ABORIGINAL HISTORY

REPORT TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Prepared by

Ted Chamberlin and Hugh Brody

April, 1993

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I

The Idea of Aboriginal History: Problems and Issues

The stories we live by define our relationship to the natural and supernatural worlds, to place, to the past, and to each other. They give us a sense of who we are, and where we belong. They sometimes go by the name of history, sometimes by the name of myth and legend, sometimes by the name of law and philosophy and politics and economics, sometimes by the name of story and song and dance, sometimes by the name of science.

Each story belongs to a tradition, and each tradition has its own criteria of authenticity and authority. The stories of science, for example--and these include the stories of sociology, anthropology and geography as well as those of the physical and natural sciences--are informed by dramatic and narrative structures that are much like those of other stories. And they are determined by particular theories--which is to say, using the root meaning of theory, by particular ways of looking at things.

Myth and legend are also shaped by methodologies that are no less strict, no less grounded in the gathering and verification of data, and of course no less creative than the stories of science. So too with local or less widely shared stories, both the ones that claim to be true and the ones--the novels and short stories and tall tales--with which we entertain and enlighten ourselves and our communities. These also belong to a tradition, and are judged according to how they restore or renovate or revolutionize that tradition.

And history, though it is sometimes hijacked by the theoretical premises of science on the one hand and by those of the imaginative arts on the other, has <u>its</u> own logic, different from the logic that informs either science or the arts; and history proceeds according to a theory--or like both science and the arts, according to changing

theories. Like them too, history functions within a set of disciplined criteria about authenticity and authority, about whether its truths are objective or subjective, a part of nature or a part of us.

There's a lot of confusion about this, and a number of points need to be made from the outset. The first is that, despite some bad press, good science has usually acknowledged the arbitrariness of its findings, and admitted that its discoveries are always in some sense inventions. Science finds (or does not find) what it is looking for, neither more nor less; and it misses (or does not realize that it is missing) all sorts of other, no less interesting, realities that are not identifiable--that quite literally do not exist--within its theoretical framework.

In other respects too, the objectivity of science is a fiction in our minds, if only in that scientific inquiry--or more precisely, western scientific inquiry, whose cheerleaders (though seldom its leaders) often claim objectivity for it--remains resolutely tied to personalities, and therefore to a whole set of stories surrounding the inventions and discoveries of peoples with names like Newton and Darwin and Einstein and Levi-Straus. In a 1920 letter to Ernest Jones, Sigmund Freud tried to refute Havelock Ellis' claim that he was more an artist than a scientist. Art is personal, he suggested. Science is not. This fascination with names, said Freud, "is all wrong. I am sure that in a few decades my name will be wiped away and our results will last". Sure. Science and scientists, like stories and story-tellers, are fellow travellers.

It is an open question whether different cultures, different languages, different traditions of the serious show and tell of story-telling, generate different theories of history; and if they do, whether these are reconcilable. This question holds whether we view history as primarily a product of nurture or of nature: that is, whether we view our experience as the result of environmental factors over which (at least notionally) people have some control--geographical, physical, social, economic, cultural factors; or whether we see it as a consequence of hereditary factors chosen by some genetic (or maybe divine) fiat.

This fundamental question about history and culture generates a set of related questions. If history relies on some theoretical

framework, are two theoretical frameworks required--one for aboriginal and one for non-aboriginal peoples? Are they of equal status? Does this mean two distinct histories, each with different theories and different practices? And if two, why not twelve, or twenty-two, or as many as are needed to accommodate linguistic and cultural differences between aboriginal peoples in Canada? On the other hand, if there is a possibility of one history, one that changes the perspective rather than the frame of reference, is the existing frame adequate? Is the idea of Canada on which mainstream history is based a satisfactory one?

The workshop tried to negotiate between stories, and between questions. It was a lot to ask of fifteen people--from different backgrounds, with different languages, and with different agendas--in three days. It was probably too much. But what happened was a necessary part of shaping a research agenda in history that will be something more than entrenchment of existing dichotomies and disputes. Despite some troubling dead-ends, and through some very difficult and revealing discussion, and with some very serious differences in discursive and rhetorical practice, we came to a surprisingly widely shared sense of what the Royal Commission might do both to bring these issues into the foreground and to ensure that they inform the development of new--and the recovery of old--modes of history.

In the final analysis, it became apparent that we can either be paralyzed or empowered by these sorts of discussions. One important result of the workshop was the recognition that many of these issues cannot--indeed must not--be resolved. They represent contradictions and paradoxes and problems that lie at the heart of history, and also of relations between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in Canada. These tensions--or more positively, the dialogues they generate--need to be sustained, just as we need to maintain the uncertainty entrenched in a memorable story told at the workshop by Neil Sterritt--a story from evidence presented to the Chief Justice Allen McEachern of the British Columbia Supreme Court in the Delgamuukw case, about whether a geological core sample--or any other piece of evidence that carries with it the prestige of science, or the privileges of written documentation--verifies aboriginal oral

history, or whether oral history verifies the core sample, or the journal entry of some more or less itinerant European, or the other routinely privileged non-aboriginal forms of evidence.

On the surface, the issues preoccupying the workshop often seemed to be ones of cultural practice--involving differences of race, gender, age, class, experience, and probably a few other things as well. Everyone, every so often, must have felt that one or another of the people around the table was perched on some polemical pedastal--academic or aboriginal or somewhere in between, in middle earth maybe. Or were wallowing in new age nostalgia or neo-colonial pragmatism. Nobody wanted to ask "why do you think what you are saying has anything to do with what we are here to talk about", because nobody wanted to sound like Justice McEachern, who asked just that question of Mary Johnson, a Gitksan elder whose testimony was of particular importance. And yet everybody must have thought it at one time or another.

Neither the courts, nor the academy, nor the assembly, nor the longhouse, have any monopoly on seeming to speak from great heights, at least to someone standing on the ground. Or speaking from a side road to someone convinced they are on the highway. But the interesting question turned out not to be whether we were talking nonsense, individually or collectively, but who has the power to impose that nonsense, and how that imposition takes place, and why people allow themselves to be--perhaps why they apparently need to be--imposed upon in these ways. And underlying all this, who sets the standards of sense and nonsense. The question of historical discourse centred on that question of power.

This power can be turned to advantage, of course. As soon as we conceive of Canada in an aboriginal context, it is no longer merely a Commonwealth country but one that belongs within the history of the Americas. And this provides the framework and the focus for new historical perspectives, and new ways of doing history. Aboriginal people would take their place at the centre of this history, and their relations with settler societies would be seen as something more than episodes in someone else's history, or grim reminders of the devastation of their own.

The workshop concluded with a discussion of three major projects that could, if done with attention to the need for a new approach to oral history and a new acknowledgement of aboriginal presence in this country, constitute an immense legacy of the Royal Commission. These projects, which are outlined at the end of this report, should be understood as the workshop's recommendations to the Commision. They flow not only from the principles that the workshop identified, but also from the difficulties that it experienced. We urge that the Commissioners give serious thought to the issues as well as to the opportunities embodied in these projects, and consider ways in which the Commission's resources can be used to launch them.

Yet this alone will not be enough. There were two other issues that were addressed by the participants with considerable passion, and a sometimes desperate sense of urgency. These issues arose in the centre of the discussion, and appeared to provide a focus for significantly different points of view. They were, to put them in the language that the courts have been using, extinguishment of title, and the idea of an organizied society. No review of the workshops' process and conclusions would be complete without a discussion of them. And no historical research that is not grounded in some fundamental understandings about them will be worth anything at all. For that reason, we have set out a discussion of them both as separate recommendations to the Commission (in Sections 2 and 3 below).

Participants in the workshop were eager that these two lines of argument be brought to the Commission's notice. There is much to be said about both, and the Commission is already engaged with some of their implications. We are aware, for example, that Michael Jackson of the University of British Columbia is preparing a paper that deals, at least in part, with models of land claims agreements in which there is no extinguishment. Two or three of the participants were particularly well informed in apects of these two concerns, and it may be worth the Commission's while to draw directly on this expertise.

Northern North America is homeland to a vast array of different aboriginal societies. And there are different kinds of oral traditions--as between, for example, the formalized Ada'ox of the

Gitksan or Nisga'a, at one extreme, and the informal, somewhat individualized shamanic/hunting narratives among Athabaskans. These differences tend to be understated, indeed are often made to diappear, in the word "Indian", in the notion of "native culture and society", even in the idea of "aboriginal rights". People speak their histories in distinctive styles and settings; and their histories contain, assert and disseminate rights (ownership, territory, inheritance, relationship to the creator, etc). Therefore different forms of history may raise the possibility of differently conceived rights. And of differently construed power. During a discussion of the relationships between written and oral traditions, the question was asked "what exactly does constitute the privilege of written texts". "They are in a foreign language" was the immediate response. Land and language are the basis of aboriginal cultures. Both have been the object of colonial dispossession. And between them they have provided the means of defining Canada, from the stories of discovery and exploration and settlement to the representations of the land in the languages of the visual arts. Compare, for example, the visual landscapes of Tom Thompson with those of Norval Morrisseau; or, more generally, the paintings of the Group of Seven with the graphic art of the Inuit of Cape Dorset. There is a kind of spatial thought and feeling in aboriginal art that is often fundamentally different from that of European traditions. Any discussion of cultural meanings and values by outsiders--and this includes aboriginal outsiders speaking of cultures other than their own--needs to be self-conscious about its potential for perpetuating colonial presumptions about cultural authenticity and disursive authority.

But there is another, though connected, issue here. Colonial process causes transformations in just about everything. Above all, colonialism changes the colonized's relationship to the land. Much land is taken, turned into farms, or cities, or forest products, or dams. Other land is simply claimed (without being physically transformed) by the colonists. The original occupant's rights are questioned, disregarded, dismissed.

All this is obvious enough; but perhaps because of their obviousness, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that these various transformations generate a profound confusion about the nature of

land rights arguments in this country, arguments around which most other discussions about the place of aboriginal peoples have turned, at least over the past two or three decades.

Many of the peoples of the north and west live on or adjacent to ancestral land, with fishing and hunting territories that at least allow a considerable amount of subsistence harvesting and fur trapping. Many of the peoples of the south and east live on or near ancestral lands that have been transformed by urban and/or agricultural development to such an extent that subsistence activites are all but impossible.

This difference of fundamental circumstances is reflected in profoundly different approaches to land claims and to aboriginal rights. And perhaps to history too, or at least to oral history. Some of these differences are more or less self-evident: differences in the importance of the land, of guaranteed harvesting options, of joint management. Some are less obvious: the issue of language, the attitudes towards "traditional culture", the status of oral history. In these latter, less obvious, instances the nature of the differences is somewhat counter-intuitive. The people whose land base is relatively intact often seem to be less preoccupied with "culture" than those whose material base is more damaged or remote.

A profound division in the workshop may have been based on these different historical experiences. Put bluntly, the upholding of oral tradition, as a mysterious and powerful authority, may replace, or provide some deep consolation for, the loss of actual land. And yet land is a foundation of all the cultures of northern North America, and of their oral traditions. So those who are more familiar with, or who grew up in, the places where the land base is relatively intact can easily feel sceptical of, and even irritated by, an upholding of "culture" rather than an argument about actual territories. They may see this as over-conservative, a reifying of culture. And they may also see some of the concomitant aboriginal rights demands--for local government, for cultural programs, even for recognition itself--as diversionary. Not because they are irrelevant, but because they seem to place at the foundation that which belongs in the upper stories.

Thus it can happen that the upholders of culture and "tradition" are not heard, their plight not taken into account. And this is made more likely, and more debilitating, by virtue of a certain coyness. No one wants to point at the losses, to say out loud: "you insist on these things because there is nothing else left". There is the lurking and unspoken danger here of discussion about aboriginal culture, and about aboriginal history, losing its defining difference and becoming a discussion of folk and immigrant culture, in which aboriginal society is perceived as a diaspora, and aboriginal history a chronicle of people who have lost or left their homeland and who will never return there, yet celebrate their heritage as the central feature of their history. None of this is said to diminish the intensity and integrity of both points of view, both historical circumstances. They are historical circumstances--that is the key point; and they require (and find) their profound and deeply impassioned voices.

A similar problem can be found in the potentially static condition of oral history, reinforced as it often is by insistence on an uncontested reverence for tradition. The young are supposed to listen and learn, not to absorb and initiate, still less to improvise. What in some circumstances (and in retrospect) would be called the growth of tradition is seen as betrayal under the duress of the kind of beseiged condition that many elders feel is the very essence of their circumstances. No growth, only betrayal. This is a difficult and potentially oppressive condition.

Think of the cartoon Maus, about the Holocaust. It is a remarkable example of oral history, for it is the son gathering his father's account of the most poignant and decisive succession of events--the events, indeed, that have caused the story-teller, the recorder and millions like them to be in the cultural and geographical places they are. They are events that explain; hence the oral history they pertain to is of central relevance.

In Maus, however, the listener, the gatherer of the history, is at times enraged by the narrator. The first volume ends with him accusing his father of being the murderer of his mother. The account is marked by doubts, by horror, by inter-generational tension; the points of view of the young meet those of the old, and each animates

the other; the history is the richer, more powerful, more resonant, and (dare we say it?) truer as a result.

Interestingly, Maus has become something of an unexpected best-seller. Many, many people respond to the subject; they also, in our view, are able to respond in large measure because the subject is presented with its contradictions, with the heresy of the son's arguments both with the history and with the character of the narrator, his father.

Is there something about the circumstances within which oral history is told, and is not told, in the Canadian aboriginal community that makes a Maus type work unlikely, impossible? Is there a refusal of tension, an inadmissability of doubt, a determination that no challenges be issued? If the answer to these questions is yes, then there might be a way in which the oral history we tend to deal with is its own enemy. Or, it might be that the history of residential schools or of the Arctic exiles could be addressed in this way, but only if certain assumptions were made about the role of history.

When and where can the power of language, the power of certain stories, the power of who tells them (and in what way) be challenged? There was no doubting that colonial models of history, which serve up a dog's breakfast of stereotypes with aboriginal people either at the exotic centre or the trivial margins of the story, have to be challenged. Much of the time was devoted to a discussion of how. But hovering over the discussion was another question. How do we avoid merely replacing one set of power brokers with another? Or put more positively, how do we provide an arena for contesting stories, a process and a place in which not just the sophisticated, subtle questions but the naive, embarrassing questions--like "why isn't the emperor wearing any clothes"?--can be asked. The "how many times?" questions of the song 'Blowing in the Wind'. The awkward questions of the unsocialized and the unsophisticated--which is to say, of those who are not part of the pact--questions about who is telling the truth, and whether it matters. The troubling questions of Maus from one generation to another about conspiracies of silence and the culture of survival.

Courts, or the secular institutions which have often claimed to provide an arena in which people bear witness and ask questions, are clearly part of the problem here. Churches, or the various spiritual assemblies which often provide another forum in which we bear candid--and sometimes conflicting--witness, don't seem to be much better. Why not? Perhaps because the fundamental issue in each case is who speaks, and to whom. The authenticity of the speaker is confirmed by the authority of the listener. And vice versa. Power is vested not so much in one or the other, but in the occasion itself.

And yet so it is with history. History, like other forms of bearing witness--where only certain voices are validated--also highights a fundamental problem of agency, especially in its extraordinary deference to precedent. This deference can be debilitating. By making the dead speak, are the living thereby struck dumb? Or by making the old speak, are the young rendered speechless? Or by allowing the men to speak, are the women kept silent? Not necessarily, to be sure; but that uncertainly may not be much comfort.

The need to develop arenas in which these matters can be contested, but in which criteria of authority and authenticity are also recognized, is one of the central challenges in the development of new and more widely acknowledged practices of aboriginal history. The issue involves not only truth but also belief. The two, after all, are sides of the same coin. Just as history deals with both truth and lies, so it must accomodate both doubt and belief, and sustain a tension between them.

At one extreme, the tension is a simple one, between authority and authenticity. This isn't new, in any tradition. "For you, apparently, it makes a difference who the speaker is, and what country he comes from. You don't merely ask whether what he says is true or false", said Socrates to Phaedras. It is recognized as a complicated part of the appeals to authority made by various people, at various times--the authority of thoughts (construed as certain sorts of abstract statements, or the reification of certain kinds of experiences) or of feelings (represented by laughter and tears and everything in between). It is part of any discussion, in any culture. It is relevant to both aboriginal and non-aboriginal discourses, across academic and non-academic practice. Rules of

procedure and rules of evidence are essentially in dispute.

At the other extreme, the tension is between things and ideas, or between the factually correct and the ideologically correct. This may seem a provocative way of putting it; but ultimately it comes down to a question of the frame within which we see and interpret things. And this involves an ideological, or theoretical, decision. We cannot say that a thing is until we say what it is. Science is full of examples of people saying that a dog is a clumsy cat. And so is history. In one of the most grotesque and comical acts of the past 500 years, Columbus mis-named Indians, setting in motion a series of misrepresentations that are still with us.

All of this highlights the power vested in the conceptual or ideological frame within which we perceive things, and talk about facts. Facts are culturally mediated. Put bluntly, they are made up (the root meaning of the word). A whole set of epistemological questions--questions about how we know, and what it is that we know when we know--are involved here. These questions remind us of what is going on when we talk about the authority of aboriginal names on maps, and affirm that they have more credibility than later namings. They do, to be sure; but within a relative rather than an absolute conception of authenticity, in which names are neither inevitable nor arbitrary.

The same contingencies apply to the matter of rights; or the solidarities of social organization. We need to maintain a sense both of their naturalness and their artifice. And we need to connect these complementary allegiances--to life and to art--with the corresponding allegiances of history, its claims to be both a mirroring and a making. These connections may make it easier to see why, if we extinguish rights, or deny the existence of communities, we extinguish history. Coherence and continuity, like integrity, are both natural and artificial. That is part of their power. That is why they are so durable. And it is why the truth-value of history, and its relationship to individual and collective belief, is ultimately so important. History provides a kind of grammar of assent, a way of saying yes. And it has complementary roles as a chronicle of events on the one hand, and a ceremony of belief on the other.

And here we come to another set of problems involving language. There are two aspects to this. One has to do with the truth value of figurative expression. Do figures of speech--the devices of rhetoric, the tricks of the story-telling trade, the things that speakers do to please and persuade an audience-- move us away from, or closer to, the truth? Rhetoric always finds itself under suspicion when the custodians of truth come calling. And yet performance--spoken or written--holds our attention. What is the relationship between the attention we pay to a performance (which spoken or written), our feelings about it, and historical truth. Morals are what you feel good after, in one venerable theory of ethics. So is truth, in another. How do these questions bear on oral history, and its audience? This is a topic on which aboriginal oral historians have many, and sophisticated, views.

There's another dimension to all this, having to do with the relationship between history and historians. History gives people a sense of who they are and who they are not, of where they belong and where they do not belong. Historians give us history. Tribal historians, acadamic historians, old visionaries, young revisionaries, collectivities, commissions. Words have power--which historians (like the rest of us) exercise, and which then hold all of us (including those who use them) in thrall. This applies as much to our histories as it does to any other of our inventions or discoveries. In colonial circumstances, the criteria for being somebody and for belonging somewhere are defined by someone else's historians, often located someplace else. On the verandah, for those working in the fields. In the city, for those in the country. In the east, for those in the west. In the imperial centre, for those on the colonial margins. In the south, for those in the Arctic. Take for instance the nineteenth century imperial British historian James Anthony Froude, saying of the West Indies that "there are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own". No organized society, and no rights. This kind of comment, which is hardly untypical, creates not only a consciousness of invisibility but also an ambition to become visible according to criteria (of what it is to be people in the true sense of the word, of what constitute character and purpose) defined by somebody

else.

But it also creates a desire for invisibility--through mimicry of colonial habits on the one hand, and through retreat into regions far away from the colonial world on the other. This desire is deeply embedded in the texts and contexts of many colonial encounters with aboriginal people. The treaties are an epitome of it. They are texts in which aboriginal people are both present and absent at the same time; and they prescribe a set of arrangements in which they will be both there and not there. Treaties were in this sense conjuring tricks (in which some aboriginal peoople participated), making them both visible and invisible. So is much history--including (and this is a troubling suggestion) some oral history.

To get a sense of the ways in which such a logic spins itself out into the fabric of colonial mimicry, consider a remark made one hundred years after these treaties by the Trinidadian story-teller V. S. Naipaul, who insisted (in a book for which the epigraph was Froude's statement) that "history is built around creation and achievement, and nothing was created in the West Indies". The logic was clear, for Naipaul. West Indians are nobodies, living nowhere, and doing nothing. They need to measure up. But they never will. The framework is set so that they will inevitably come short of the mark--not speaking properly, or looking right, or living where they should. And so peoples of African and Asian and aboriginal heritage in the Americas spend a considerable amount of time trying to speak like someone else, and to look like someone else, and to live someplace else--or as though they were living someplace else.

All of the assumptions about land in the Americas, for example, depend upon an analogous framework--in which aboriginal peoples must prove their entitlement to land that was in their stewardship long before settlers arrived, and moreover to prove it along lines dictated by the newcomers. It is like insisting that blacks be grateful for slavery because it gave them an African heritage. Or that Indians be grateful for the frontier because it gave them an economy.

The West Indies belongs in this story in another way. 1763 was the year in which the custodians of imperial power in Great Britain drafted the Royal Proclamation, that utilitarian (and as it turns out rather useful) expression of British policy towards aboriginal

peoples. But in that same year, the high-minded thinkers who gave lawyers and judges their main defense of aboriginal rights were also negotiating the Treaty of Paris in the service of slavery, and (to hedge their bets, because they saw clouds on the slave-trading horizon) in explaining to some very doubtful British parliamentarians why Guadeloupe and Martinique were a fair trade for Canada. And why France could be expected to welcome the trade.

And so to finish this story in the West Indies, Derek Walcott (1992 Nobel laureate for literature) has one of his characters, a mulatto named Shabine (whose ancestry is the same as Walcott's, and whose name is the very word for metis in French creole), put it bluntly.

> I had a sound colonial education,
> I have Dutch, nigger and English in me,
> and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation

Self-contempt jostles with self-conscious irony in this statement, and colonial categories convey colonial contempt. The alternatives that Shabine poses are not nearly as simple as they seem. One ("I'm nobody") parodies a colonial condition; the other ("I'm a nation") mimics imperial categories. Slave or master. It's a foolish choice, between a false alternative, that binds you either way . . . just like the choice between separation and assimilation, or between being marooned on an island or drowned in the sea.

The clearest thing that emerged from the discussions at the workshop, and from discussions that have taken place before and since with practitioners in Canada and abroad, is that the setting up and living out of dichotomies is an especially pernicious legacy of colonization. Primitive or civilized, hunter or farmer, warrior or peacmaker, traditional or progressive, legal or illegal, rural or urban, material or spiritual, young or old, women or men, oral or written, separation or assimilation, nothingness or nationality, aboriginal or non-aboriginal . . . these are the categories which are used to analyze aboriginal people, and the choices that are put to them. Take one or the other. Be modern, assimilated . . or primitive, traditional. Many try to move beyond these categories . . . but most are caught up in them, and the solutions that are

devised--development for the underdeveloped, communication and transportation to the centre for those on the margins, employment for the unemployed, and so forth--reflect this.

Dichotomies are also deeply embedded in conventional modes of historical discourse, just as (with the best will in the world) they are enshrined in the research agenda of the Royal Commission. Breaking free from these dichotomies, while preserving the differences that define both aboriginal identity in general and the particulars of distinct aboriginal cultures and communities, is the most important task of research, if not of the Commission as a whole. And this is what the historical research must attempt to do, with the projects being understood and undertaken as an integrated endeavour. More than that, historical research must make crystal clear that it is this breaking free of inappropriate and insidious dichotomies--not something else--that it is trying to do.

Of course, many aboriginal people know that they do not have to make these choices--least of all the choice between being "traditional" or "assimilated". They know that they always have been and still are somebody, living somewhere. And yet they are surrounded by a discourse--historical, political, legal--that contradicts this. A discourse that is premised not only on a catechism of false choices, but also on a lie, or a collection of lies--about the land, about organized societies, about choices. And so they sometimes find refuge either in a tale of demons--demons from over the water, who come in a straight line to do crooked things--or their own tapestry of lies, in which images of the nobility and stability and sensitivity of aboriginal people predominate.

Living a lie, of course, is not uncommon. We all do it, all the time. It seems to be a necessary part of living the truth. Except that we have fancier names for it. History, for example. History--aboriginal and non-aboriginal--is as deeply involved in fictions as it is in facts, deliberately forgetting as much as diligently remembering, forging (in <u>both</u> senses of the word) the consciousness of a people to give them "a character and purpose of their own" in a "history built around creation and achievement".

Yet there is another and perhaps deeper dimension to the issue of truth. Much emotional distress has its origins in a mismatch between what is said and what is known. Children who are told the world is one thing when they know it is another; people who feel obliged to insist that things are not as they in fact believe them to be; societies that have to represent their history in defiance of their own true knowledge--all these constitute untruths for which very high prices have to be paid. Prices in the form of anxiety neurosis, self-loathing, profound nervousness, fear of discovery. And the highest of all prices: self-destructive alcoholism, extremes of violence, and suicide. It may be that we should all pay as much attention to Alice Miller (the psychologist of child abuse) as to Frantz Fanon (the theorist of decolonization).

A national history, a first nations history. The hazards are obvious--that the standards of creation and achievement will be defined by somebody else, and that people will be corrupted into a certain kind of significance by someone else's categories. This is a possibility by which groups within most communities, not by any means only aboriginal communities, have always been troubled. Are the criteria that often characterize history (at least in a European tradition) relevant to the history of women's experiences, for instance; or to the experience of different classes in the society; or to a history of the arts; or to the development of religious thought? Do these (once again fashionable) questions do anything more than distort the situation, for instance of communities where these distinctions do not emerge, or are not acknowledged in the same way?

Against this, there is another kind of argument, which Walcott proposed to counter Naipaul. "Nothing will always be created in the West Indies, for what exists there is like nothing one has ever seen before". Good move, in many ways. But do we therefore accept that the experience of aboriginal peoples is fundamentally different from that of non-aboriginal peoples? If so--and this is a very big if--is it different from that of other colonized or victimized peoples? Which ones? Many people--many Jews, for instance--would claim considerable status as victims in a long line of dislocation and dispossession going back to 1492 in Spain, and well beyond in other

parts of Europe and Asia. Should the history of aboriginal peoples seek common cause with other, similar experiences--such as that of the Irish, whose history of colonial oppression includes most of the past eight centuries, and whose language and customs were ruthlessly supressed, their lands taken from them, and their chiefs' ancient claims disregarded; or the Scots, who were cleared off their land in the eighteenth century with a brutality that is remembered by their descendants in story and song.

This reminds us, also, of the ways in which immigrant history, immigrant problems of culture, the nature of the diasporas that underly much Canadian non-aboriginal history--Acadien and Canadien as well as Irish and Scots--are not all that dissimilar from problems expressed by aboriginal groups with the keenest focus on cultural form and survival. This is an unpalatable implication; the aboriginal interest is, for good reasons, emphatic about the basic difference between itself and other parts of Canadian pluralism. Yet we should be careful here; if aboriginal right is distinctive, it may not be on account of suffering, displacement or assaults upon indigenous cultures. We may need to look, again, at land in history rather than at culture as such.

But then other questions come back into play. Are some experiences of dislocation and dispossession different in kind, as well as degree? Is the holocaust *sui generis*? Is the war against the Indians? Are there immunities that go along with such unique experiences? Should some questions--about the holocaust, for example, or about the Bering Straits--not be asked? Even if the experience of aboriginal people <u>is</u> different, should their history be different in kind, or only in degree, from non-aboriginal history. Is history what is told by the winners? Or the survivors? In what sense are they the same? Knowledge, which history reflects, is after all in the business of both survival and power.

Hovering over all these questions is yet another. Does any of this matter? Does history--should history--have anything to do with these arguments? Or should it get about its business of providing us with a way of looking at the world--of giving us a story line by means of which we can make sense of experiences that otherwise are incoherent and incapacitating? Is history most of all in the

business of providing us with a theory of our lives, a way of beholding ourselves and others? Or is it in the business of comforting us, helping us live our lives, making us feel good about ourselves, safe in the knowledge that we are people in the true sense of the word, with guardians hovering over us? Are these two functions seperate, or separable? Should history settle, or unsettle, us?

There are two kinds of responses to these questions. One is to slam the door shut on them and hope they will go away. They may, for awhile. But they'll be back; and the history that has been written in deliberate ignorance of their importance will look trivial, and in some fundamental sense will be untrue. The other response is to try to answer them--not in abstract theoretical terms, but as part of the practice of history. The projects that we are recommending to the Commission are designed to do this in ways that move us beyond the debilitating anxiety that these questions often produce, and the impatience that they sometimes generate. And these projects can be alive, in many ways, to the genuine--the really inspiring and consoling--complexities of history.

These projects are not in competition with other historical research. They complement longstanding historical traditions within aboriginal communities. And they will contribute in significant new ways to the historical scholarship that is going on within the academic community, and in the courts. They will provide a basis for work in other areas as well, ncluding some of the areas in which the Commission will be making specific recommendations for action. They will establish a framework within which aboriginal history can take its place at the centre of the Canadian consciousness, and shape a new sense of the country.

II

Extinguishment of Title

The federal government has structured land claims negotiations so that at the end of the process aboriginal people are required to extinguish aboriginal title in return for a set of benefits. In this regard these land claims negotiations are in the spirit (though not in the letter) of the written versions of the treaties. They are intrinsically colonizing. They seek to ensure that none of the original population has rights in the land that go beyond the legal rights of either the crown or the Canadian (that is the immigrant) citizen. Federal government policy has been to secure an agreement that extinguishment be a part of the final settlement; and an agreement to extinguishment has constituted a condition to negotiations. This negotiating policy is sometimes decorated by arguments about stability and sovereignty, which only serve to highlight its colonial premise.

The Royal Commission could offer a strong opinion on this subject--a statement about the aboriginal right to maintain aboriginal rights, a statement about why extinguishment is, among other things, unjust (it is quite simply wrong for the crown to legislate away the special place of aboriginal people in the country) and counter-productive (failing to entrench aboriginal rights will produce an ever deepening sense of alienation and anger among aboriginal people).

This is an issue that goes to the heart of this country, for it speaks to the way Canadians see themselves, and how they constitute their history. An authentic history of Canada must place aboriginal history at its centre. Entrenchment is a chance for Canada as a whole to acknowledge the place of aboriginal people in these lands, to take this acknowledgment as a starting point in negotiations, and to confirm the place of aboriginal peoples as a fundamental historical fact. If there is a clear statement that there cannot be extinguishment, that to contemplate extinguishment is to contemplate obliterating both history and geography, then the negotiation of

a new relationship could begin to take place in a way that does not, from the beginning, throw aboriginal peoples onto the defensive with a deep sense of wrong and an even deeper sense that no one is prepared to put it right.

The difficulty that non-aboriginal Canadians have with aboriginal oral history is closely related to this issue, for it is part of the denial of their historical presence on this land. It is to deny, also, that aboriginal people have and always have had a history. Much of the oral tradition of each cultural group focusses on its unique relationship to a particular territory or set of territories. The point of this focus, the importance of this special relationship, lies in the culture's affirmation, through and in the history, of their right to certain places. Such histories typically describe how a people originated in a place, came from the land there, and have the names by knowing how the names were first given. Such histories also establish that others do not have rights there, for the accounts of the past usually refer to conflicts, wars and trespass (including, in some cases, wars and trespass that resulted in transfers of territory). It is these histories that locate aboriginal people in a sure position in relation to the newcomers.

History defines culture. In the case of aboriginal history, as in the case of most people's history, culture is based on the land, on a people's sense of having responsibility for and being in some sense inseparable from a particular place. Deny this, and we deny history. We say you never were, and you are not now.

In this way, oral history is inseparable from the idea of aboriginal rights. To speak of extinguishment, the over-ruling of aboriginal rights, is to entertain the possibility of aboriginal oral history being over-ruled. But history cannot be overruled. It can be undermined, ignored, forgotten--which is part of the injustice and pain of the colonial process. The Royal Commission, with its task of making a new and influential set of definitions of the place of aboriginal people in this country, can make a crucial contribution to the debate by explaining the link between history and rights, between oral history and aboriginal rights. This explanation would naturally end with the powerful recommendation that extinguishment be removed from the land claims agenda.

III

Organized Societies

A question has arisen in land claims and land rights cases about the extent to which one or another culture is composed of "organized societies". This was asked, for example, in a seminal 1919 Southern Rhodesian case; and, most recently, in the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en case, Delgamuukw v. the Queen. The question is asked in law because the law appears to have decided that if people do not live in an organized society, then they are not eligible for aboriginal rights of ownership or for any other forms of jurisdictional authority in the lands and resources they use. Organization has thus become a test, a matter which judges have to decide, and the judges' decisions bear directly on the legal prospects of aboriginal defendants or litigants across a wide range of matters.

From a legal viewpoint, the test of organization makes some obvious sense in cases where a number of individuals fraudulently constitute themselves a group, and decide that they have collective rights by virtue of their being organized. If this organization is recent, and has no more than an ad hoc or opportunistic basis, then the law must be sceptical, and must make the collective claims of this self-styled organization difficult to advance or defend.

The application of this test to aboriginal cultures, however, does not make sense. Indeed, there are ways in which it represents the kind of insult and produces the kind of outrage felt by survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, for example, when faced with a denial of the holocaust. To suggest that a human culture--with a unique tradition of language and law--might not be an organized society, and to rule on this basis that the peoples of that culture have no collective or aboriginal rights, is deeply shocking. It is also very stupid. This is so for several reasons.

First, all human cultures are composed of organized societies. Aboriginal systems, rooted in subsistence, their well-being dependent on a web of mutually supportive family ties and complex

links with specific territories, are self-evidently "organized". Indeed, the very expression "organized society" when used in the context of any culture is a kind of redundancy.

Second, a court (or a society) feels able to ask whether or not an aboriginal culture is composed of organized societies only by virtue of some sort of evolutionism. The discussion of a culture's degree of organization typically takes place alongside questions about its degree of development, its progress up the evolutionary ladder. This constitutes the conceit of racism.

Third, when colonial governments came to lands already occupied by aboriginal people (which is to say, all the lands of Canada), they were eager to validate, in the European legal world, their claims to rights in these territories. They did this through treaties with peoples who were manifestly organized, and perceived as able to enter into long-standing and binding juridical relations. In fact, validation of the occupation in the European's legal system required that these arrangements be made. To raise the question of organization in retrospect, therefore, has the hallmarks of a legal sleight of hand. It is not an authentic question about the real nature of aboriginal society, either now or at the time of contact. Still less should it be a question that bears on that society's future.

Fourth, the asking of the question directly in court, or indirectly in the many ways in which society puts aboriginal people on the defensive with regard to the coherence and continuity of their culture, forces aboriginal defendants and litigants to present evidence that no human being should be required to present. The question involves an intrinsic denial of their humanity, and a profound abuse of their right to be treated with respect and dignity. To embark on a proof of an aboriginal culture's being an organized society is tantamount to seeking proof that aboriginal people are fully human. This is an abomination. We place considerable importance on a justice system in which people are presumed innocent until proven guilty. How can we possibly countenance a system which requires aboriginal people to prove they are human before they can ask for justice?

Social science, especially with the work of the past thirty years on hunting and gathering systems, has made clear that all

indigenous peoples live in organized societies. Archaeological and anthropological findings reveal that for at least 25,000 years human beings have lived in what are referred to as "cultures", which is to say in societies that are organized. Yet in case after case anthropologists are sworn as expert witnesses, and challenged to prove it. It is as if physicists were repeatedly required to prove that the earth is round, or that the earth orbits the sun, or that if you throw something up in the air it will come down.

In all sciences there are such things as discoveries. The nature of human social organization in indigenous culture is no less--and no more--of a discovery than the discovery of gravity. To resist this is to maintain ignorance and prejudice. Worse, it is to place on aboriginal people the continual burden of proving what is as obvious as gravity, and to perpetuate a system in which they need help from anthropologists in order to prove that they exist. Whatever else this produces, one thing is certain: it leads to confusion, withdrawal, resentment, and also to the fabrication of a kind of fake history. The logic goes something like this: if they believe we're sub-human, we'd better prove we're super-human.

We propose that the Royal Commission make an authoritative statement on this issue. Prejudice and racism are not easy to combat. Yet the Commission is in a position to make an intervention into the terms of the debate about aboriginal society that will expose a form of argument, and indeed an arena of argument, in which prejudice and racism often assert themselves, albeit sometimes in covert form. A decisive rejection of the very possibility of the question in serious discussion--and particularly in judicial discussion--would amount to a recognition of aboriginal people as fully human, and (accepting the universality of the human cultural condition) of their cultural status as on a level with others. It would also, implicitly at least, amount to a recognition that aboriginal people have a history.

Let's be clear about this. The suggestion that aboriginal societies might not have been organized is based on the idea that, at the time of European settlement and appropriation of the Americas, some human beings lived in a state of such primitive development that they "roamed from place to place" like "beasts of the field".

This is the old idea of the wild savage, an intermediate creature between the animal and the human. This was the idea, of course, that was used to justify the expropriation of the "savages'" lands. In the famous sixteenth century debate beween Las Casas and Sepulveda at Valladolid in Spain the central argument turned on whether Indians were "natural slaves". A natural slave, as Aristotle had defined it, was someone who had not reached a truly human and social level of development. Sepulveda took this to mean that the natural slaves, the Indians, could be pressed into a civilized condition by forced labour and Christian religious practice. The argument of the day was that such sub-humans must be given, by force if necessary, the organized society that they lack.

In modern lands rights cases the core argument is being made: no history, no organized society, no rights. Is this not to dispossess on the basis of sub-humanity? This argument is still made by the Crown, and sometimes sustained, in Canadian courts. Whether the argument is being sustained or not, the people are being forced to demonstrate that they are fully human. The Royal Commission is in a position to expose, and then dispose of, this archaic and repellant anomaly.

On August 25, 1992, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in its Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities issued its "First Progress Report", submitted by Special Rapporteur Miguel Alfonso Martinez. Central to his report are observations that are also central to what we are discussing. The Special Rapporteur refers to the long shadow of "inferiority", "backwardness" and "want of institutionalization" which the Euro-centric view has thrown over indigenous societies. Part of the wall creating this shadow is the "organized society" test. Shoring up and providing new legitimacy to this test is its most recent advocate, Chief Justice Allan McEachern, who decided the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en case.

The Rapporteur notes how deeply rooted is Western society's ethnocentricity amongst the judiciary when he quotes Judge McEachern as saying: "The plaintiffs' ancestors had no written language, no horses or wheeled vehicles, slavery and starvation was [sic] not uncommon, wars with neighbouring peoples were common, and there is

no doubt, to quote Hobbs [sic] that aboriginal life in the territory was, at best, 'nasty, brutish and short'".

In a statement which marries issue of superiority with issues of extinguishment, the Rapporteur remarks that concepts of "inferior societies" led to outright colonial domination, and in many cases to early extermination, of indigenous nations. The Beothuks of Newfoundland are part of Canada's historical legacy of physical extermination. Extinguishment is its spiritual counterpart. The organized society test is its instrument.

IV

General History Project

Over the past twenty years, a good number of written historical studies have been produced that address the past and present experiences of aboriginal peoples in Canada. Standard histories have finally begun to acknowledge in a more than token manner the presence of aboriginal societies on the land when settlers arrived. Sometimes, this still seems to be provided as an exotic introduction to the serious business of discovery and development. Occasionally, it continues as a thread running through the social, economic, cultural and political history of French, British and Canadian national enterprise. But at least it is no longer possible to write serious history in Canada without admitting that there were aboriginal people here first. Drawing on extensive scholarship in the United States, so-called intellectual histories--histories of the ideas informing these enterprises--have also been produced. And the creative arts--fiction, poetry, painting, music, drama, dance--have provided significant insights into historical events and circumstances, as well as into the limitations of academic and popular historical discourses.

Recently, some fine specific historical studies addressing particular sets of events within particular cultural situations have appeared. These have drawn on archaeology and ethnography, on a wide range of archival documentation, on continuing as well as recorded

oral traditions, and on the testimony provided in land claims and impact assessments. Many of these are conceived from the perspective of non-aboriginal society, though more and more they are self-conscious about this; and sometimes apologetic. In the main, their methods are determined by the disciplines of conventional academic history, and their accomplishments are measured by these standards. These standards, arbitrary though they are, are also high; and many of these new wors have raised the standards even higher. Most of them are produced by individual scholars, and while most of these are non-aboriginal, significant contributions have been made by a new generation of aboriginal historians. A few of these have challenged historical methods, often for reasons that are discussed in this report; and one or two have radically altered the framework within which the stories are told.

As this report emphasizes, historical accounts shape the present and the future of society, as well as its past. In Canada, in the absence of the kind of inspirational political ideology provided by the American revolution, historical studies have been especially important in defining a distinctively Canadian nationality. That they have often also been deeply biased--as the central story of Louis Riel illustrates--and that these biases have informed relationships between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in Canada, and all peoples' sense of themselves, only underlines their power. We may have many of the reservations about them that are catalogued in the workshop report. But the power of these historical studies continues to be formidable, and continues to haunt aboriginal people--especially students who find themselves objectified and vilified and essentialized and homogenized and caricatured and stereotyped by written history. Or who continue to be ignored by it, their heritage neglected and nullified. So even while condemning the privileges of written history, advocating instead the importance of oral history, and of other forms of historical representation such as maps and films, we must recognize that power is vested in these written texts, and aboriginal people want and need access to that power.

How to nourish this power of text, and how to make sure aboriginal people are both the architects and builders of written history that

truly reflects their experience, is one of the challenge before the Commission. A review of current work in this field indicates that there is a wide array of new historical scholarship now underway, much of it under academic sponsorship, some of it addressing specific circumstances of more or less urgent social, economic and political concern, often in order to raise consciousnesses and to create either a context or a climate in which remedies for particular injustices will be provided. The Commissioners have been told that more of these are needed. They have also been told of the dangers of replicating modesl of historical research that represents aboriginal people primarily in relation to non-aboriginal initiatives, and of reinforcing the hegemony of reductive material explanations and purely instrumental relations.

A specific recommendation to provincial and federal granting agencies, such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, that they not only set aside substantial new resources for funding but also establish significantly new strategies for encouraging aboriginal historical scholarship, and for sustaining existing aboriginal institutions dedicated to historical research, would make a substantial difference over the next decade. Such a recommendation should also be addressed to the Canada Council and the various provincial and municipal arts councils, since some of the most important historical insights have been provided in the creative arts, which in turn shape the thinking of the scholarly community. The influence of the Australian Aboriginal Arts Board, a part of the Australia Council, in affecting representations of Australian aboriginal people in the arts and sciences and humanities, is a convincing example of how much influence this kind of initiative can have.

But the Royal Commission has a unique opportunity to have another kind of impact, one that will have far-reaching implications both in this country and abroad. Nobody--no individual, no institution--has brought together the wide range of perspectives and possibilities that exist in contemporary aboriginal and non-aboriginal historical discourses. No single individual or institution could do it. What it requires is the concerted effort of a group of aboriginal and non-aboriginal people, working together

to create a set of texts that will display the present state of knowledge, the main trends in research, and the problems inherent in them. These texts would present divergent views, where they exist, in a context in which the integrity of each was affirmed. They would display historical relationships between different aboriginal cultures, and the different relationships that each has had with settler societies. They would illuminate the distinct forms that colonialism took in various parts of the country, and the distinct responses to it. They would be informed by aboriginal views, and aboriginal intellectual traditions.

There are models for this. One is the Smithsonian Handbook of the North American Indian; but this is developed within a very conventional scholarly academic framework, and its geographical and cultural organization results in a disaggregated historical account. Much more promising are the UNESCO sponsored General Histories, in particular the General History of Africa which is now substantially completed in eight volumes. Each volume has up to thirty chapters, organized according to a wide range of categories. Most of the contributors are African. The volumes are being published first in English, French and Arabic, with specific publishers on all continents cooperating (for example, Heinemann and local publishers in Africa, James Currey in England, UNESCO itself in Europe, University of California Press in the United States.) The books are inexpensive; and are being translated into African languages and in due course into other languages of international currency. There are are some cautionary lessons to learn from this project--but its ambitions, and a sense of the risks inherent in such ambitions, provide a useful frame of reference. It is premised on a couple of principles. The first is that without a general account of history in Africa, the history of the world would remain obscure in many important respects. Furthermore, the methodology used for it has made an invaluable contribution to historiography in general, especially in its use of new interdisciplinary approaches. Its design is intended to ensure that it will be used as the basis of children's books, school textbooks and radio and television programs.

There are two possible models for the project we see as necessary. The first would be a set of studies to cover the geographical and cultural diversity of aboriginal peoples in Canada. These might vary in their methodologies in order to reflect different historical traditions and experiences within different aboriginal communities, but they would be bound together by a common design, and together would constitute a general history of aboriginal peoples in Canada. The second model would focus on a set of exemplary events or relationships or moments, chosen carefully to give an overall picture of the history of aboriginal peoples in Canada, and to illustrate the range of historical traditions and experiences within aboriginal communities. The choice of a model would be made by a small editorial board, to be set up immediately. It would include two elder historians, two academic historians, one specialist in the use of oral history in written texts, and at least one person involved in the development of the Atlas and Film projects described below.

The editorial board, in consultation with the Commissioners, would choose a model and establish a working plan, which would include a framework for interdisciplinary and cross-cultural scholarship. They would also put in place a mechanism for supervising the production of the texts. Co-production funding, involving both granting agencies and publishing houses, would be secured at this stage. This funding might also include contributions from corporate sponsors, foundations, school boards, and international agencies (such as UNESCO). These arrangements would ensure that publication and distribution of the texts would not be a burden on the Commission.

Whichever model is chosen for the General History, the Commission would be directly involved in two elements: the plan itself, which will be an immensely important contribution to historiography and historical research; and the early results of that plan, in the form of the first three or four texts in the project. None of these could conceivably be done without oral history, and without developing new ways of using oral history. All of them would raise issues of considerable importance to the Atlas and Film projects. And each of them would suggest new possibilities in for combining visual material with written and oral text.

A final decision on the first texts would of course be influenced by the overall design of the General History, but possibilities would include a history of relations between Indians and Metis in different parts of the country; a history of the traditions of prophecy in anticipation of, and at the earliest stage of, the colonial encounter; and a history of northern aboriginal peoples, focussing on relations between Inuit and Dene in the west and Inuit and Innu in the east.

The initial budget would be $25,000 for the work of the editorial board, who (in consultation with other aboriginal and non-aboriginal scholars and learned individuals, as well as with archival and cultural and professional associations) would prepare the overall plan; and $100,000 each for the production of the first three texts, each of which would involve a senior researcher/writer and at least two assistants. The relatively high costs of these initial texts reflects the fact that they will be prototypes for the entire General History, and will inevitably require more time--involving more research and more editorial attention--than later volumes.

V

Aboriginal Atlas Project

Aboriginal rights, aboriginal title, and aboriginal identity are all closely associated with the relationships of aboriginal peoples to land. While this truism is widely understood in Canada, many of its implications--cultural and social as well as political and economic--are not. What do aborignal people mean when they speak of the land? Certainly not just real estate or property in any conventional sense, nor even simply a homeland or a way of life, important though those things are. Land (and this includes lakes, rivers, and oceans, whether open or frozen) is territory, landscape, livelihood, belonging, identity, knowledge, spirit. Because it is stories, it is history, but it is also space and place.

These characteristics can only be partially encapsulated and expressed in the conventional literary form of history: words on pages in books. Books about aboriginal history in Canada are becoming plentiful, even if there are debates about their quality, their perspective, their relevance, and about what they don't say as much as about what they do. We may need more history books, and we may need different ones, and we may need different ways of writing about history. We believe that we do. But books are books, and there is much they cannot tell us about the relationships between aboriginal people and the land. The land can be read but it must also be seen, and its pictorial representation in the form of maps, diagrams and pictures is an essential element of communication in a literate world. Together, such representations comprise an atlas. Ideally, an atlas brings together the dimensions of both time and space in a way that no other book can do.

Canadian atlases have only begun to recognize the aboriginal fact in Canada. They are perhaps a generation behind history books. The fourth edition of the Atlas of Canada, a centennial project, includes only two plates showing the historical and present distribution of aboriginal peoples. The current edition has five plates, showing the same type of information but in more detail. Provincial atlases are much the same. The Historical Atlas of Canada is much more innovative, especially in illustrating the dynamic relations of the fur trade era, although within both the current conventions of scholarship and of atlas format. The same limitations apply to the few more specialized (but less ambitious) atlases devoted in whole or in part to the aboriginal experience.

Why have atlases been slow to recognize either aboriginal perspectives or new aboriginal scholarship? The answer is less likely a reflection on geography and cartography as disciplines than it is on the size of an atlas project. Maps and illustrations cost a lot of money, compared to the printed word. Atlases seldom have a single author but are collective works. They are, in the publishing field, megaprojects; and not surprisingly they are more likely to reflect elite, established interests and perspectives (even if only academic ones). Perhaps because of the funding and support they normally require, their underlying if not overt theme is the

celebration of purpose and achievement--of the nation, and of colonial expansion. They are, in an historical sense, teleologies.

These facts speak not only to the need for an Aboriginal Atlas of Canada, but also to the need for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to facilitate the undertaking of the project.

And what is it that should be undertaken? What is needed is not just an atlas that depicts more aspects and more detail of the aboriginal fact in Canada, but one that depicts it in different ways, and above all, from aboriginal perspectives. This is not simply a matter of aboriginal people drawing conventional maps, any more than it is of aboriginal people writing conventional histories. Not only the content but also the format, the style, and perhaps even the medium, must be unconventional. Or at least it must be so in part, because an effective means of communication requires some conventional grounding that is creatively integrated with the unconventional.

What is the capacity in Canada to create the unconventional? Is this just a pipedream or is it a project that is practical and realistic to undertake? What would it look like? How would it challenge conventional perspectives?

We will come to these questions in a moment; but first let's look at the characteristics of such an atlas. Keeping in mind the need to combine the familiar and the unfamiliar, the contents of an Aboriginal Atlas of Canada might incorporate the following elements:

Early aboriginal maps, especially those drawn in the early stages of contact for explorers and traders. Many exist in archives, and some have been published; but never as a collection.

Aboriginal perspectives of space and territory. This could include maps drawn using different projections, and perspectives that would contrast with the familiar conic projection, north at the top, representations of Canada. Such maps should reveal aboriginal perspectives on landscape and territory. There is little precedent for this and it might be the most innovative part of the Atlas. It would require new research by new methods. Some of the representations might also serve as base maps for plates in the

following sections.

Place names (Toponymy). This would include familiar representations of Canada, or parts of it, with aboriginal place names in aboriginal languages. This would be accompanied by at least a sampling of the meaning of these names--not simply literal translations but their stories. This is one way of emphasizing the connection between people and place through myth, stories, kinship, and history. Some attention should be given to the system of place-naming as well as to the names themselves. Several toponymy projects have been undertaken in recent years. None has been published in Atlas form.

Land use and occupancy. An enormous amount of land use and occupancy research has been undertaken in the last twenty years. This has occurred primarily for comprehensive claims documentation, secondarily to document land use and resource conflicts for impact assessment. While many of these studies have been published, their format has often been restricted and unimaginative, and the archive of information largely untapped beyond its immediate utility. An atlas could provide the occasion not only for the collation of this material, but also for its reinterpretation. Which leads to another issue. Arguably the instrumental processes for which the material was collected have had the effect of distorting and even misrepresenting the subject matter itself. What is land use and occupancy? What are its indicators? How should they be mapped? What do they show? What, for that matter, is the nature of property and tenure in aboriginal societies?

The land use and occupancy theme raises fundamental questions about how geography and cartography represent territories and boundaries, and about the nature of territories and boundaries in societies without states. How to portray permeable boundaries, social space, and the relative significance of core and peripheral territory? How to portray aboriginal nations geographically? The Aboriginal Atlas of Canada could make a major contribution to theory and method in this regard, rather than simply representing "facts" on conventional maps by conventional means.

History. The Atlas must portray the knowledge and experience of aboriginal people in a novel way, not simply their "contribution" to the development of Canada as a nation, which is an important underlying theme of most atlases.

The Aboriginal Atlas of Canada would provide a means of capturing and translating new historical scholarship into concepts and representations of space and place. And of acknowledging places of particular symbolic importance to aboriginal people. Existing research, archives, and oral history records provide a rich source of historical information on a wide range of themes that could be portrayed on maps. Some themes that should be addressed include the pattern of treaty-making, reserve selection and loss, comprehensive claims, and historiographic material on differing interpretations of rights and claims.

Traditional knowledge. The Atlas should also include the typical sections on physiography, climate, and biota, but from aboriginal perspectives, using aboriginal systems of classification and aboriginal concepts of significance and relationship. In other words, it should be in part an atlas of ethnoscience and traditional knowledge, portraying aboriginal systems and theories of knowledge about the aboriginal world. This would be another area of innovation, for which there is little precedent.

Current themes. Two major areas could be addressed here. One is current demographic and economic conditions, social and cultural characteristics, and related topics for which there exists much administrative and monitoring data as well as information from special studies. The demographic plates might pay particular attention to migration, displacement, and relocation. In this, as in other areas, new information will also come in from research currently underway sponsored by the Royal Commission.

The other area that the Atlas might address is the relationships (including the conflicts) between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in Canada with respect to their rights, their activities and their visions of the future. Other plates could illustrate the impacts of settlement, development, and administration, and depict land use conflicts, the extent and nature of the effects of river regulation, contaminants, and resource harvesting disruption. The

results of aboriginal-sponored research as well as academic scholarship provide a rich source for these topics.

Not least, the Atlas should convey in spatial and geographical terms some visions of the future. What are the defining characteristics of aboriginal nationhood? What happens when you map them? What will be the spatial and geographic impact of aboriginal institutions? What should Canada look like from aboriginal perspectives?

The sections on history and current themes will inevitably overlap to some extent. Of fundamental importance will be the choice of base maps in which to represent the data, because these as much as the overlying information can serve to communicate a different reality.

Nothing like this exists in one place. There are a number of scattered bits and pieces that serve as partial examples, but many of these themes have never been mapped on national or regional scales, and some have not been mapped at all. An Aboriginal Atlas of Canada would be an important contribution not only for aboriginal but also for non-aboriginal people, by providing them with a new perspective and a deeper understanding of the northern half of the continent which they have made home.

An Aboriginal Atlas would also serve to convey some of the important results of the Commission's work to a different audience in a different way. The Royal Commission has undertaken a very ambitious and diverse research program. But the exigencies of schedules and deadlines will mean that while many words will be written and published, maps and diagrams will not only be scarce, but conventional. One may predict with confidence that the illustrative materials will do justice to very few of the projects they accompany, if they are used at all. As the above outline indicates, there is already much material on hand on which to base an atlas, and the Royal Commission itself will generate much more. At the same time, a really innovative atlas will require additional innovative thought and research in certain areas.

A serious Aboriginal Atlas project will cost several million dollars, and take at least five years from inception to completion. Many people will contribute. While the Historical Atlas of Canada

provides a beautiful example of what, visually, an atlas can be, the technical requirements of a project in the era of Computer Assisted Drawing and Geographical Information Systems are substantial, and probably quite different from that project.

The proposed Atlas would require, from the outset, an editorial and technical board that would bring together aboriginal, academic, and technical perspectives, knowledge, and skills. The first stage should be to bring together a working group to discuss the idea; and this could most effectively be done in Ottawa in the first week of June in association with the Learned Societies Meetings, when academic associations such as the Canadian Association of Geographers will be meeting. As with the General History project, co-production funding involving both granting agencies and publishing houses would be secured at an early stage. This funding might also include contributions from corporate sponsors and foundations. An initial budget of $10,000 to fund the working group sessions would be required, with the expectation that a further commitment of up to $100,000 would be needed to move the project into the serious planning stage. The project, the Aboriginal Atlas, would be conceived and initiated by the Commission (and this would be recognized on its title page). It should be underlined, however, that the results of this project would not be fully realized within the life of the Commission, but that its legacy would be very substantial indeed, and would include the innovative use and imaginative expression of the Commission's own research.

VI

Film Project

Attempts to convey the meanings and carry the voices of aboriginal society in writing are inevitably bedeviled by the contradiction between the form of the spoken and the form of the written word. The audience for the written word is restricted to the literate; writing about an oral historical tradition is restricted to a high degree of objectification--it is <u>about</u> people,

and not a communication with them. Stories, histories and even opinions within an oral tradition are spoken with greatest authority in specific settings. Although the setting can be described on the page, it cannot be seen, and cannot be heard.

The advantage of film thus lies in its being able to work within an oral tradition, using many of that tradition's own devices, and seeking to place the spoken word within appropriate settings. Moreover the people about or with whom a film is made can easily be a part (and might well be the most important part) of the audience. That is to say, film can be an intrinsically less alienating medium with which to record and communicate oral culture.

But there are a number of important qualifications to this theory of film. In reality, many films about native people and aboriginal society have been made from above. That is to say, the film-making style (in particular the use of white, male and middle-class narrators) has meant that many films are patronizing and even racist. In many cases, programs about aboriginal people do not realize the potential of film, but rather cause it to become a form of visualized literature, or heavy-handed film journalism.

Aboriginal people hit the TV screens when there is a moment of crisis, when some aspect of their lives hits the news. They are not part of the currency of television, and for this reason their forms of understanding, their ways of life, are to some considerable extent shut out of the mainstream of national television broadcasting. Similarly, feature films are daunted by Hollywood stereotypic conceptions and imagery of the primitive (and usually violent) savage. Possible exceptions to this are Dances with Wolves and The Emerald Forest. But they, too, carry their own ideological messages. In the former, it takes a white man to find the buffalo and, in the end, the Indians are doomed; in the latter, the Indians are divided in the idiom of Hollywood melodramatics into goodies and baddies--both groups are naked and made up of the shapely young, with the baddies painted black and touting machine guns! In both, the people are able to speak to us thanks to white adoptees. Yet aboriginal history should be able to find a particularly valuable and authentic mode of expression through film.

Given the potential of film to give expression to oral tradition,

and the value this can have in the society as a whole and in the educational system in particular, the Royal Commission might consider the possibilities here both for using film to establish the place of aboriginal people in Canada, and for leaving, as part of the Commission's legacy, a film project that could endorse and communicate its view of aboriginal history in this country.

What kinds of film project would be appropriate? There are many possibilities. But in the light of our suggestions here about the nature of oral history and the central importance of the joint issues of extinguishment and organized society, we urge that the Commission consider a film project that sets out the history of the legal arguments about aboriginal rights. This might be a documentary or docu-drama mini-series that reached back in time to the Las Casas-Sepulveda debate, and moved forward to the establishment of the League of the Haudenosaunee (the Iroquois Confederacy), the signing of the 1870s treaties, the Calder case, and the issues raised by Degamuukw. The advantages of a project of this kind include the following:

1. Legal structures are of critical importance to aboriginal peoples, and yet the terms in which they are discussed tend to be those of the lawyers rather than of the people. In reality, the questions about history and society which underly the arguments are anything but obscure; they tend to be at the very centre of native people's oral histories and everyday practice. In films that were committed to staying close to these--the voices and realities of people's lives--the seemingly obscure aspects of legal arguments could be made visible.

2. Many of the protagonists in the central case --that of Calder--are still alive and would be eager participants in a project of this kind.

3. The broad implications of these cases mean that the different kinds of aboriginal circumstance in this country could all be relevant. The tension between what we have termed north and west versus south and east perspectives could be obviated.

4. Many of the topics are already researched from within the aboriginal community; the project would give expression to that which is agreed by aboriginal elders to be of importance.

5. The finished films would endorse the Commission's central determination to broaden, and in some ways change, the ways in which aboriginal history is done and known.

6. Finally, the finished films should be broadcast nationally, ideally by the CBC (and the Commission's offices might well be used to secure this), and thereafter become a feature of school and university curricula, in Canada and abroad.

The current cost of documentary film of broadcast quality is in the order of $500,000 per TV hour. The cost of a three part series, therefore, would be something like 1.5 million dollars. If a significant proportion were dramatized, costs would go up accordingly. Producers make films at these budget levels by negotiating quite intricate co-production deals. Were the Commission to provide seed money for the research and development of a project of this kind. This would take the idea as far as full treatments of the films, and constitute the Commission's initial commitment. Funding of this would require about $20,000 per film. Once treatments were done (a process that would take approximately eight weeks), the films' producers would then be in a position to take the treatment and raise the production budget from a variety of sources. These might include broadcasters (the CBC or others), the National Film Board, the private sector, foundations, and finally from Telefilm Canada. The Commission might at this stage be invited to provide further support. Each film would open with a credit that announced the Commission's role as initiator. (For example: "This film was produced for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples . . . etc")

While broadcasting represents the means of reaching a mass market, there is a significant and more important long-term audience made up of schools, colleges, government agencies and, of course, aboriginal communities. Some (all too few) films are already being directed towards these audiences. But new technologies could be used to create remarkable ways of building the film project into other parts of the Commission's findings and contributions. For example, CD-ROM and laser disc forms would allow integration of oral history, atlas and film into a single and accessible package. These technologies would make possible the teaching of aboriginal history

in a way that hitherto has been impossible, and would place the published historicai work of the Commission at the forefront of public education.

The Commission could initiate this process. An advisory group (of three or four people) could be formed, and a person appointed to prepare the treatment under the guidance of the group and in consultation with the Commissioners. We believe that there is a very considerable opportunity here for the Commission's legacy to include a major contribution to, and innovatory use of, films with and for the aboriginal community. No Royal Commission has sought to make use of this means of developing and broadening its findings. Yet the possibility of film of this kind--to set out the issues and to ensure that they enter the public arena and contribute to future understanding--appears to us to to provide a unique mechanism for furthering the Commission's fundamental objectives.