deal only with written text eliminating the experiential component which is essential in understanding.

In commenting on Hallowell's work, Black-Rogers commends him for advocating seeing the world from an Ojibwa view. However, she notes that "he ultimately did not rely on the Ojibwa people's words and acts 'speaking for themselves' to readers ... He resembled the ethnoscientist in his going directly after the Ojibwa categories and ways of ordering the phenomena of their world—within a Western taxonomic structure" (93, note 2). Gordon Christie (Inuit, philosopher) is concerned that the Western philosopher, in attempting to understand Native philosophy, will, by forcing it to conform to Western categories, destroy what he/she is trying to understand (McPherson and Rabb 1997, 12).

I mention Black-Rogers' and Christie's concerns because Overholt and Callicott attempt to interpret the Ojibwa cultural life-world from *within* the Western, organizing their interpretation into Western categories. In their interpretive essay about the narratives, they identify "elements of the world view": power; metamorphosis; the situation of blessing; disobedience and its consequences; reciprocity, life, and death; and, finally, dreams (140-49). From these they deduce three "principles of behavior" (152). They then discover that the Ojibwa have an

'environmental ethic' as defined by Western philosophy (153-155). One could search through the interviews and find some things which might fit Overholt and Callicott's categories, but they do not enlighten the Ojibwa spiritual connection to the life-world.

For example, "power" is discovered to be hierarchical; various beings have different amounts of power. One should not try to use power which is inappropriate to one's own abilities. Overholt and Callicott describe "power" as being much like the Western definition as "the ability to act" (141). They see that it resides in "some intangible inner essence" and may have a "certain spiritual quality" (142).

Compare this to what this study has shown about "power." Defining "power" has not been as facile an endeavor as Overholt and Callicott would make it seem. Each being, composed of the matterenergy of the life-world which itself has "power," contains within its uniqueness spirit/power. Ceremony and vision put one into intimate contact with "power" and can invest it into ceremonial objects. It is not that "power" may have "a certain spiritual quality," but that "power" may *be* spirit.

A comparison of each of Overholt and Callicott's "elements" could be done like this. Each one has been extracted systematically from the stories and we would then be "applying" them to the interviews, systematically extracting what fit and rejecting what didn't. The process itself is Western and leads us to a Western interpretation.

The three "rules of behavior" which Overholt and Callicott find are particularly problematic: these are 1) one should not attempt to do things beyond one's given powers, 2) "one ought not be greedy," and 3) "one must be obedient to the rules of the culture and the terms of his individual dream" (152). The artists here are not acting according to "rules of behavior." They are not compelled to act in *any* particular way. Through their own sense of purpose and responsibility to what they have been given they *choose* to think and act with gratitude and respect.

In their final paragraph of their section "World View and an Ojibwa Environmental Ethic,"

Overholt and Callicott say:

The narratives certainly reflect and affirm a fundamentally economic relationship between human persons and animal, plant, and mineral persons. Animals, plants, and minerals are not, however, rightless resources. As is the case on Western economic assumptions. They are as it were trading partners with human beings, and are pictured as profiting, from their own point of view, from exchange with human beings. (155)

This fundamentally Western economic interpretation is almost unrecognizable as Ojibwa in its lack of spiritual reference.

The artists who speak here show reverence, respect, and gratitude in their thought and work for the all the beings in their spiritually dynamic world. Within this life-world and cultural life-world, daily secular and ceremonial life flows.

Marge Hmielewski, Joe Rose, Richard La Fernier, Frank Montano, and Louis Ogema perceive a living and spiritually accessible world. This life-world is not beyond the capacity of Westerners to perceive. The Ojibwa cultural life-world which interprets and gives modes of expression to the artists' perceptions of the life-world is rich, balanced, and harmonized with its rhythms. The ability of Ojibwa culture to draw on the power of the "mystery" to sustain and regenerate itself through the era of disruption is expressed in the work of these artists. I thank them for sharing their world with us.

## Appendix

The Appendix contains the materials which were required by the Ethics Advisory Committee, Lakehead University. These include: a research proposal with sample questionnaire, a letter explaining the study to potential participants, a consent form, and approval from the committee. Also, included are the signed consent forms, one of the introductory letters I sent to some people, some correspondence, and other "permission granted" forms. When I was beginning I found it helpful to see what Lorraine Brundige, one of the first graduates of the Native Philosophy Program, had done in her interview materials. Therefore, I am including below a few comments which may be helpful to another student using an interview method.

### *Ethics Materials*

My direction changed somewhat from the time I wrote the research proposal and the sample questionnaire. I thought I would be talking mainly with people who did brain-tanning and leather work. It was difficult to find one person who did brain-tanning and I did find people doing other fascinating work. The sample questionnaire, while useful in focusing my thoughts before I did interviewing, was of little help. I found that if I explained my project and asked one or two beginning questions, that was sufficient. (At least after the first interview) I learned to listen instead of interrupting quite so much. I learned much more this way.

### *Interviews*

For the people I didn't know, I first mailed a cover letter with copies of the explanatory letter and a consent form. I followed that up with a telephone call shortly prior to the time when I would be in the area and could set up an interview. Not all the people I sent the

materials to were willing to grant me an interview.

Personally, I found it very difficult to go through the process of asking people to speak with me and doing the interviews, in spite of the fact that I have worked in fields in which interviewing was a regular job requirement. In the interviewing situations for my thesis, I was finding out how little I knew *and* doing it publicly! However, I gained so much which would have been inaccessible to me otherwise—and enjoyed the experiences.

# LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY



Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada L7R 5E1

Office of the President  
Telephone (807) 343-8200

28 April 1998

Ms. Karen A'Llerio  
P.O. Box 1206  
Bayfield, Wisconsin  
54814

Dear Ms. A'Llerio:

Based on the recommendation of the Ethics Advisory Committee, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project entitled: **CRAFT, RITUAL AND WORLD VIEW: A STUDY IN NATIVE PHILOSOPHY.**

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Whitfield', with a large circular flourish at the end.

**JOHN WHITFIELD**  
Interim President

/lw

cc: Dr. D. Rabb, Supervisor

## **The Research Proposal**

**Title. Craft, Ritual, and World View: A Study in Native Philosophy**

### *Research Purpose*

I plan to do the field work for my study this summer 1998. The field work will form the core of my Master's degree thesis in Native Philosophy. My primary study will be with Anishinaabe (Ojibwa) people in northern and central Wisconsin. Other interviews with Native artists who use natural materials in their art work and/or Natives in less dense population and less cosmopolitan areas may be considered. I plan to do a written thesis and a version on CD Rom.

I have chosen the area of crafts, especially tanning and leatherwork, for three reasons. One of the most important for focusing on tanning is that it is a traditional indigenous craft which has been practiced by many, if not all, tribal peoples in North America; there is continuity from the pre-colonial period to the present and contiguity cross-culturally. Also important is the fact that I have my bachelor's degree in craft work with art history courses in (what at the time was called) primitive art. More recently I have, myself, begun learning to tan and to work with fleece. I understand the physical process involved in the production of crafts. I also have thought about the meaning of the work from a Western viewpoint. Lastly, I am interested in Western environmental ethics, most particularly the human person's relationship with what would be regarded in indigenous world view as other-than-human persons. Craft work involving use of animals offers a means of examining this relationship.

I hope to learn about Native thought, meaning, value, and inspiration associated with the production of craft work. I am particularly interested in the artisan's relationship with the

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materials, the further meaning and relationships within the community symbolized by the work, the inspiration for design, the relationship with the past and future inherent in the processes used, how the artist learned the craft, and the recognition and status conferred upon the craftsperson for his/her work.

Why field work? Learning directly from individuals is almost imperative in craft work. The artisan participates in a physical process within a particular cultural framework and in a particular mental state which is extremely difficult to convey in text. Also, learning directly from people is traditional in Native cultures. My own 30+ years of work before coming to an academic setting has been almost completely people-related. I like working with people and learning directly about their life experiences.

### *Research Instrument*

My research is structured in interview format. I will not use a written questionnaire nor a rigidly structured format. My objectives are informal meetings, comfortable participants, and dynamic discussions. This will depend in part on the person being interviewed; if the person is an Elder, questions or interruptions on my part may be inappropriate.

While my primary interest is in tanning and use of leather, I hope to interview people who do a variety of other crafts, e.g. quilling, beadwork, etc. Some questions apply to all the crafts, others are specific to a particular craft. I have grouped the questions by general categories: personal history, learning the craft, process, design, teachings/traditions, and additions. During an interview, questions may be shifted about. A sample questionnaire is attached.

### *Recording Interviews*

I hope to use a tape recorder for all my interviews if it is acceptable to the participant.



This is covered in the introductory letter and the consent form. If what a participant does and comments on appear to be appropriate and a participant is willing, I hope to make arrangements to videotape an interview. In videotaping I will focus on demonstration so the participant will feel more comfortable commenting on his/her work on camera. I have included a specific consent on the form for videotaping. If recording the interview is not acceptable to the participant, I would still like to conduct the interview and will write notes immediately afterward.

#### *Informed Consent/Cover Letter*

Once I am referred to a potential participant, I will contact that person in whatever way is appropriate – meeting, phone, mail, and tell him/her about my study. I will then either give or mail the introductory letter and consent form (both attached) to the person and arrange a meeting if acceptable. Confidentiality will be ensured if the person so desires. (See below.)

#### *Seven Year Storage/Confidentiality*

Original materials – audio and/or video tapes, field notes, will be stored for seven years in a safe deposit box to which only I will have access. Culturally sensitive material or names of participants who wish confidentiality will not be made available further. Copies of the original interviews not requiring confidentiality will be made available through Lakehead University's Indigenous Learning Department Oral History Project so that they are accessible to students. The data will also be available in my thesis at the University Library and the Department of Philosophy.

***Risks/Benefits***

This study does not have physical or psychological risks or benefits to the participants. I think there are benefits in doing the study and have included these in the cover letter.

***Dissemination of Research Results to Participants***

The participant can indicate on the consent form that he/she would like a copy of the interview. Also contained in the letter and on the consent form are the locations where the material will be available. (See above.)

**The Research Instrument: Sample Questionnaire**

The interview would begin with a review of the information contained in the introductory letter: intent of the project, the benefits of the study, tape (or video) recording and consent, storage and use of materials. If not already received, I would obtain the signed consent form before beginning the interview.

The primary questions below (not indented) usually are designed to be open-ended to encourage the participant to talk about what she or he thinks is important. What the participant provides may prompt further interchange about the topic situationally appropriate. The indented questions indicate the content I would like to cover, but do not limit content. They may be used if the information is not spontaneously provided by the participant.

**Personal History**

I appreciate your agreeing to talk with me. To get started, could you tell me something about yourself?

What band/community are you from; where do you live?

What is your name?

Would you like to give your [Anishinaabe, Lakota, etc.] name?

Would you like to give your age?

[Name of referrer] has told me that you do [specific craft]. How long have you done this work?

Do you do other kinds of craft or art work?

How long have you done [x]?

Is there anything else you would like to add about yourself before we talk more about [x]?

### Learning

I am wondering how you learned to [tan hides, etc.]?

How old you were when you started?

Who did you learn from?

How did [that person] teach you?

What kinds of work did you begin with?

Is [x] something everyone learned to do or just specific people?

*If the answer is 'specific people':*

How were these specific people chosen to learn [this craft]?

How did you feel about being chosen to learn [x]?

Have others in your family done [x]?

### Process:

#### Tanning

Could you describe the process you use today when you tan hides?

What kind of hides do you work with?

Do you use different processes for different kinds of hides?

Do you tan differently to obtain different results?

Where do you get your hides?

*If from someone else:*

Are they purchased, exchanged, or given?

What do you look for in picking out a hide?

*If from trapping or hunting:*

Could you tell me how you [trap, hunt] a [name of animal], for example?

Are there rituals or ceremonies you need to do?

Is there a personal attitude you need to have?

When is the best time to get the animal?

Are there seasonal differences in the hides?

Are there any rituals or ceremonies needed for obtaining the animal?

Could you describe the best way to skin the animal?

What is done with the rest of the animal?

I'm interested in your relationship to the animal or to the hide when you go through the tanning work.

Could you tell me about that, or perhaps tell me what you think about when you do the work?

Are there any rituals or ceremonies needed in tanning?

During the time you work with the hide, what do you think about?

How does the hide feel to you when you work with it?

Do you have any responsibility to the animal or to the hide itself? Is there a difference?

What helps you produce the best tanning?

### Leatherwork

**What kinds of things do you make?**

**Could you tell me about the process you go through to make a [item]?**

**How do you decide which leather to use?**

**Are different leathers, or parts of the same hide, good for different items?**

**Is it important for you to have a particular attitude when you work?**

**Are there any rituals or ceremonies which must be observed?**

**[If leather goods are produced by hand rather than by sewing machine, another set of questions regarding that process will be necessary.]**

**[Repeat questions from "Home Tanning" appropriately altered to leatherwork from "I'm interested in your relationship to the animal . . .?" to end of section.]**

### **Quilling**

**Could you tell me about how your quills are obtained and which quills you use?**

**[Repeat questions from "Home Tanning" appropriately altered to 'quills' or 'quilling' from "Where do you get your hides?" to end of section.]**

**Do you color your quills and, if so, what kinds of dyes do you use?**

**Do you use commercial or natural dyes?**

***If natural:***

**Could you tell me about the kinds of materials you use and how you prepare your dyes?**

**Are there important ways to collect the plants and/or earth materials used?**

**Is there a personal frame of mind you need to maintain?**

**Are rituals or ceremonies necessary?**

**What time of year is best?**

**What colors are obtained from the various dyes?**

**How do you actually go about dyeing the quills?**

**How fixed is the color?**

**What do you apply your quill work to?**

**[Depending on the type of item quilled, e.g. birch bark box, leather shirt, etc., then another set of pertinent questions are necessary.]**

### **Beadwork**

**What kind of beadwork do you do?**

**[Secondary questions might involve kind and size of beads, method of stitching, what types of materials are beaded, indirect or direct application, etc.]**

**Are there any procedures, rituals, or ceremonies needed when you do beadwork?**

**When you work, what kind of relationship do you have to your materials?**

**Do you think you would have a different relationship or responsibility to your material if you were working with something from an animal or plant? Could you explain why [so or not so]?**

### **Design**

**[Design may apply to leatherwork, quillwork or beadwork.]**

**Can you tell me something about your designs, where you get the inspiration for them, the meaning they have for you?**

**[I expect that the content in this category will relate to visionary or ritual experience. Secondary**

questions will be especially dependent on the participant's own explanation and/or experience.]  
Do you think your imagery has the same or similar meaning for another [Ojibwa, etc.] person?  
Is your work identifiable by others as being [made, stitched, etc.] by you?

#### **Teachings/Traditions**

Are there traditional teachings associated with your work?

Are there stories about [specific craft]?

How did the person who taught you present these teachings?

Do you consider your work traditional?

When working do you feel yourself in touch with other people who have done the same work in the past?

How do you think the way you do your work today may have changed from way it was done in the past, perhaps by your [grandmother, great-grandmother, etc.], for example?

#### **Additions**

Are there other things you think are important we haven't talked about or that I might not have known to ask about?

Thank you very much for talking with me and teaching me about your [craft].

[At this time, if a further videotaped interview seems appropriate, I would ask if the person would like to do that. It would be arranged for another time and the video would focus on a demonstration of the work while the person talked.]

October 1998

P.O. Box 1206  
Bayfield WI 54814

Hello,

My name is Karen A'Llerio. I am working on a Masters Degree in Native Philosophy at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. My purpose in the program is to learn about Native thought and ways of living not only academically, but by listening to what you might share with me. My research is centered on the meaning of craft and art to Native artisans. Through craft work and artwork Native thought, meaning, and values can be demonstrated. An important goal of this work will be to promote an understanding and respect for Native values and community expressed through Native craft work. And, as a craftsperson myself, through learning about Native thought I hope to learn how to relate to my own work with increased understanding.

I respect the importance of sacred knowledge and this study is designed to ensure that sacred knowledge is protected to the utmost.

I would like to request a meeting with you to listen to your thoughts about your work as part of my learning. There are some questions I would like to ask, but I am open just to listening.

I would request your permission to use a tape recorder or, on some occasions for demonstrations, a video recorder. This will let me listen again to what you share and will allow others to learn directly from you. At any time upon your request, I would turn off the tape (or video) recorder. If you do not wish me to record our conversation, that is quite acceptable and I would still like to meet with you. Also, your name or identity will not be included in the final thesis without your permission. You may, of course, withdraw from this work at any time. My present plans include constructing my thesis in both written format and as a CD Rom for computer use.

I am requesting your help to ensure that this study has meaning. Two benefits of this research will be to promote respect and understanding for traditional Native values in the non-Native community, and to provide information for Native students raised in non-traditional environments. These students will have access to this information that comes from the experiences of traditional Natives and Elders.

Your name will be used in this thesis or your identity revealed only by your authorization. If

you prefer not to have your name used, your confidentiality is ensured. In accordance with Lakehead University's Research Integrity Policy, all the original recorded information, my original notes, and any culturally sensitive data will be securely stored for seven years at Lakehead University by my supervisor, Dr. Douglas Rabb.

My completed thesis will be made available at the Lakehead University Library and the Department of Philosophy. Copies of the taped material, with your permission, will be filed with Lakehead's Indigenous Learning Department Oral History Project where it will be accessible to Native students. If you would like to have a copy of our discussions, I will be happy to provide one for you.

Thank you for your help and kindness in considering this request.

Karen A'Llerio

# LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY



Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada P7H 5E1

Department of Philosophy

Tel: (807) 346-7725

Fax: (807) 346-7764

## CONSENT FORM

I have read the letter which explains the work Karen A'Llerio is doing on the meaning of Native craft and artwork and have agreed to spend time with her. I agree that she may use a tape recorder, and that I may ask to have it turned off at any time. [The last sentence may be crossed out if taping is not acceptable.]

I understand that my time will be given voluntarily and my name may be included only with my consent. Confidentiality is ensured if I desire it. I have also been told that the information I have contributed will be available at Lakehead University's Indigenous Learning Department Oral History Project and the thesis at the University Library and the Department of Philosophy.

I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, even after signing this form.

Marge Hmielewski  
Signature

Rt 2 Box 323-A  
Street Address/PO Box

MARGE HMIELEWSKI  
Name

Ashland WI 54806  
City, State/Province

9-19-1998  
Date

715-682-5703  
Phone

## CONSENT FOR VIDEO RECORDING

I further give my consent to have my discussion and/or demonstration videotaped, portions of which may be used in the thesis and a copy of the full tape made available at the Indigenous Learning Department Oral History Project.

Yes  No

I would like my name added to the thesis

Yes  No

I would like to have a copy of the interview

Yes  No

Note: The participant's name, unless authorized will not be printed in the thesis nor will his or her identity be revealed. In accordance with Lakehead University's Research Integrity Policy, all original data will be securely stored for seven years at Lakehead University by my supervisor, Dr. Douglas Rabb.



# LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY



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I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, even after signing this form.

*Joseph M. Rose*                      *Northland College*  
 Signature                                      Street Address/PO Box  
*Joseph M. Rose*                      *Arnprior, ON*  
 Name    City, State/Province                      *54806*  
*Oct 12, 1998*                              *(715) 682-1294*  
 Date    Phone

## CONSENT FOR VIDEO RECORDING

I further give my consent to have my discussion and/or demonstration videotaped, portions of which may be used in the thesis and a copy of the full tape made available at the Indigenous Learning Department Oral History Project.

Yes  No

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I would like to have a copy of the interview

Yes  No

Note: The participant's name, unless authorized will not be printed in the thesis nor will his or her identity be revealed. In accordance with Lakehead University's Research Integrity Policy, all original data will be securely stored for seven years at Lakehead University by my supervisor, Dr. Douglas Rabb.

# LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY



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## CONSENT FORM

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I understand that my time will be given voluntarily and my name may be included only with my consent. Confidentiality is ensured if I desire it. I have also been told that the information I have contributed will be available at Lakehead University's Indigenous Learning Department Oral History Project and the thesis at the University Library and the Department of Philosophy. *And Northland College (CA) 11-7-98*

I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, even after signing this form.

*Richard LaFramboise*

Signature

*Rt-1 Box 10915*

Street Address/PO Box

Name

*Rayfield WI*

City, State/Province

*11-8-98*

Date

*715 779-5695*

Phone

## CONSENT FOR VIDEO RECORDING

I further give my consent to have my discussion and/or demonstration videotaped, portions of which may be used in the thesis and a copy of the full tape made available at the Indigenous Learning Department Oral History Project.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I would like my name added to the thesis

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to have a copy of the interview

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Note: The participant's name, unless authorized will not be printed in the thesis nor will his or her identity be revealed. In accordance with Lakehead University's Research Integrity Policy, all original data will be securely stored for seven years at Lakehead University by my supervisor, Dr. Douglas Rabb.

# LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY



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Department of Philosophy

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I understand that my time will be given voluntarily and my name may be included only with my consent. Confidentiality is ensured if I desire it. I have also been told that the information I have contributed will be available at Lakehead University's Indigenous Learning Department Oral History Project and the thesis at the University Library and the Department of Philosophy, *and Northland College*

I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, even after signing this form.

<u><i>[Signature]</i></u> Signature	<u><i>Box 305</i></u> Street Address/PO Box
<u><i>Frank Morozov</i></u> Name	<u><i>Burlington, ON</i></u> City/State/Province
<u><i>11/8/98</i></u> Date	<u><i>715-779-5333</i></u> Phone

## CONSENT FOR VIDEO RECORDING

I further give my consent to have my discussion and/or demonstration videotaped, portions of which may be used in the thesis and a copy of the full tape made available at the Indigenous Learning Department Oral History Project.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I would like my name added to the thesis

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to have a copy of the interview

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Note: The participant's name, unless authorized will not be printed in the thesis nor will his or her identity be revealed. In accordance with Lakehead University's Research Integrity Policy, all original data will be securely stored for seven years at Lakehead University by my supervisor, Dr. Douglas Rabb.

**PERMISSION TO USE RECORDED & PHOTOGRAPHIC MATERIAL**

Karen A'Llerio is authorized to use the songs "Migizi Nagamon, Eagle Song" and "Healing Song" from my copyrighted audio tape *Closing the Circle*. This permission is given for a one-time use only on a compact disc to accompany her thesis, *Craft, Ritual, and World View*, for Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Fee: \$25. Normal fee waived for this one-time usage.

She may also use the photographs of me taken by Julie Buckles, Staff Photographer for the Ashland Daily Press. The photos were for the article which appeared on June 23, 1998 "Red Cliff Artists Capture Ojibwe Spirit." Again, this is for the one-time use (above).

Authorized by: Frank Anakwad Montano Date: 3/15/99

Frank Anakwad Montano  
P.O. Box 305  
Bayfield WI 54814

Accepted by: Karen A'Llerio Date: March 9, 1999

Karen A'Llerio  
P.O. Box 1206  
Bayfield WI 54814





# THUNDER BAY ART GALLERY

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AUTHORIZED BY: Louis Ogemah and Janet Clark

PACKAGED BY: Karen A'Llerio

LOAN PERIOD: for duplicates, to be returned 1 March 1999

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ADDRESS: P.O. Box 1206, Bayfield WI 54814

RECEIVED BY: Karen E. A'Llerio

*(sign & date; return one copy Attention Registrar)*

### FORMAT

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### FORMAT

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Mr. Frank Montano  
Bishop Lane  
Bayfield WI 54814

Dear Frank,

My name is Karen A'Llerio and I live on Turner Road north of Bayfield. Right now, I'm at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, where I'm in the Native Philosophy Project working on my master's degree. The work of each of us in the program is to research an aspect of Native philosophy. My topic is crafts, since some of my experience is in this area.

I talked with Marge Hmielewski recently about her work and she mentioned that you have come to her class to talk about flute-making. Elizabeth Madsen-Genzler is familiar with my project and asked if I had contacted you. Also, I knew that you make your own flutes and had thought that I would really like to talk with you about it. I saw the article in the Daily Press in the spring which had such good photos, too. (I've also sent a note to Diane about her birchbark work.)

My 'formal' interest is in the crafting of the object — what goes into it: the natural materials and how you obtain them, the thought, the physical work, and the spirit; and then what the object becomes after these have gone into it — its meaning, use, spirituality. But I'd also be particularly interested in your thoughts about your work. I'm very excited about my project and would be honored if you could participate.

For your information, I've enclosed my formal letter and consent form which are required by the university so that people know exactly what the information is for and what will happen to it.

I'll be in Bayfield later this week and will give you a phone call (and hope you're home!) to see if this is something you could help me with.

Thank you,

Karen A'Llerio  
RR 16, Site 2, Comp. 32  
Thunder Bay ON P7B 6B3  
(807) 768-0386

P.O. Box 1206  
Bayfield WI 54814  
(715) 779-3262



November 30, 1998

Louis Ogema  
2D - 468 Main Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3B 1B7

Dear Louis,

I was glad to hear your talk about "Regeneration" last week. Without it there would have been a lot I wouldn't have noticed or understood. I went back yesterday after completing the transcription of the tape. No one else was there so I could take time to notice many details, but there is undoubtedly more meaning than what I can comprehend. I appreciated the overall simplicity and quiet, and then the depth within it. Two questions: do the two hides on the scaffold represent one person or perhaps two 'people(s)'? And, I wondered about the meaning of the bird wing which is on the scaffold?

Enclosed is a lot of stuff. I'm sending you a copy of the transcription. I'll let Dr. Warkentin send you the file by e.mail. My computer skills don't extend that far. And here are copies of the two issues of *Aysangwaamizin* which Dr. Rabb thought you might like to see. We should be working on Volume 2, Number 1 pretty soon.

Also enclosed is the letter required for my thesis and the consent form. If it's still OK for me to use your talk in my thesis, could you please sign the form and return it to me in the SAS envelope? Thanks. I would add some description of the exhibit so readers would know what you're talking about. So far I've spoken with Ojibwa people from the Red Cliff-Bad River area of Wisconsin (where I live) who are doing traditional work: bead and quill work, flute-making, drum-making, and brain-tanning. Your piece brings together the more traditional forms and their meanings and makes a vital application to a current problem. I just found it very moving and well done, and will appreciate being able to include it.

Again, thank you.

Karen A'Llerio  
RR 16, Site 2, Comp. 32  
Thunder Bay ON P7B 6B3  
(807) 768-0386  
e.mail: kealleri@ice.lakeheadu.ca

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## References

Works which were particularly helpful in writing this thesis are included as well as all references in the text.

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