

Radical Presence

Beyond pernicious identity politics and racialism

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The burden of forgetting will worry their hearts.

(Rytcheu 1997, 242)

In the past I have used such words as “recovery of Indigenous mind” and “nurturing conversation” and “participatory or shamanic concourse” and “decolonization” to point to a particular consciousness practice or way of being present in the world or form of inquiry (Kremer 1997b). These terms point to a radical way of overcoming persistent identity politics and racialism as a consequence of historical wounds, supremacist thinking, collective amnesia, and the ensuing shadow material. For myself they implied the provocative, even outrageous, challenge to look at ancestral roots that were so obviously deeply marked by Nazi and Viking violence. Labels, such as “recovery of Indigenous mind,” can be a dangerous thing -- whatever the initial clarification they may offer, they may just as easily turn out to be explosive or meaningless; discussants may wield them as mental swords trying to destroy each other’s careers; or they may become divorced from the live process to which they originally referred and this reification then turns “it” into something that may be “politically correct” -- and then not.

“Multiculturalism,” “white,” “traditional” or “Euro-centered” make this all too obvious. While we cannot do without labels entirely, what we can do is to use them lightly, maybe even with a sense of humor or irony. At worst “recovery of Indigenous mind” could be seen as a narrow path for true believers. Such quality of certainty would be as troubling as the certainty of dissociated, distancing objectivity that reflects the lostness of the white mind and soul. “Participatory or shamanic concourse” may always remain sufficiently obscure so as to be inured against such uses. What I am trying to point to is remembrance beyond the husks of identity modernity offers. And I would like to use words, labels, or concepts that admit to fluidity, that preserve the sense of the shifting ground our conjoining of reality and its interpretation always is.

The question I am asking myself is this: How can I imagine myself and my story outside the molds provided by the modern cultures I have been a part of? N. Scott Momaday has written that “we are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what and *that* we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined (1975, 96).” These words may have even greater urgency for those who have left their Indigenous roots long behind than for Native Americans. Paula Gunn Allen comments that “the way of the imagination is the way of continuity, circularity, completeness. The way of the intellect is the way of segmentation, discontinuity, linearity (1987, 563).” So, how can I use my intellect to imagine myself with place and time, yet outside the paradigmatic stamps that had brought me to adulthood? How can I develop a story of self in search of continuity and completeness? I am not sure what this measure of imagination all might mean, especially when I think that continuity also means the persistence of chance and such trickster figures as Loki and Till Eulenspiegel in my German background. What I am struggling with is an attempt to imagine my personhood as it has migrated between different places and through different times. Not as a linear list of segments, but an attempt at narrative continuity, however incomplete.

Presently I like the label “nurturing conversation” best for this process, because it carries an implicit modesty and mundaneness. I would prefer to say even more simply that presence in and through conversation is all this is. Such use of the word “conversation” is a paradox: From the perspective of presence and participation, from an Indigenous perspective as it were, its meaning is obvious and, in some sense, trivial. Yet, from the perspective of modernity and dissociation it desperately needs an epithet to indicate the quality that is not obvious to the contemporary modernist mind. Presence is nurturing, as a teacher who is present to a student is nurturing. Therefore the addition of the adjective “nurturing” seems appropriate as indicator of the quality I am trying to point to. The inspiration for this terminology came from the Andean group PRATEC which uses the phrase *criar y dejarse criar*, nurturing (raising) and letting oneself be nurtured, to describe the reciprocal activity of conversing with the world (Apffel-Marglin with PRATEC 1998). As I converse with other beings and presences I hope to nurture them and as I listen to them I may be nurtured -- speaking and listening we give nourishment to each other as the conversation moves in its circles (among humans it shows itself in the flow of narrative realities). Of course, a conversation does not have to be verbal, and neither does it have to be serious -- it can be in the exchange of food, in the dance

movement, in the intake of air, in the rush of the waterfall, in the play of air currents in the bunch grass, in the song offered to the mountain, and in the melody brought down from high peaks on the wind. Conversations may be abstracting, serious, funny, witty, as if, ironic, tricky, long, short... Now I don't like the label "nurturing conversation" quite as much anymore, since it only insufficiently covers the actions of the ceremonialist, the buffoon, the philosopher, the farmer, the writer, the scarab, the flintstone, and of so many other conversationalists. But I will use it for now, speaking it lightly, hoping that it will be read lightly.

So, what is this that I am trying to point to with this label and brief description? What practice does it require? It means that I make myself present to the current moment and to what went before, to present and past; it means to be present to the cycle of seasons, the celestial movements, the weather, the land, the past of the land, the plants and animals, and to fellow human beings; it means seeking a place in community, whether natural or intentional, where story, ceremony, cultural history, and individual history matter; it means the struggle to align rational, emotional, somatic, and spiritual senses, understandings, and meanings; it means remembering the stories of languages, the history each word carries; it means looking at shadow material and acknowledging and healing internal and external splits and denials. It means not just thinking about rights, but also obligations. It means discovering spirits in symbols and using metaphors to create the possibility of spiritual presence. And then there is the creative play of chance, vision, and insight, the movement of tricksters. Visionary narratives of this kind are bounded by the land lived on, by the seasons, by the movement of animals, now seemingly chance, now predictable. Tradition, when alive, is mirror and inspiration, it challenges and is challenged as old vision rubs against new. This is something quite different from an asphyxiating traditionalism. Tradition is never singular, except in the minds of some mythologists or anthropologists; living tradition is always an agonistic play of contending interpretations. More than anything the practice I am trying to point to seems to mean listening and inner quieting, rather than speaking.

Such practice values the individual, yet needs to occur outside of an individualistic ideology. It is not a dis-course, but a con-course, a shamanic coming together in a circle in which truths are unfolded and refolded. Here communal reality creation is reviewed through talking as well as ritualistic embodiment. This circle has space for silence, humor, theater, dance, and all the other arts; scientific claims to truth need to rub shoulder with other aspects of human reality as they all struggle to align with each other. This is a practice of world creation and maintenance. Knowing is a practice of living. Living is the practice of knowing. Beingknowing. And evolving knowledge cannot find its point of alignment without vision. Truths cannot be achieved by means of the rational mind alone. The knowing of the body, the knowing of the heart, the knowing which comes from states of shifted awareness all need to inform agreed upon truths. Every consensus, temporary as it may be, has to withstand the challenges posed in verbal, rational discourse, yet such resolutions also have to withstand the challenges emerging from somatic, sexual, emotional, and spiritual experiences as the present embraces ancestral past, history, and ecological presence. Somatic knowing, intuition, and visionary insight need to see the light of the rational mind, while the mind needs to see the light that comes

from other realms. Not an easy task at all. We will always remain challenged to reflect our resolutions, our truths in language, yet language is not the sole arbiter of truths in this process. This way we may appreciate scientific achievements not just abstractly or for the promise of their technological value, but by also connecting them to what our hearts know and what gender differences tell us. And we may appreciate them by connecting them to our somatic knowing and what they may look like in the face of visions across past and future generations. I would call this the practice of participation or the nurturing conversation. It is the work of preventing dissociation from various aspects of life and of healing splits that have occurred. Its opposite is normative dissociation, the socially enforced splits from aspects of life that are integral to Indigenous presence. The tragedy of the Western mind is the conviction that closure, Truth, and certainty are possible and desirable goals. Viewed from a distance this appears to be not only a loss of wonder, presence, and comedy, but an altogether ludicrous folly in view of the historical realities human beings have been engaged with. The overly serious questers for ultimate scientific truths are so often blinded and fail to recognize the comedy they are a part of (cf. Kremer 1992a,b).

Although the implications of these summarizing statements about the nurturing conversation can be read in a utopian vein, I am trying to talk about a humbling practice of conversation that struggles to honor and respect the right of individual beings, humans and others. Utopian visions may have been an inspiration to many on one occasion or another, yet, they have more than anything else spelled disaster and death in such dystopian forms as the search for the New World and manifest destiny, communism, or Nazism. Grand theories, utopian and otherwise, more likely reflect the end of a conversation in the mind of men desirous to impose their thoughts and obsessions than an opening to an evolving play of individual and collective narratives on a scale that humans can not only participate in with awareness, but can also enjoy. Such awareness and play would include the struggle with splits, denials, and shadow material. It seems improbable that the grand vision of a single individual or theory can correct the collective ills we are faced with. The individual practice of the conversation, however we understand it as unique individuals, seems to be an inevitable ingredient in the development of social engagement, community building, critical theory, and cultural exchange. Listening to ourselves and others patiently and with compassion and forgiveness seems to be mandatory. As human beings we seem to be terrifyingly unskilled in this. This is apparent whether we think of the history of racism, the Native American holocaust, and slavery in the U.S., the Shoah perpetrated by the Nazis, or even positive attempts, such as the various ways to deal with communist history in former East Bloc countries or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Amnesia always seems to be the most tempting route to deal with the shadows of history. I am not sure that there have been times when we were better at it, but I am sure that our present times require it desperately, maybe more than ever.

One could argue the case that we humans already have sufficient means in hand to address successfully our contemporary ills, such as environmental destruction, poverty, sexism, or the incredible number of children dying all over the world every day. Yet, we seem to fail to be committed to, or perhaps lack the psychological makeup and skills for

utilizing the resources, the technologies, and the information we have at our fingertips to relieve the suffering and destruction that stares at us daily on tv, in the newspaper, and on the computer screen. It would be difficult to make the case that ecocide, children dying because of insufficient health care, the death penalty, lack of medical services, etc. are unavoidable in the face of all the riches, monetary, technological, and otherwise, we have available to us. We are constantly making choices as humans. Now that we can see so much of the world in an instant we are all complicit in the choices we are making. Complicity is the flip side of global awareness and interconnected knowing. Yet, within a particular framework of evolution and progress, within a particular understanding of the market, money, and commerce, the often disastrous results of such complicit choices seem inevitable consequences, a price that needs to be paid now in hopes that the situation will be remedied sooner or later. Whether it is the reluctance of the U.S. to empower a world court for crimes against humanity or the refusal (together with Canada, Japan, and others) to support the significant reduction of hot house gas emissions; whether it is in the refusal of rich nations to cease the exploitation of so-called Third World countries (where poverty, more than anything else, is the result of the destruction of ancient economic bases and the foreign exploitation of resources); whether it is the destruction of Indigenous languages and the increasing predominance of English through the worldwide web; whether it is the refusal of certain Christian organizations to cease missionizing Native peoples; whether it is the development of school curricula and testing procedures that re-create human beings as functional robots in front of the computer screen -- all these are actions guided by choices that could be made differently. Obviously. So often we forget to question the framework within which choices are made.

However, the accelerated disappearance of animal and plant species, the increase in pollution, the continuing violence against Indigenous peoples, the frightening rate at which humans die because of war, starvation, and illness uncared for are simultaneously confronted by a wave of optimism that seems to see resolution of these ills in successful globalization and ever faster computer technology and information management. Fiber optics, the "evernet," and other advances induce a new form of utopian thinking in which these technologies are expected to give rise to a new economy, not to produce smog, to give us access to unfathomable amounts of information in an instant, to abolish old job hierarchies, to make services location-independent, and to abolish the curse of alienation as people take charge of their destinies. Leisure, the arts, entertainment, friendship, creative pauses, and reflective thought may get drowned in all-encompassing economic activities that are done with ever greater efficiency (cf. Denby 2000). The success of these developments may create, with much greater universality than previously anticipated, the one-dimensional woman and man Herbert Marcuse (1964) talked about (and, indeed, the word "man" in *One-Dimensional Man* seems appropriate here given the male vision from which such human beings result). Doubtful as it seems, it is not altogether impossible that the potential inherent in such ongoing interconnectedness and instant transfer of information may also lead to the breakdown of national boundaries and age-old chauvinisms; to independence from work commute and hierarchical organizations; to a reduction in environmental destruction; to the preservation of endangered languages; and more. Paradoxically, the price for such developments may be the overarching success of the one-dimensional framework of American language based

commercialism, the final success of a particular type of colonization of self, other, and world. Yet, all this is a matter of choice. The notion that progress can only be measured in terms of market value is the surrender of choice and responsibility. As long as profit remains the sole measuring rod for change and development we are participants in a one-dimensional paradigm that resists reflections upon its premises by invoking the specter of the loss of competitive edges.

Whatever incredible developments computer technology may be capable of, we still may want individuals who have the intellectual, moral, and emotional capacity to deal with the billions of bits per second arriving in their computer. What does it matter that I can download the Library of Congress or innumerable old movies in seconds or that I can nab countless tunes from the net if I don't have any way to absorb these riches? What could be enrichment becomes mere noise and a certain number of bytes in the computer. What about cave painting from Ural mountains or the yoik of Sámi singers Mari Boine or Ulla Pirttijärvi in my computer if I can't make myself present to them? What is the impact of information about persecutions and deaths in Chechnya, Iraq, Tibet, and elsewhere, if I don't allow for the time to make myself present to such inhumanity? Yet, we could. We could at least try. And in that case things may slow down a bit and choice may enter as felt option. The increasing wealth of information available to more and more people still needs individuals to absorb, administer, use or enjoy it. Presence has the potential of developing alternatives to the one-dimensionality of the market, while lack of presence or normative dissociation increases the profit margin.

Our contemporary predicaments have prompted significant segments of the population in the U.S. and elsewhere to look for alternatives outside of the dominant frameworks. Buddhist meditation practices, Hindu rituals, mind altering substances, channeling, shamanic ceremonies, and intentional communities are among the avenues sought out. The interest in Indigenous peoples roams as the market place dictates which tribe and culture is presently sellable. It seems ever so easy to project nostalgically the lack and need of the culture we are a part of onto the tradition or teacher of choice. The resulting idealization and romanticization is ultimately self-defeating and may even be dangerous. It appears urgent and mandatory to learn from other traditions in these times, yet it seems crucial that we do so within a framework that is respectful of others and otherness and that does not impose implicit supremacist values. To do this without taking into account possible limitations, personal wounds of colleagues, friends, and teachers, or cultural shadow material would be folly. An even greater folly would result from the avoidance of one's own personal and cultural shadow material, the catalyst for idealization and romantic projections. If people of white or Euro-centered mind, of whatever actual skin color they may be, are to engage in a conversation with fewer splits, then a painstaking conversation to recover aspects of self, culture, and history lost in personal and normative dissociative processes seems mandatory -- and it is only then that the need for idealization may disappear and the other has a chance to appear as conversation partner. Real ... denials ... painful memories, and all -- human.

The word *Indian* is not only a mistaken identification, but also a continuing signifier for the supremacist discourse of whiteness. As Gerald Vizenor and many others have pointed

out, *Indians* were invented by the latecomers who could not see the Natives for who they were and are. Socialized as a white man in Germany it was *Indians* I had been trained to perceive. My idealizations of Native American people were initially fed by the romanticism the German writer Karl May infused in me as a child; Carlos Castaneda and others continued on grounds well prepared. Significantly, all these influences opened an avenue for my search for Indigenous knowledge, but they also made me susceptible to the impact of Indians acting out their traumas on my back or tempting me with essentialist or fundamentalist notions that perpetrate an unreflected authoritarianism (the seeds of fascism). Any survivor of genocide has to deal with the painful consequences of post-traumatic stress syndrome (or whatever else we might call it). When such suffering is not addressed, but acted out, alcoholism, family violence, sexual abuse, cruelty, deception, mistrust, unstable relationships, and other symptoms are the result. My idealizations have at times made it difficult to see these symptoms and I suffered from them in consequence. More importantly, they prevented me from true compassion and empathy, since I was not present in ways that could overcome the dynamics of victimry and tragic history. Racialism may rear its ugly head in any quarter. In consequence, while teaching, I have on occasion become party to cultural healing garnered at the price of divisive games of dominance rather than the appreciation of difference and the caring respect for different needs (nonetheless much healing happened in the midst of all of this). Part of my continuing challenge is to deal directly with romanticism, racism, and victimry when learning communities consist of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Idealization, in final analysis, is the persistence of shadow material and the refusal to engage with the reality of who we are in all our complexity.

This is, of course, a dynamic that is furthered by the New Age market and the mono-myth ideology developed by Joseph Campbell and others. Native peoples tell stories, not myths. Shamanic states of consciousness, at least in one sense, are subjective experiences beyond time; or encounters with eternity; or individual experiences of everpresent origins (Gebser 1985). When stories of such experiences are taken out of their historical Indigenous ceremonial context, then myths result. Dangerously, if these are further interpreted and decontextualized, as in Eliade's (1963) *in illo tempore*, then we quickly get on the road to authoritarianism and fascism and the hypostasis of an individual altered state as social utopia easily birthes Iron Guards or brownshirts. Mythology is fundamentally the invention of white men that came to fruition in the middle of the 19th century when the emergent nation states were in need of defining epics akin to Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. At that time Elias Lönnrot created the *Kalevala* based on Karelian sung poems which later became the Finnish national epos. This represents maybe the clearest example of the invention and use of mythology in service of contemporary politics. It is important to remember that nation states are not natural communities, but, as the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has aptly pointed out, they are stressful and formed through stress. "Modern nations are not what traditional historians pretend they are, namely historic explanatory and originary communities; they are much more and fundamentally psycho-political suggestion bodies that have the character of artificial communities of stress. Thus they are of radically autoplasmic nature, because they exist only to the extent that they arouse themselves, and they arouse themselves only to the extent that they tell themselves their reason for being in powerful fictive narratives and

autosuggestive, stress-creating news” (Sloterdijk 1998, 44-45). Myths are the stressful creations of ethnographers as they take down the oral story and make it stop quivering as it reaches print. Nations supersede the intimate knowledge practices of tribal communities as abstraction and writing become increasingly important. The assumption that print is an evolutionary advance is ideological in view of the losses sustained in the abolishment of oral knowledge transmission. Yet, myths can be resuscitated at any time and return as stories.

Jorge Luis Borges wrote a dream story entitled *Ragnarök*, in which the gods make an unseemly appearance: ”Centuries of feral life of flight had atrophied that part of them that was human; the moon of Islam and the cross of Rome had been implacable with these fugitives. Beetling brows, yellowed teeth, the sparse beard of a mulatto or a Chinaman, and beastlike dewlaps were testaments to the degeneration of the Olympian line. The clothes they wore were not those of a decorous and honest poverty, but rather of the criminal luxury of the Underworld’s gambling dens and houses of ill repute. A carnation bled from a buttonhole; under a tight suitcoat one could discern the outline of a knife. Suddenly, we felt that they were playing their last trump, that they were cunning, ignorant, and cruel, like aged predators, and that if we allowed ourselves to be swayed by fear or pity, they would wind up destroying us. -- We drew our heavy revolvers (suddenly in the dream there were revolvers) and exultantly killed the gods.” (Borges 1998, 322). Indeed, these gods (and goddesses) need to be killed, since their life is sustained by chauvinistic visions and colonial desires.

Carl Gustav Jung suggested that the Germans of the Third Reich were possessed by the god Wotan. Gods and goddesses are part of the paradigm of mythology -- spirits make their appearance in Native stories. After all, the older word *goð*, on which the word god is based, was used by the Icelandic scholar Snorri Sturlusson to refer to spirits. It was abstracted, just as the Tungus word *šaman* became shaman, to serve the unfolding conversation of European peoples, a conversation dissociating and abstracting from the specifics of time and place. Maybe Borges’ dream story prefigures the possibility of killing the worn out contraptions gods and goddesses have become as Hitler and others have pressed them into their service. This then may make a different quality of spiritual presence possible. Maybe we need to draw our revolvers and exultantly and compassionately confront essentialist notions about life and world. Maybe this is the *ragnarök* that is ahead of us as the Great Year of 21,000 or so years changes (which may be the cosmic drama described in Old Norse poems like the *Magical Ravenchant* or *Hrafnagaldr Óðins*). This event refers to an astronomically observable event at the time of the completion of one cycle of the precession of the equinoxes: on the day of the winter solstice in 2012 the sun will be at the intersection of the ecliptic and the galactic equator, right in the v-shaped opening of the milky way (Kremer 2000b). What this rare conversational event may mean is for the interpretive work of the nurturing conversation to understand. We may story it in terms of *ragnarök*, a fateful spiritual moment in time (where we could say that the sun dips deep into *urðrbrunnar*, the well of memory, touching memory of old as the new Great Year begins); or the end of the Maya calendar (as the warrior twins descend down the Road to Xibalba, the black road to the place of fright, for renewal); or the Hopi prophecies (as the Pahana, “the white brother,” returns to

contribute to the creation of balance in accordance with the original instructions). Or we may enter a Borgesian dream and work to purify ourselves of misguided utopian thinking, fundamentalist conceptions, and grand theories, thus seeking the play of unfolding narratives. The magic of that moment depends on the depth of human presence rather than any inevitable cataclysm or opening of the doors of heaven.

The proposition that a German connect with Indigenous roots is a difficult one. I have been exhorted to do so by Native American friends and colleagues on numerous occasions. The only way I could conceive of doing so was by painstakingly tracking the various historical changes and distortions of what might be called the layer of an Indigenous paradigm analogous to the *wina· má· bakì ya'* or Diné paradigm (the Pomo and Navajo people of the dominant discourse). I do not regard this dimly visible layer as ideal, not at all, however, I do think it mandatory that we give it greater presence in the awareness of the Eurocentered mind and that there are important paradigmatic matters we can learn from it. Simplistically, I distinguish three major historical layers to be worked through for the purposes of the connection with my own indigenous roots. The most recent layer is circumscribed by the Nazi abuse of Germanic mythology, with Richard Wagner as one of the important figures paving the way for Siegfried, Brünhilde, Wotan, Erda, and Walküren to be part of fascistic machinations. I associate the prior layer particularly with the Viking times, with the patriarchal and so frequently violent times of Óðinn, Sigurðr, Sigdrifa, and Valkurjar (and the protagonists of *Der Nibelunge Not*). Beyond the Æsir layer of gods I can faintly see the Vanir spirits, maybe of megalithic times, the times of Freyja -- a shamanic universe. To be sure, this is a rough outline; the knowledge we have about these traditions indicates complexities and the blurring of distinctions and connections. The fact that German prehistorians seem to have dealt insufficiently with the ways in which they made their subject matter a handmaiden of the Third Reich continues to stand in the way of a deeper understanding of the Old Europe of the more northern latitudes.

For me there is no presumption at all that Indigenous roots help us remember some ideal paradise from which retro-romantic minds can concoct yet another utopian system. But what I believe matters is the difference in paradigm between modernist thought and Indigenous paradigms. Here, it seems, the modern mind can learn something urgently needed for the future. Not dealing with the presence of Indigenous European roots and the history of distortions empowers romantic and nostalgic projections onto Native American and other tribal peoples. The "ecological Indian" and similar notions are birthed out of the perverse dynamic of idealization and an unconscious yearning to be Indian or some other Native on the one hand, and racism and Indian hating on the other. That we were all tribal at some point in history is trivial, what is not trivial is the lack of integration of tribal pasts and the resulting racist and genocidal machinations. Each tribe or people or nation has to deal with its history, including the history of whatever violence has or is occurring (whether slavery, cannibalism, clitorectomy, or whatever other atrocities). What remains stunning is the difference in scale and quality of the colonial violence (against women, nature, and Native peoples) that the modern Eurocentered mind has perpetrated; I fail to see something comparable in the violence among peoples

engaged in what I have described as the struggle for conversational presence and balancing in a particular place and time.

Altered states of the shamanic kind come easy, in a sense. With the right know-how or for the right amount of dollars anybody can begin to explore alternate realities. The affirmation of such human potential is important, yet seems utterly insufficient as an isolated process. The shamanic work of Indigenous cultures is embedded in cultural practices akin to the nurturing conversation I have been talking about. Most such conversations have become fragmented and incomplete due to colonization and missionization, in places still vibrant, in others partially Christianized, in others almost folkloric remnants. Therefore the experience of alternate spiritual realities seems to require as prerequisite the experience of a specific alternate state of consciousness more difficult to attain than the shamanic state of consciousness taught in weekend workshops: compassionate presence to the various histories different peoples are a part of; empathic awareness of historical wounds and violations, of chauvinisms and white supremacy, of fractures and fissures in history as told by victors; listening presence on the land lived on. And compassionate presence to the ills that are being wrought today and that are part of all our lives. Prolonged presence to suffering seems to be a fail safe recipe for insanity since it is so prevalent all over the world. The difficulty of remaining present to such abundant pain and fear and anger is obvious. Just brief periods of intense awareness can drive me to despair, depression, anger, and other intense feeling.

What is at times seen as the classical shamanic initiation can be described as a process in which the initiand is entirely picked apart, down to each single bone, before being put back together. It seems to me that the contemporary shamanic initiation for people out of their Indigenous minds not only requires something of that sort, but also the prior dark night experience of our collective situation, past and present. Unless we allow ourselves to be picked apart by the monstrosities we have created in history we may not be able to re-create ourselves as human beings capable of a nurturing conversation without significant splits while holding those splits that seem inevitable for the moment in compassionate awareness. This I consider the healing of history and the washing of words. The spirits that lurk in the shadows are just as real as the spirit helpers a practitioner may wish to acquire. For me these issues became obvious as I was looking at the historical relationship between European and Indigenous peoples and as I was trying to understand what equitable knowledge exchange and a cross-cultural nurturing conversation might mean -- I could not conceive of it without becoming present to the violent events of colonization, Christianization, genocide, and internalized colonization. And with it I had to acknowledge the state of consciousness, the normative dissociation, that enabled such global violence. This type of split seems to be the psychological ingredient necessary for the scale of violence we are faced with. Painful awareness of historical shadow material started a slow healing process.

The Chukchi writer Juri Rytcheu, in an article on *The Future of Memory* (1999), reports a conversation with the Inuit singer and dancer Nutetein, in which he told him that human beings are not merely to be measured in height and width, but also in terms of their depth of memory, since only that is what makes them spatially real, graspable, and visible. He

continues: “Nutetein’s words admirably connect the human memory of tradition and cultural inheritance with the coming-to-consciousness of individuality and irrepeatability. Because a human being without roots and without acknowledgment of the ancestral cultural inheritance is -- as Herbert Marcuse said previously -- flat and one-dimensional, even if s/he claims to be a person of all the world cultures.”

I have undertaken a journey from origins in Germany to the recovery of the practice of the nurturing conversation, incomplete and flawed as it undoubtedly is. At first I had to deal with my conditioning as a German white man. This motivated the integration and transformation of the demons of the past. Work with Native American students demanded of me, I felt, that I become present not just to the colonial history of this continent, but also to the history of my ancestors that led to the paradigm enabling such global violence. At one point, while I was out in the desert fasting, the shoah was urgently present in my awareness. As part of confronting my feelings of shame I was trying to work through a story (Jewish poet Paul Celan’s *Conversation in the mountains*) and an Old Norse poem (*Hrafnagaldr Óðins*). My self sacrifice of food and dialogue with poetry and nature opened the vista to faint traces of cultural practices not immediately marked by structural violence and dissociation. While traveling in the arctic north of Sápmi I tried to be present to the shadow material that I carried as individual and as an individual representing a certain culture. I had to confront not only a history of colonization and missionization, but also of German occupation during World War II (Kremer 1998b). I have come to a place where I can envision spiritual and shamanic practice in a way that is also present to the violent history of the places of my settlement and the surrounding lands. For me the conduct of ceremonies provide an inspiration to see cultural and individual healing not as separate. To use images from the Old Norse literature: The fertilizing clay lifted from the well of memory need not become a folkloric or fairy tale image, but can be a shamanic vision that facilitates the presence of natural reason as people move in and out of trance, remember the fertile power of shadow material, and listen to different versions of origin stories. Indeed, history may speak then, in the way that the rill gurgles and the raven calls and the summer triangle sparkles overhead -- and all of these may get listened to.

Undergoing the dismemberment by the demons of history is the recovery of the nurturing conversation. Occasional laughter at our follies, hypocrisies, and ludicrous grandiosities may be a useful additive to compassion and empathy in the struggle for more encompassing truthfulness. This may enable us not only to imagine how we might right historical wrongs, but also how we might use the powerful technology, the abundant resources, and the wealth of information in our hands for the benefit of individuals and communities. Shamanic initiation is the death of the self that we grew up to be and the rebirth of this self enlarged and changed by spiritual presences. Historically, people of Euro-centered mind generally have forced Native peoples to die as sovereign people engaged in their own and unique visionary nurturing conversation in the place they inhabited and, if they survived physically, forced them to be reborn as people of Euro-centered mind. The residential schools all over the American continent were the most obvious illustration of this genocidal violence; there the educational structure was designed to kill the Indian so that a person of European mind might live. Presently the

challenge for people of white mind seems to be to die as the dissociated selves they have become and to be reborn as selves that can exercise not just their rationality but other neglected aspects of self experience. Thus they may re-awaken their potential to become present in the way of Indigenous peoples. This would increase the capacity to honor the multiple truths humans can create.

The problems our forebears were faced with are not the same challenges we have to answer to today. There is nothing simpler in earlier historical periods, just a different kind of complexity. Not reviewing the past amounts to the avoidance of complexity in service of the linearity enforced by market economy. If people who have left their Indigenous ancestry behind a long time ago want to re-enter such a framework they need to take account of the historical changes as well as the history that traces their split from the nurturing conversation. (Aboriginal peoples are confronted with similar issues in order to address the consequences of colonialism and genocide in a way that is self-affirmative and discontinues the victimization they have suffered.) In either case a creative and visionary and critical practice seems to be called for, not the folkloric or essentialist or fundamentalist re-creation of a world past. I would like to believe that this is what communities in their Indigenous or participatory mind have tried in the past when free of the threat of genocide, war, hunger, and similar overpowering dangers. The current ideological biases of much evolutionary thinking would like us to believe that such visionary self-actualization of self and community was uncommon among peoples frequently relegated either to pre-history or contemporary remainders of evolutionary stages considered long obsolete (cf. Kremer 1998a). While these communities or individuals probably rarely, if ever, have been ideal in the sense the romantic mind demands, they do provide a framework or images for a practice of being and knowing, an ontological and epistemological understanding that seems remarkably relevant today (beyond specific knowledge Indigenous peoples hold, such as the medicinal properties of herbs, ecological knowledge, etc.). All our dazzling computer technology seems to have increased actual work time in the U.S. rather than reduced it. Current technological developments hold the utopian promise that we may work always and forget about such diversions as leisure. Yet, peoples commonly labeled “hunters and gatherers” seem to have worked 3 - 15 hours per week -- enough time to self-actualize with stories, crafts, ceremonies, love-making, ecstasies, etc. Abraham Maslow’s insights regarding self-actualization, so important in the field of humanistic psychology, thus appear as the remembrance of things past, but urgently needed for today.

We don’t need to share Bruce Chatwin’s enthusiasm and narcissistic idealization of “the nomadic alternative” in order to advocate freedom of movement. The movement of our ancestors seems to constitute a significant part of human history, whether in the form of the migration of the early Indo-Europeans into central and northern Europe; or the *völkerwanderung* of the European tribes (the Langobards, the Goths, and others); or the tribal movements in Africa; or the migration of the peoples known as Iroquois from what is now Mexico to their present location; or the Sámi peoples herding the reindeer on seasonal routes; or the movement of Warlpiri and other Aboriginal Australian peoples along their songlines. While some of us may prefer a sedentary life to nomadism or migration, the option of free motion, unconstrained by state powers should be there for

everybody. Individuals and communities need to have the sovereign right for the visionary creation of their particular brand of conversation with the land they live and move on. Each place allows not just for one resolution of creative conversations with humans, animals, plants, stars, and spiritual presence, but for a variety of insightful solutions. The star constellation *ursa major* can be seen in many different ways and stories may give these particular stars different significance. The way Altair re-appears in the arctic north in the midst of winter to hail the return of the sun can give rise to a variety of ceremonies celebrating celestial movements and spirits. In so many cultures such narrative resolutions are balanced, or threatened, by the chaotic and disturbing presence of a trickster or clown figure. The resulting diversity of conversation can hold, integrate, digest, and even amuse itself about the facts empirical sciences are able to create, replicate, and apply. And such diversity of conversation can also integrate the positive values of the civil society that have largely arisen at the price of much human life, whether during the Nuremberg trials or on other occasions. Human rights, notions of egalitarianism, freedom, etc. can and need to be part of any nurturing conversation. The pejorative use of the word "tribalism" may point to areas of Indigenous discourse where indeed notions of traditionalism may be unduly restrictive or at odds with rights of the civic society -- yet such finger pointing often simplistically seems to imply the inevitable superiority of the modern Euro-centered discourse while barring reflection upon its serious structural limitations. Each of these different discourses needs to find its own resolution for restrictions (mental, historic, economic, and otherwise) that may impede the visionary and creative unfolding of who we potentially can be as human beings. Equitable knowledge exchange is what is called for; otherwise mutual learning is impossible and exchanges are structured by implicit or explicit supremacist assumptions.

Gerald Vizenor has developed a discourse of sovereignty that transgresses beyond notions of inheritance and tenure of territory. In his discussions sovereignty appears as transmotion, as vision moving in imagination, as the substantive right of motion. "Sovereignty as motion and transmotion is heard and seen in oral presentations, the pleasures of native memories and stories, and understood in the values of human spiritual motion in languages. Sovereignty is transmotion and used here in most senses of the word motion; likewise, ideas and conditions of motion have a deferred meaning that reach, naturally, to other contexts of action, resistance, dissent, and political controversy. The sovereignty of motion means the ability and the vision to move in imagination and the substantive rights of motion in native communities" (1998, 182-3). He associates transmotion with natural reason, natural creation together with other creatures, and Native memories. Sovereignty of motion is described as mythic, material, visionary, the ethical presence of nature, and natural reason. I believe his descriptions question Eurocentered notions of sovereignty and challenge modern and postmodern discourses to reintegrate a dissociated past.

Umberto Eco (1998) has rightfully warned against the dangers of Ur-Fascism in New Age and related thinking. Yet, interest in the older traditions of Europe, her Indigenous knowledge, continues to be present. The increasing number of books of lesser and higher quality about Celtic, Norse, and other traditions attest to this. Calling for the suppression of this interest because of past fascistic abuses or contemporary fascistic tendencies is an

insufficient response. After all, Wagner's seductive sounds of Ur-Fascism continue to be played in opera houses around the world. We need to develop a discourse that is intelligent enough to take legitimate concerns, such as the possibility of Ur-Fascism, into account, yet recovers the potential of a nurturing, Indigenous conversation of European peoples. This would mean to develop a discourse, a nurturing conversation as it were, that critically turns European Indigenous thinking to deconstruct the limitations of modernist and postmodernist notions without resorting to a cult of traditionalism or irrationality, and without rejecting analytical criticism or values integral to civic societies, however imperfectly realized. Vizenor's writing calls for a self-reflective response from within Euro-centered thinking.

While we can conduct the conversation I am speaking of as a retro-romantic endeavor that hearkens back to times imagined as ideal or desirable, we can also conduct it as visionary enterprise where the story, ceremony, and history of place and people can find a creative presence in contemporary times -- real, not folklore or re-enactment; faithful to all that has occurred, not New Age fancy. True origins are never singular. The struggle for truthfulness needs to be unceasing, but skepticism of ever reaching complete truth equally needs to pervade each action, dream, performance, piece of writing, and ceremony. Seeking to understand our exact place in the weft and warp of the fateful lines created by the norðar from the auður, the riches, in the well of memory is necessary. Yet we should only do so by acknowledging our likely insufficiency for the task. Paradoxically, we may be destined to live up to our fate but incompletely. This makes the conversation a modest and humbling practice indeed.

At one point in my struggle to recover the connection with my roots I identified myself as "Teuton" or "Myrging." I was standing in a circle of Native Americans who were affirming their presence amidst the projections and denials the dominant culture had foisted upon them. From the Native perspective such affirmation of ancestry seemed entirely natural (Kremer 1996c). But from a German perspective this identification may look anywhere from silly to nonsensical or ludicrous. I don't think it was any of this. The labels Teuton and Myrging are as problematic as the label German, albeit for different reasons. Teuton provokes a connection with a memory not only of an unsavory part of German history, but also those parts of my ancestral history that are denied the presence that can heal the Karl May projections onto Native Americans of the desire for the mythic, the wild and natural, and communal connection. German is a label that is doubly problematic when applied to myself: First, I have crossed the boundaries between (at the time) the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States of America. After twenty years on the Native American continent I am neither German nor American, even though in both countries I can get away in either pose. My German upbringing is heavily coated with American experiences (as reflected in all my writing). Second, the label German is the figment of a particular nationalistic imagination and political construction that has little to do with the past or present possibility of Indigenous presence in the place I was born to; ultimately it is the shrinking of imagination into the essentialism of bloodline and heritage (Germany continues to determine citizenship predominantly by bloodline). That my bloodline could be considered pure is as much an accident of history, the chance encounters of my ancestors, as it is a particular way of constructing ancestral lines (and

possibly the denial of Jewish heritage). It may be wise for Germans to remember that human beings were given blood by the trickster Loðurr or Loki, and a tricky affair it becomes when we forget such origins. The trickster has been in the blood since the earliest creation story we can associate with the Germanic peoples. During the Third Reich they forgot that the trickster has no stability, no center, no identity, just as blood is fluid and not stable, and is insufficient to provide originary identity. Loki -- man, crossdresser and all -- was too tricky for the German nation and they denied the trickiness of blood in consequence, just as its earliest history is now suspect and largely shunned. Fate is a never merely a bloodline, it is a creative vision that may limit itself as it enters blood and as blood enters vision. Thus I am neither German nor American and the Teuton or Myrging serves as a provocative and comic stand-in for a tribal figure whose absence has inflicted endless colonial violence onto Native peoples the world around.

Salman Rushdie, in discussing Günter Grass, describes the full migrant as a person who suffers, “traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and codes are very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to, his own.” He then goes on to describe Grass’ life “as an act of migration, from an old self into a new one ... The first dislocation, remember, is the loss of roots ... The second dislocation is linguistic. And we know ... of the effect of the Nazi period on the German language, of the need for the language to be rebuilt, pebble by pebble, from the wreckage; because a language in which evil finds so expressive a voice is a dangerous tongue ... And the third disruption is social (1991, 277-278).”

I have migrated from what was then the Federal Republic of Germany to the U.S., I have become fluent in another language, and I have adjusted to new social codes, out of which the continuous denials of Native American presence and history may be the most offensive beside the unrelenting celebration of profit and money. My old self was rather safely moored to a critical, progressive modernist understanding of society and individual, nurtured through the student rebellion and activism of the late sixties and early seventies. I have begun a second migration from this self by deconstructing its modernist roots and the monstrosities of Nazi and other distortions, thus entering an imaginary borderland that, at first glance, appears out of place and time, but is defined by the concrete coordinates of collective shadow issues and the creative vision that arises from them in a specific place and time. Rushdie also wrote that “the very word *metaphor*, with its roots in the Greek words for *bearing across*, describes a sort of migration, the migration of ideas into images. Migrants -- borne-across humans -- are metaphorical beings in their very essence; and migration, seen as a metaphor, is everywhere around us (1991, 278).” As a metaphorical being I seek to evoke and vision myself in migratory motion across the boundaries and categories enforced by an attritive imagination. I seek to evoke and vision myself within a conversation where the tracks of history, shamanic imagination, natural cycles, and social conscience gather in nourishing creativity. Gerald Vizenor wrote, “the trick in seven words is to *elude historicism, racial representations, and remain historical* (1988, xi).” In our contemporary world so many people are migrants, people of mixed blood, culture, and tradition. The figure of the trickster giving humans blood may acquire new meaning.

So, here I stand on the place of my settlement, on Nomlaki land, where the people are absent to my German and American mind, yet present to the story my Teuton and Myrking mind tells and present to the stories the Vanir people, the pre-Indoeuropean people of the north, told. My presence arises not through the label Teuton or Myrking, it arises from lineages that emerged from Lithuania and the Alsace, from these border crossings that constitute my ancestral lines and from my own border crossings inside and outside. My presence arises from the boundary crossings of twinning, the androgynic and hermaphroditic exploration of memories in Waltoykewel and by the river Elbe. The Old Norse image of memory with the three women by the well spreading the white fluid of memory and destiny across the lands, with the guardian of the ages standing on top of the tree, has sexual connotations in the deepest sense of creativity. Reaching into memory to tell as complete a story as possible is creative and healing, re-generative. It celebrates the lifeforce we carry and the imaginative possibilities of our visionary presence bounded by the cycles of the seasons and the flight of the raven. The observation of the black feathered bird is as important as its mythic counterpart Raven. The presence to Indian warriors, mission bells, digger pines means the double presence to scarlet red and brownish purple flowering plants and grayish-green pine trees as well as presence to the history of genocide with its creation of a tribal absence.

The three nornar, the fateful spirits of the Old Norse, weave destinies from thread that is spun from the sun and fastened to the moon hall. It is work that deals with the life giving force of the sun and the cycles of the moon as they reach into the spaces from which humans can envision themselves. These creations are nurtured by the imaginative act of the three women reaching into the well and providing lifeforce, *auður*, riches of memory. Selective memory throttles lifeforce. Digger pines need to be seen for what they were, what they have become, and what they can be. Germans need to be seen for what they were, what they have become, and what they can be. Teutons need to be seen for what they were, what they have become, and what they can be. The star Altair needs to be seen for what it was, what it has become, and what it can be. The Shift of the Ages needs to be seen for what it was in different stories, for what it has become in our understanding of these stories, and for what it may become as we deepen awareness. Our imagination is the horizon on which natural cycles, memories, plants, animals, and stars meet to create what may be generative and re-generative. The achievements of modernity may thus be part of our balancing act for the sake of the future. I no longer imagine myself as German or even as Myrking or Teuton. The idea I have of myself arises from the gap of gaps, the Old Norse *gap ginnung*, and the world snake, *miðgarðsormr*, holds me in the home that has never been my home as ravens fly overhead and bears flatten my tent.

I am a white man. White is short for "socialized into a Eurocentered frame of mind." White is the name of forgetting. Forgetting so much of how we came to be where we are. I am a white man. Boxed into a box that likes to forget its name. I do not walk alone. Like other white men something walks with me. With me walks a shadow. Before me I project the shadow of forgetting where I came from. Behind me trails the shadow of the tears of native peoples. Below me I march on the shadow of the lands my peoples have raped. Above me looms the shadow of the spirits which I am blind to. All around me walks the shadow of domination, witchhunts, genocides, holocausts, sexism, racism. I do

not walk alone. So, here I stand, with stories coursing through me as my imagination is fueled by memory and vision, as I am aware of Nomlaki presence, as I am aware of the stories of Germany and her tribal peoples. The vanishing Indian is a concoction of genocidal imagination. The Karl May Indian is the denial of the multiple and Indigenous origins of Germany. I move now, uphill and downhill, following the line of song, following the threads that are spaces laid out for me by the noronar, covered with white clay. White thread in my ear. Maybe like my ancestors when they offered reindeer outside of Hamburg. The white thread to the sun, a sign of self sacrifice to vision and imagination. I continue to move, uphill and downhill. White. And not. Humbled. Crossing boundaries. A metaphorical being. Modern and postmodern. Real. Remembering. Imagining.

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