

BRICOLAGE

A Comparative Reading of Brian Jungen's *Prototype for a New Understanding*
and Romuald Hazoumé's *La Bouche du Roi*

By Marthe Tveitan

A thesis in Art History presented to
The Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas
IFIKK
The University of Oslo
Advisor: Erik Mørstad
Fall Term 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to everyone who has helped me make this thesis happen. My sincere thanks goes to Mark A. Cheetham at the Art Department at the University of Toronto and Dr. Victoria Anderson at the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths University of London for their positive response on what was to become the first draft of this thesis, to my tutor Erik Mørstad at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas at the University of Oslo for his thorough reading and encouraging words along the way. My gratitude also to Tim Lennon and Bente Jørgensen for their help with the layout of this thesis, and last but not least, thanks to all my friends and family for their support and kind words throughout the time I have spent working on this thesis. Thanks also to the British Museum, the October Gallery and Witte de With for providing me with images of the artworks of Brian Jungen and Romuald Hazoumé.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	4
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	5
CHAPTER II: WHY BRICOLAGE?	8
CHAPTER III: BRICOLAGING AN INTERPRETATION	18
CHAPTER IV: CULTURAL IDENTITY: IDENTITY INTERPRETED AS HYBRIDITY	46
CHAPTER V: BRICOLAGE AS A FUNCTION OF HYBRID IDENTITY	53
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS	69
LITERATURE	72

SUMMARY

The purpose of this dissertation project has been to find out whether the bricolage concept of social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss can possibly offer interesting perspectives on how cultural identity is negotiated through the visual arts. Two contemporary artists and their work have been central to this experiment; Brian Jungen (Canada) and Romuald Hazoumé (Benin). My argument is that Jungen's sculpture and assemblage series, *Prototypes for a New Understanding* (1998-2005), and Hazoumé's installation *La Bouche du Roi* (1997-2005), serve as examples of Lévi-Strauss' bricolage concept and that they thus exhibit an ongoing process of negotiating the formation of cultural identity. In order to define what I mean by cultural identity, I have made use of cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha's Hybridity theory. I argue that Bhabha's theory of Hybridity opens up the notion of identity to flexibility and change. Consequently, Bhabha's notion of Hybridity goes well with Lévi-Strauss' bricolage concept.

The text can roughly be divided into two parts. The first part addresses the question of whether the bricolage concept serves a purpose as a strategy of interpretation or not within a discussion of Jungen and Hazoumé's artworks. The second part addresses questions about the formation of cultural identity and how cultural identity surface in the art of Jungen and Hazoume.

*I am invisible, understand, simply because
people refuse to see me.¹*

Ralph Ellison

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As I walked into the Brian Jungen retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal a couple of years back, I was struck by the artist's curious use of readymades. In one of the exhibition rooms a large whale skeleton made out of plastic patio chairs was hovering over the floor, seemingly floating in the air. In another room a series of transformed Nike Air Jordans were on display. The shoes owing their name and fame to the well-known American basketball player Michael Jordan, had been ripped apart and sown back together in forms reminiscent of Northwest Coast Canadian First Nations' ceremonial masks. I was immediately struck by what I thought was a very elegant way of commenting on the situation of the First Nation Peoples of Canada. Brian Jungen's transformed patio chairs and trainers had taken on the symbolic function of traditional Northwest Coast First Nation art, but since the chairs and the shoes were already imbued with symbolic value on their own, the artworks came to resemble a hybrid symbol of trendy consumerism and stereotypical Northwest Coast First Nation artefacts. The artworks potentially held forceful political criticism on the past and the present accommodation of First Nation Canadians, and at the same time they did nothing more than pointing to the fact that First Nation Canadians' notion of identity is as much influenced by mainstream Canadian and American cultural references as their own cultural heritage.

When I was later introduced to the artworks of Beninese artist Romuald Hazoumé, I began thinking that there were certain similarities in Hazoumé's art to the artworks of Jungen. Like Jungen, Hazoumé makes use of the symbolical potential in

¹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, (New York: Vintage, 1972), p.3.

the readymade by altering it and transforming it into something new and different. Analogous to Jungen, he also makes masks, not out of shoes but out of plastic petrol cans. The petrol cans – which are in wide use not only in Benin, but also in larger parts of the African continent – can be bought in convenience stores and are used to transport either water or petrol. By making the cans into tribal masks Hazoumé comments on the fusion of contemporary daily life with the traditional culture of the tribes of Benin, much in the same way as Jungen comments on the fusion of cultural markers in Canada. In his *La Bouche du Roi* (1997-2005) Hazoumé has created an installation in which the main feature consists of a massive cluster of cut up plastic jerry cans resembling masks – each with individual features – in the formation of a British slave trader's ship from the 18th century. Materials related to contemporaneity appear to be in dialogue with the historical past of Benin.

Despite some differences, the two artists seem to have a lot in common with regards to their art practices. Both artists use the readymade with its many connotations as a way of establishing a dialogue between past and present, tradition and modernity, and traditional stereotypes of cultural identities and new readings of these. Through their altering of a ready-made mass-produced commodity Jungen and Hazoumé are making inquiries into a distinctively post-colonial discourse about cultural identity; Jungen's works provoke questions about Northwest Coast Canadian First Nations and their relation to a larger Canadian and Western society, Hazoumé's works generate questions about the Atlantic Slave Trade and its long-term consequences for Benin and its tribes. The re-contextualisation and remodelling of the readymade into a new type of artefact is what informs their art and calls into question stereotypical representations of native cultures.

Upon discovering the link between Jungen and Hazoumé's art practises I started doing some research on Claude Lévi-Strauss' notion of the term *bricolage*. I had already seen the bricolage-term in association with artworks informed by post-modern practices of appropriation and assemblage, but Lévi-Strauss' take on the term seemed to be less developed within the field of visual arts. Almost to my surprise, then, I found that Lévi-Strauss' development of bricolage seemed to be even more relevant in regards to Jungen and Hazoumé than the more conventional use of the term. Lévi-Strauss used the word bricolage in order to explain mythmaking activity in native cultures, and he understood the artist as a figure who in certain ways had internalised this type of mythmaking activity; thus being able to translate the

bricolage into a material object. The connotations of mythmaking associated with Lévi-Strauss' bricolage-term appeared to fit well with Jungen and Hazoumé's concerns with stereotyping of native cultures. The artists seemed to share with Lévi-Strauss a concern for the mechanism of mythmaking as a way of establishing a cultural and social footing.

Against this background I started formulating my thesis. With Jungen's series of transformed Nike Air Jordans – *Prototype for a New Understanding* (1998-2005) – and Hazoumé's *La Bouche du Roi* as examples of the artists' practises, I gave myself the task of finding out whether Lévi-Strauss' bricolage-term could be used to designate the mechanism of communication through which Jungen and Hazoumé question notions of cultural identity. Hence, what I am aiming to find out in the following is how and why it might be rewarding to think of *Prototype for a New Understanding* and *La Bouche du Roi* as bricolage. Consequently the following discussion is not structured as a traditional art historical thesis aiming to place an artist or a group of artists within a particular period of time and historical context. Hopefully this thesis will enable me to offer some perspectives on contemporaneity and how it is expressed in the visual art of our times, while the main focus here will be on testing whether the bricolage concept of Lévi-Strauss can contribute to a reading of artworks which poses questions about cultural identity.

The following pages are divided into five chapters. In Chapter II I give a closer account of my reasons for using the Lévi-Straussian bricolage as a strategy of interpretation. I present what I take to be the essence of the bricolage term and I explain how I am going to apply the term to a discussion of the artworks of Jungen and Hazoumé. In Chapter III I use the bricolage concept as a means to structure my discussion of *Prototype for a New Understanding* and *La Bouche du Roi*; which thoughts are conjured up in my mind upon contemplating these artworks? In Chapter IV I introduce another analytical term, Hybridity. I argue that cultural identity the way it is expressed in Jungen and Hazoumé's art can be understood as Hybridity. I present the term as it is used by the post-colonial thinker Homi K. Bhabha, and I argue that it may be fruitful to connect the bricolage term with Hybridity. In Chapter VI I continue my discussion of Hybridity by applying to it my discussion of the bricolage and the artworks of Jungen and Hazoumé. I ask myself what additional perspectives the Hybridity concept can bring into the discussion of the artworks and on the activity of

bricolaging. In Chapter VII, the last chapter, I sum up my discussion and present my conclusions.

*Our brand-new truths may really be the myths of tomorrow.*²

Ticio Escobar

CHAPTER II

WHY BRICOLAGE?

Pondering the reasons for my enthusiastic response to Jungen's *Prototypes* and Hazoumé's *La Bouche du Roi* when I first sat down to think about this thesis, I came to the conclusion that it would have to be the very tangible expression of identity and cultural belonging as an ambivalent matter that intrigued me. Further speculations brought me to think that the artworks' questioning of the myths we create about ourselves and others in order to generalize about our surroundings and prevent the world from disrupting into chaos, was both critical of our predisposition for making up generalized myths about different peoples and their possible identities, and at the same time the artworks themselves were doing just that; setting up myths of identities. Admittedly the myths presented in *Prototypes* and *La Bouche du Roi* seemed to be up-dated and somewhat more valid than the ones they were criticizing, but they still did not contain any guarantee of presenting the essential truth about identity. Then Claude Lévi-Strauss' notion of bricolage came into mind as a way of explaining my interest in Jungen and Hazoumé.

A social anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss took a special interest in the role of myths in indigenous cultures, in particular the myths prevalent in native cultures of the American continent. Myths in indigenous cultures, according to Lévi-Strauss, was founded on a demand for order and served an explanatory function by suggesting

² Ticio Escobar in "Identity and Myth Today", *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory* (edited by Rasheed Areen, Sean Cubitt, and Ziauddin Sardar) (London: Continuum 2002), p.145.

how a given culture had come into being. The myths also elaborated how the surroundings – both nature and culture – were structured and how they best be dealt with. Although myths might be unsuccessful in giving man more material power over the environment, they do supply man with the illusion that he can understand the universe and, according to Lévi-Strauss, he *does* indeed understand the universe.³

In his *La Pensée Sauvage* (The Savage Mind) from 1962 Lévi-Strauss argues that humans have a natural predisposition for mythical thinking, or put differently, mythical reasoning. In the opening chapter he describes the human mind as consisting mainly of two *modus operandi*; a scientific mindset and mythic mindset. The scientific mindset is compared to the mindset of an engineer who, when confronted with a problem to solve, does her best to come up with well reasoned solutions by cross-examining available resources before making any final decisions and putting plans into action. The mythical mindset on the other hand, goes about problem-solving less scientifically by applying more of a pragmatic approach; orienting itself towards quick and concrete solutions which might not be of the lasting kind, but which at least temporarily solves the problem.⁴

Lévi-Strauss compares the mythical mindset to that of the *bricoleur*, a figure who is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but who, unlike the engineer, does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and produced for the purpose of a specific project.⁵ Instead, the bricoleur aims at making do with “whatever is at hand”; a finite set of heterogeneous tools and materials containing no relation to the current project, or any other particular project, because it is the result of all the earlier occasions there have been to enrich the stock with the remains of previous constructions and deconstructions. The elements of this stock are specialized up to a certain point, but not enough for them to have only one specific use.⁶ The result of the bricoleur’s activity – what Lévi-Strauss terms as the science of the concrete – is the *bricolage*, where each material part contributes to the whole of the construction with an individual historical past.

When the mythical mindset is confronted with a purely intellectual challenge, where the answer cannot be found in a material construction, the solution is still bricolage. Various narrative elements are pieced together from narratives and myths

³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books 1995), p. 17.

⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1966), pp. 16-19.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

produced on previous occasions and thus come to represent a form of intellectual bricolage. The characteristic feature of the mythical thought then, is its ability to express itself by means of a heterogeneous and possibly extensive, but nevertheless, limited repertoire.⁷ However, it proves almost impossible to separate the two modes of reasoning from each other. The scientific and the mythic mode of reasoning are both operating in our mind at the same time. Even the repertoire of solutions at disposal to a scientist is limited. She too has to confront a given task by considering a previously determined set of practical and theoretical knowledge, according to Lévi-Strauss.⁸

The mythical mindset lies half-way between percepts and concepts; it cannot separate itself entirely from its reference background in the material world, nor does it become completely abstract since it is anchored in the realm of the perceptible. Lévi-Strauss draws on Saussure's understanding of the linguistic sign when he explains how the mind of a bricoleur operates: signs function as a link between images and concepts; like images, signs are concrete entities, but signs also hold the ability to refer beyond themselves, an ability signs share with concepts. Neither signs nor concepts refer to themselves alone, they also refer to something beyond themselves. However, signs' powers of reference are more limited than those of concepts, as signs are less abstract than concepts. This also goes for the individual parts of the bricolage.

The elements which the 'bricoleur' collects and uses are 'pre-constrained' like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre.⁹

By themselves each part represent themselves as signs and their individual stories, but once they are combined into a whole, they start generating new meaning in the same way as multiple signs make for a concept. Thus the sign – or each bricolage-part – functions as a mediator between a perceptible world on the one hand, and an interpretation of this world in abstract terms on the other.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p.19

⁹ Ibid.

An important part of the bricoleur's bricolage-constructing process concerns the setting up of a dialogue with the tools and materials at the bricoleur's disposal. In order to solve a task it becomes necessary for the bricoleur to index her stock and further to evaluate what possibilities each part of her stock constitute in terms of function. In the case of producing explanations in a purely intellectual bricolage, the bricoleur evaluates what possibilities lie in the set of explanations inferred at earlier occasions of problem-solving. In the case of a material construction, she has to evaluate which purposeful operations each part of her stock can fill in a new construction.

The distinction between intellectual and materialized bricolage is, however, somewhat artificial, because there will always be elements of intellectual bricolaging in the materialized bricolage. It is this materializing of the bricolage which is of special interest here. According to Lévi-Strauss, the bricoleur derives her poetry from the fact that she does not confine herself to accomplishment and execution; she "speaks not only *with* things, but also through the medium of things, giving an account of [her] personality and life by the choices [s]he makes between the limited possibilities."¹⁰ The bricolage is thus not only to be understood as a construction whose mandate is to serve a certain function in the material world, but also as a construction which, through its composition from odds and ends, communicates on a more abstract level. The bricolage functions very much as a metaphor; it conceals a profound abstract thinking process in a material object.

Inherent in Lévi-Strauss' use of the bricolage-term is also an understanding of the bricolage as being unsettled, both in terms of function, and in terms of interpretation. The bricolage is never fixed; it can always be expanded or restructured to meet new ends; the mythical mind never tires of ordering and re-ordering its elements and events in its search for meaning.¹¹ Thus each part of the bricolage – belonging either to a purely intellectual kind of bricolage, or one actually materialized – can be ascribed new functions or interpretations as time passes and as the mythical mind of the bricoleur demands it. Consequently, when the function and interpretation of one part of the bricolage is altered, it affects the other parts of the bricolage too, and thus the whole construction is altered.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 22.

This continuous reconstruction-process affects the relations between the diachronic and the synchronic as well. Because of the arbitrariness inherent in the process of continuous reconstruction and re-contextualization, the bricolage does not express any linear continuity in time. Understood as a whole, the different elements making up the bricolage rather express the synchronic notion of time, referencing past events without concern for what point in a historical past these events actually took place.¹²

The Artist as Bricoleur

Having explained what Lévi-Strauss understands by the term bricolage, it is time to ask why the term has relevance in relation to art – more specifically the art of Jungen and Hazoumé. Lévi-Strauss was himself fond of art, and as a consequence of his anthropological interests, native art in particular. It might be of little wonder, then, that art figures as an example of bricolage-activity in *La Pensée Sauvage*.

Art lies half-way between scientific knowledge and mythical thought, according to Lévi-Strauss, because the artist is both something of a scientist and of a bricoleur. “By [her] craftsmanship [s]he constructs a material object which is also an object of knowledge.”¹³ What is more, artworks do not take it upon themselves to represent the world in images homologous to reality in scale, like a scientific representation would have sought to do. Artworks are rather to be understood as metaphors. The painter, which Lévi-Strauss takes as his example, is always “midway between design and anecdote” – her genius consisting in uniting internal and external knowledge.¹⁴

In relation to Brian Jungen and Rouald Hazoumé’s art practices the Lévi-Straussian bricolage seems particularly relevant, first because the artists seem to share a concern for the questioning of myths as they are used to explain and solidify cultural identification, and second because this concern for explanatory myths is expressed through the medium of visual arts. Both Jungen and Hazoumé are concerned with the presentation of what one could term as myths in indigenous cultures – indigenous cultures here referring to First Nations Canadians and the different tribal peoples of Benin – and their function as markers of identity *within* those cultural groups. The artists also seem to share a concern for the myths about

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.25.

indigenous cultures as they occur in mainstream Western society, or more specifically, the myths about indigenous cultures as they are cultivated outside of specific cultural groups by white Westerners who for the most part understand indigenous cultures to reside at the margins of, or even outside of, Western society. In *Prototypes* and in *La Bouche du Roi* the link between cultural identity and its expression in the visual arts is explicit, which is why I think the Lévi-Straussian bricolage-term might be suitable as a tool in providing an interpretation of the works I have selected here. By using the bricolage term as an analytical tool I do not expect to “crack the code” of Jungen and Hazoumé’s art objects. What I hope to gain, however, is an idea of how these art works communicate; how they function as metaphors.

Critical Considerations

There might of course be reasons to hesitate in choosing Lévi-Strauss as the provider of the theoretical tools in the interpretation of visual arts since his field of research and theorization was social anthropology rather than visual arts. But the social anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, as several later anthropologists have remarked, is akin to philosophy and might therefore prove to be useful in regards to visual arts as well, especially in regards to the kind of art involving questions of an anthropological and philosophical nature such as the artworks of Jungen and Hazoumé – at least this is what I set out to argue.

Lévi-Strauss was as much concerned with the more abstract concepts of the human mind as the detailed research of any particular society or class of societies.¹⁵ His development of a structural anthropology is proof of this. He spent much of his career as an anthropologist doing fieldwork among the native peoples of North- and South America and in Australia, with the overarching aim to explain what constitutes the most fundamental elements of human thought. His interest in the role of myth in indigenous cultures was much founded on his theory about mythmaking not being a feature of a distinctively primitive mindset, but a way of reasoning in pre-civilized societies. Thus mythical thinking was to be understood not as primitive, but as a natural predisposition of the human mind in general which was a result of a natural predisposition to make sense of one’s surroundings.

¹⁵ Edmund Leach, *Lévi-Strauss* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins 1973) p.8.

Lévi-Strauss' findings have been much criticized, especially his attempt to explain human relations and human activity in terms of underlying structural social relations. His use of structuralism as a theoretical approach have gradually grown out of fashion as many critics have contested that the unilateral focus on structure undermines the role of the individual.

Sociologist Pierre Bordieu has for example been critical of how Lévi-Strauss pays little attention to the specificities of the social relations in his case-studies. According to Bordieu, Lévi-Strauss' explanations of social relations fail to take into account the experience of a social situation as the partaking individuals subjectively experience it, thus being concerned only with the observer's experience of the situation – an experience which almost certainly is influenced by the observer's preconceived ideas about the subjects of observation and the social relations between them. Bordieu is for example critical of how anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss avoid discussing the subjective experience of gift-exchange, since he understands gift-exchange only as a structured pattern of exchange carried out by the individuals in a group as an unconscious response to a the rules of giving and receiving. But gift-exchange involves a whole range of subjective factors not accounted for in structuralist approaches to social interaction, argues Bordieu. What about strategy in terms of timing for example? Gifts are given and received at important moments in life, birthdays and weddings to mention only a few. Bordieu points out that you cannot free yourself of the obligation to give away a wedding present to a good friend until he or she is getting married. Time thus complicates the gift-exchange pattern and thereby testifies to the importance of considering events on the individual level as well as on the structural level when analysing the mechanism of gift-exchange, or any other form of social interaction in a given culture. Bordieu is not directly oppositional to Lévi-Strauss' structuralism, but argues that as a social anthropologist one should be concerned both with generalized structures of social interactions *and* the aspects of social interactions at the level of the individual.¹⁶ Without disregarding Lévi-Strauss' approach to social anthropology completely, Bordieu suggests a middle way between explanations emphasizing formal structures and explanations paying more attention to the specifics of a social situation.

¹⁶ Pierre Bordieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977).

A list of opposing views on the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss could go on for quite a few pages, but it does not serve any purpose to elaborate much more on that kind of critique here. The consequences of such critique do not seem to affect my employment of Lévi-Strauss' bricolage-term as a tool in my exploration of the selected artworks of Jungen and Hazoumé too much. I am not aiming to find any set structures in the way the selected art works communicate, rather I want to use the term to see if it can possibly offer readings of the works that opens them up to a discussion of cultural identity. It is furthermore worth pointing out that my use of the bricolage-term does not rule out paying attention to the specifics of social situations, I do indeed include some information on the level of individual experience in this thesis.

Bricolage – A Strategy of Interpretation

Using the bricolage as a strategy of deciphering how Jungen and Hazoumé in their works negotiate what I have termed *cultural identity*, requires a clarification of what I understand by cultural identity and how I intend to set the parameters for the use of such a term in this thesis. In Chapter IV I will give a closer definition of how I use the term analytically in relation to the bricolage and the selected artworks when I call upon Homi K. Bhabha's Hybridity¹⁷ theory in order to expand my reading of Jungen and Hazoumé's bricolage art. But for now a brief overview of a more general understanding of cultural identity within cultural studies and related fields will suffice for the purpose of placing my use of Lévi-Strauss and Bhabha within a wider context.

First, it is worth pointing out that I understand cultural identity to be separate from racial identity in biological terms, thus I am not in the following concerned with how an individual defines her identity in terms of genetic heritage. Rather, I am interested in identity as it manifests itself through affiliation with a certain set of standards in a society to which an individual subscribes. Simply put, cultural identity provides a sense of belonging; a sense of a common past and shared future with a larger cultural group with which the individual can identify. This is identification through what Benedict Anderson has called 'imagined communities'; cultural or

¹⁷ Hybridity with a capital H refers to Bhabha's Hybridity concept, while hybridity refers to the more general term.

national identity is not based in knowing all the individuals participating in a community, “yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹⁸

Here myth comes into the picture, not necessarily as something entirely fictitious and faulty, but as that which helps create a meaningful world for the individuals in the collective, much like Lévi-Strauss describes the function of myth in indigenous cultures. A shared understanding of territorial location, language, nation, religion, and so on, contributes to myths of a shared collective identity. However, the myths of collective identity and nationhood are increasingly placed under scrutiny as the speed of globalization and transnational communication increases; myths valid as explanations in one community do not always fit in with myths and criteria of truthfulness in other communities. When myths are extrapolated from one cultural community to another, formerly authoritative myths are questioned and revised. Ultimately it is this revision that enables us to classify our former truths as myths.

The Paraguayan historian and art critic, Ticio Escobar, describes three different ways of understanding collective identity in an article for the journal *Third Text*. First, he describes an ‘ontological’ concept of identity in which the common and relatively stable references to territorial location, religion and nation produce in its members an awareness of uniqueness. Then there is the concept of ‘inverted identity’ in which identity is defined much by its opposition: otherness. Understanding identity in relation to otherness, means understanding one’s own identity image as presented and represented through a mirroring in others. In such an understanding of identity, one community’s cultural identity would be defined by it differing from other cultural identities. Identity thus understood is non-static, continuously evolving in a dialectical relationship to other surrounding cultures. Last, Escobar describes the concept of ‘plural identity’, in which identity is not so much a result of the dialectical response to otherness as such, but a result of individuals occupying variable positions in which identity takes shape through confrontations that simultaneously take place in different settings. Identity is thus formed “in relation to other cultural forces with which it clashes, joins and crosses, trading metaphors and concepts, establishing ambiguous boundaries and sharing hybrid territories.”¹⁹ To be distinctively different from the other is not important, what matters is that individuals

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, revised edition 1991), p. 6.

¹⁹ Ticio Escobar in “Identity and Myth Today”, *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory* (edited by Rasheed Areen, Sean Cubitt, and Ziauddin Sardar) (London: Continuum 2002), p. 148.

can take on different roles or identities for different uses and different occasions. As an example Escobar mentions how indigenous peoples in Latin America have learned to preserve their sense of cultural identity, through shifting between masks and identity profiles, depending on what the situation requires, when confronting the world outside of the local community.²⁰

I have included Escobar's description of different ways to understand the concept of identity here, because what Escobar is tracing is how the understanding of identity has changed over time. At the moment it seems like we tend to understand the concept in a post-modern fashion which rules out pinpointing any stable essence of what it is that defines cultural identification. It is my argument that the bricolage, and the concept of Hybridity discussed in chapter IV and VI, can be interpreted as a form of what Escobar terms as plural identity. The bricolage, as I have tried to put across above, picks elements from here and there simultaneously; the bricoleur adapts the bricolage to different situations through the shifting of elements as she sees it fit. As long as the bricolage is ever evolving and adapted to new situations, the stories it offers – either fictitious, scientific, or both – come across as truthful and legitimate as markers of identity. Likewise the concept of Hybridity specifically puts emphasis on identity as continuously in flux, always adapting itself to different situations.

The concept of cultural identity deployed here is thus not an essentialist one. Rather I understand identity to be the exact opposite of the traditional semantic concept of identity, stable and unified. Cultural identity is very much a measure in flux. With this somewhat post-modern understanding of the concept of identity in mind, I set out in the next chapter to decipher Jungen and Hazoumé's artworks with the help of Lévi-Strauss bricolage concept.

²⁰ Ibid., p.146-149.

CHAPTER III

BRICOLAGING AN INTERPRETATION

Does it make sense to speak of *Prototypes for a New Understanding* and *La Bouche du Roi* as bricolage? My use of the bricolage term as a strategy of interpretation has certain implications. First, I find it worth mentioning that, by reading *Prototypes for a New Understanding* and *La Bouche du Roi* as bricolage, I do not wish to give a canonical interpretation of the artworks. The account I give of the stories and myths I extract from the works of Jungen and Hazoumé is quite simply the result of literally using the bricolage as a strategy of interpretation, letting the structure of the bricolage reflect itself in my text; I intend to read the art works through a gathering of associations from the individual parts of the works with the shifting in perspectives and time this implies. Second, the act of bricolaging implies a relation to history less empirical and more open to oral and mythic accounts of history than what is perhaps common in academic work. I understand the selected artworks to communicate by encouraging viewers to actively engage with the works, and I read them as visual representations of identity and the myths involved in the creation of identity. Consequently, the kind of history relevant here is not necessarily of the empirical sort, rather history should be thought of as consisting in differing perspectives on historical recollection, as much dependant on oral storytelling and mass media's presentation of people and news events, as scientific research.

It is also worth pointing out that my reading of the works is essentially a reading not taking into account the artist's biographies. However, I will not try to avoid biographical information where I feel it to be relevant – such decorum would conflict with the concept of the bricolage. A short introduction to the artists is therefore in place.

Brian Jungen (1970) was born in Fort St. John in British Columbia (BC), Canada, to a Swiss father and a First Nation Dane-zaa mother. Growing up, Jungen was affiliated both with First Nations culture and with mainstream Canadian culture. After having studied at the Emily Carr institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, Jungen spent a few years in New York before he moved back to BC where he now lives and works in close affinity with First Nation people. Brian Jungen has been exhibited with increasing frequency during the last few years: his works have been shown in Australia, Europe and in North-America.

Romuald Hazoumé (1962) was born in Porto Novo, Republic of Benin, where he continues to live and work. Hazoumé is of Yoruba ancestry but grew up in a Catholic family. Hazoumé has been a full-time artists since the early 1980s and have exhibited world wide, perhaps most notably at Documenta 12 in Kassel 2007.

Prototype for a New Understanding

Brian Jungen's "Prototype for a New Understanding" series consists of twenty-three masks made out of three types of Nike Air Jordans – Air Max II, Max Air Pegasus, VXT II – and black human hair. Consisting of leather and plastic materials in white, black, and red, the trainers have been transformed into masks with color schemes strongly reminiscent of Northwest Coast First Nations' masks. The combination of curved shapes and lines, and of color fields underlining different features in the masks, is reminiscent of different types of First Nations' masks produced in BC; the *Prototypes* do not necessarily reference one band's masks in particular. However, the heavily stylized masks of the Haida people originating in the Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) at the northern coast of BC, do seem to be a central source of inspiration for the artist. Like traditional Haida masks Jungen's *Prototypes* have bold lines and patterns built up around u-shapes and ovoids; the artist has used the rounded shapes of heels, tongues and décor to modulate the trainers in such a way that they resemble traditional Haida woodcarving patterns.

Northwest Coast First Nations' masks are made as to resemble a variety of stylized crest figures depending on the function of the particular mask and the lineage of its wearer. Among the Haida bands in BC hand carved objects, such as masks, function as a way of making statements about social identity. Most Haida

objects are decorated with crest figures of animals, birds, sea creatures or mythic beings found in the Haida mythology. A rendering of a crest figure on a mask thus indicates which of the two social groups (known as moieties) the owner of the mask belong to – either Raven or Eagle – and his or her lineage. On a more subtle level the specificities of the crest figure indicate which specific myth the mask represent and thereby make it possible for the Haidas to place the owner of a mask socially.²¹ Traditionally the mythology of the Haida people has thus served as explanatory functions, both in terms of history and of social organization.

However, with the arrival of the Europeans in the mid-eighteenth century such traditions of social organization started deteriorating. Canadians of European descent saw the traditional art forms of the Pacific North – whenever art objects appeared in their genuine setting and not as curiosities in a fair or a market – as indicating failure of the church and the government to assimilate the natives. First Nations' traditions and way of political organization were met with few attempts to understand. Instead the newcomers attempted to transfer their own political ideals and systems to the natives – often with depressing results on the part of the indigenous population. The native's potlatch ceremony which marked the introduction of a new chief and served as the public forum for the establishment of communal law, were seen as highly primitive. In 1884 the government of General Sir John A. MacDonald therefore had the potlatch – and everything associated with it, including the production of art objects made as gifts to be given to the new chief – banned under the “potlatch law”, on the grounds that the potlatch encouraged barbarity, idleness and waste, and generally discouraged assimilation.²² The law was not repealed until 1951.

*Every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as 'Potlatch' or in the Indian dance known as 'Tamanawas' is guilty of misdemeanor, and shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than six nor less than two months in any gaol or other place of confinement.*²³

²¹ George F. MacDonald, *Haida Art*. (Canadian Museum of Civilization, Quebec: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996), pp.7-8.

²² Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian In Canadian Culture*. (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press 1992), p.99.

²³ Section 3, An Act Further to Amend the Indian Act 1880, as reproduced in “Reclaiming Haida Culture”, *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art*, edited by Deanna Ferguson. (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery and Douglas & McIntyre 2006), p.50.

The production of art objects for ceremonial purposes – after 1885 recognized as criminal offence – continued in secret, as did the potlatches under the disguise of family gatherings and birthday parties, but the art production still suffered a serious down-period lasting well into the 1900s. The Europeans had also brought with them new diseases – the most devastating for the natives being smallpox. The Haida population on Haida Gwaii has been estimated to have measured between ten and thirty thousand in the 1860s, by the early 1900s there were only six-hundred left. As a consequence of Euro-Canadian interference both the number of works produced, and the skillfulness with which native art was made, decreased.

With the gradual arrival of government initiated attempts to restore First Nations' rights and culture in the latter part of the twentieth century, however, the production of First Nations' art has increased by degrees. The trust in art as a marker of cultural identity has regained territory as contemporary First Nations people are increasingly reclaiming cultural heritage and taking pride in their ancestral origins. Contemporary Haida artist 7idansuu, Jim Hart, expresses his affiliation with art like this:

See, art and culture is the same to us – it's not separated. It's our history, our stories, our clans, who we are as a people... So it's all that history that goes with it and where it comes to form, to where it comes through – comes through me and makes something, and comes through another artist and makes something.²⁴

Adding to this, Nika Collison writes in a catalogue accompanying Vancouver Art Gallery's exhibition *Raven Travelling* in 2006 that "Haida art stems from life, past and present. Haida art is the visual companion to Haida language, both of which are born from our inextricable connections to the lands, waters and supernatural beings of Haida Gwaii. Together they represent who we are – they are our identity."²⁵ Haida art, as art in other First Nation bands, thus serves to express the social and cultural footing within the Haida people as different (but not necessarily separate) from a larger westernized Canadian community.

²⁴ 7IDAnsuu, Jim Hart, "Haida Art and Haida Gwaii", *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art*, (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery and Douglas & McIntyre 2006), p. 29.

²⁵ Nico Collison, "Everything Depends on Everything Else", *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art*, (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery and Douglas & McIntyre 2006), p. 59.

Part of the Team

This function as a marker of cultural identity can be detected in the Air Jordans as well. The wearer of a pair of Nike Air Jordans will, to a certain extent, identify with the kind of mythology that comes with the shoes, either consciously or unconsciously. The artist Carlos Amorales have used the term “Cinderella-effect” about the symbolic potential implied in owning a pair of brand trainers; understanding such trainers to possess a mediating function between the individual and its ideal ego.²⁶ Brand trainers, such as the Nike Air Jordans, associated with celebrity sports stars, invite kids and grown ups dreaming of fame a step closer to the glamorous world of celebrity life – at least on a superfluous level. In some of the Prototypes Jungen has included the words “Team Jordan” and “Jordan – Quality inspired by the greatest player ever” as they appear on different parts of the shoes. The slogans serve to remind potential buyers and wearers what they are buying into – the stardom and success of Michael Jordan. The words “Team Jordan” quite explicitly state that if you wear these shoes, you will become part of the highly successful team under guidance of Michael Jordan. By wearing the Jordans the wearer will also set a certain standard in terms of footwear; only the best is good enough, and the best is what the star player himself wears: the Air Jordans.

The first Nike Air Jordans hit the market in 1985 with instant success much due to their promoter who wore the shoes while he was playing basketball on court in the National Basketball Association (NBA) series. Although the Jordans were not extremely revolutionary in terms of their functional design, they quickly gained a reputation of positing “flying powers” – a power more likely to stem from Michael Jordan’s extraordinary performance than the shoes themselves. What made the Jordans stand out was their bold color scheme. Up until 1985 most basketball shoes were white only, and the NBA therefore protested the new design claiming that the Nikes broke with their footwear-policy. The NBA subsequently had the shoes banned. However, Jordan refused to obey and risked a \$5000 fine per game he played wearing the Nikes – a fine Nike eagerly agreed to pay as long as Jordan wore the shoes on court.²⁷ The Air Jordans soon became a great commercial success. The first Air Jordan model made over \$130 million in its first year in America.²⁸

²⁶ Carlos Amorales , 20 Million Mexicans Can’t Be Wrong, *SLG5* (London: South London Gallery, 2002).

²⁷ Ulrik Caessus, “Superstar, Air Jordan Celebrate 35 Years of Sneaker Fashion” in *Virginia Law Weekly*, Vol.57, iss. 24, 2005, p. 4. & Justin Harrington, *The legacy of Michael Jordan*, Suite 101tm.com [website

Owing their enormous popularity to Michael Jordan, the Nike trainers were associated with success not only on the sports arena, but in business as well. As his basketball career brought him wealth and his shoes became an instant hit, Michael Jordan was well-off financially from quite early on in his career. In his first year as an NBA rookie for the Chicago Bulls in the 1984-85-season, Jordan signed a contract with Nike guaranteeing him \$18 million plus royalties on every pair of Nike Air Jordans sold.²⁹ In 1998 *Fortune* magazine estimated Michael Jordan's impact on American economy at more than \$10 billion, with approximately \$5,2 billion benefiting Nike as a result of the Air Jordan trainers and the company's by now well established Jordan Brand. David Breskin, a reporter for *Gentlemens Quarterly* has said of Jordan that he is "the most admired, idolized, and moneyed team-sport hero in the entire American hero-business. For some folks he has come to *represent* America."³⁰ The trainers have thus come to embody liberal democratic ideas about economic mobility and success; they embody no less than the American dream of the self-made man. They bear witness to Michael Jordan's success story about the boy who set his mind to making a career for himself in sports and succeeded beyond what anyone could have hoped for. As of today Jordan is one of the most famous sports stars in North American history, perhaps only ranking behind Muhammad Ali and Babe Ruth.

Back in the later 1980s the demand for the Air Jordans resulted in so-called "shoe-jackings", where young boys were robbed of their shoes at gunpoint.³¹ The trainers became extremely popular with kids living in black communities of average low incomes, especially after Nike's so-called "bro-ing" marketing campaign served to boost the cool-factor of the shoes. "Hey bro, want to check out some new shoes?" By giving out new trainer models to kids in poor neighborhoods, Nike increased the popularity of the Air Jordans by a great deal.³² The shoes were perhaps too popular for a period, considering the impact they had on poor and unstable neighborhoods where status among youngsters is measured by the brand of a kid's trainers.

online], available from http://basketball-players.suite101.com/article.cfm/the_legend_of_michael_jordan, Internet, last accessed 15.11.2007.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ David L. Porter, *Michael Jordan – A Biography*, (London: Greenwood Press 2007), pp.24-25.

³⁰ Ibid p.xiii.

³¹ Ibid. p.25

³² Josh Feit, *The Nike Psyche*, Willamette Week 28. May. 1997.

By now the Air Jordans have become the ultimate symbol of pop culture. Worn by kids and youth in the streets as well as fashionable celebrities around the world, the Air Jordans are still extremely popular. Much due to the steadily rising popularity of rap music dominated by black American artists rehearsing their affiliations with the rough life in the “hood”, the popularity of shoes like the Nike Air Jordans, have grown popular with the greater mass of consumers – First Nations Canadians included. The shoes have even become a collector’s item – a pair of original Jordans might sell for as much as \$500.000 on ebay – fitly describing the capitalist mechanism inherent to their popularity.³³

Going to work on the Nikes, then, Jungen quite literally started ripping apart the American dream. “I went to a sports-store and purchased a number of pairs of Air Jordan sneakers and began to dissect them, which in itself was interesting – in that it was almost a sacrilegious act: cutting up and ‘destroying’ these iconic, collectible (and expensive) shoes.”³⁴ Piece by piece the Air Jordans were torn apart and when they appeared sown back together, they were not trainers anymore but masks – displaying a different side to trainers as a marker of North American cultural identity. The ideal of the self-made American, successful in terms of career and personal economy, a believer in the opportunities embedded in hard work, is put under pressure in *Prototypes*; the American dream might not ring true in quite the same way for Native Americans as for Americans of European ancestry.

The “Swoosh” Nike logo, a stylized victory sign – which has been used in *Prototypes* as a defining feature – comes across as ambivalent. To a journalist from the *Willamette Week* newspaper in Oregon, Nike employee Vizhier Corpuz, back in 1997 said of the Swoosh that it “represents something other than just a company, it represents a whole value system”. Having tattooed the Swoosh just above his ankle, another Nike employee approved of his colleague’s statement, adding that his job with Nike had stopped being a job and “started to become a way of defining how you are living on earth”.³⁵ Speaking of Nike as if it was a welfare organization rather than a shoe company, the employees had in mind the numerous good-will projects with which Nike was involved. Perhaps such projects could be viewed as a victory for kids and youth enjoying new basketball courts in poor neighborhoods or for the kids

³³ Ebay, available from http://search.ebay.com/nike-air-jordan_W0QQdfspZ32QQfromZR40QQfsooZ2QQfsopZ3QQsbrsrZd; Internet, last accessed 10.02.2008.

³⁴ Brian Jungen in conversation with Matthew Higgs (Vienna: Seession 2004), p.24.

³⁵ Josh Feit, *The Nike Psyche*, Willamette Week, May 28, 1997.

participating in Nike's various tournaments. However, in connection with Jungen's title *Prototype for a New Understanding* the Swoosh seems to question the legacy of Nike rather than to embrace it. Achieving victories does not go without costs, neither on the sports arena nor in business. Apart from what the Nike company itself presents as Nike's athlete ethos and American dream ideals, Nike is also associated with various aspects of the downside to global capitalism, such as the exploitation of low-cost labor in Asia and market monopoly in disfavor of smaller companies. In the late 1990s Nike came to serve as *the* prototype of companies eager to make profit without concern for the human resources involved in the production of brand products at low costs. In the context of Jungen's *Prototypes* the Nike logo can therefore read as critical of Nike in particular, and in general of the kind of business policy this company represents.

Questioning Cultural Domination

In a wider sense the victory sign as it appears in *Prototypes* does not only question the legacy of Nike, but also the legacy of Western cultural domination in North-America. A feature of negotiation of First Nations' identity, the Nike logo invokes uncanny associations of victories in the context of First Nations' historical encounters with colonizing Europeans. What victories are there to be celebrated? When Christopher Columbus arrived in America he thought he had come to India and discovered the Indians. But even if there were different indigenous cultures, there were in fact no Indians: the Indian was a European invention. Still, Columbus' discovery went along to become one of the most celebrated discoveries in Western history – an ambivalent historical event for North-American natives.

From the beginning of European colonization in Canada the natives were considered second nature. They were useful as allies during the wars over land between the different colonizing powers – of which France and Great Britain were the major nations– but when the wars came to an end in the mid-nineteenth century the natives were not as useful as allies anymore. Rather, they were understood to be in the way of the cultivation of the land.³⁶ Various aspects, too numerous to be properly dealt with here, played into how First Nations Canadians were disaccommodated by

³⁶ Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian In Canadian Culture*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press 1992), p.8.

the colonizers. Not all encounters between Euro-Canadians and First Nations peoples had negative results on the part of the First Nations, nor were all Euro-Canadian attempts to deal with the First Nations population meant to discriminate, but the overall injustice the First Nations population of Canada have suffered have had, and still has, long term consequences. Consequences which make themselves felt when apprehending Jungen's *Prototypes*, because Nike, in a sense, represents the continuous cultural domination of Western ideals over First Nation culture. The trainers represent the new social marker of identity among First Nations as well as Canadians of European descent. Nike is not alone in having taken advantage of a situation of globalized markets and widespread transfusion of Western cultural standards, but Nike has indeed contributed to the spread of North American popular culture. Thus, it becomes difficult not to think of Nike as representing a trend towards acculturation of Western ideals.

As the need to develop a Canadian identity made itself felt among Canada's European population in the latter part of the 1900s, the Indian was marginalized and came to represent everything the Euro-Canadians did not associate themselves with. The image of the Indian in the eyes of European settlers took shape accordingly. The image the Euro-Canadians had of Indians, historian Daniel Francis writes, was an invention based as much on myth and imagination as on actual knowledge about the First Nations of Canada.³⁷ For a long period of time the First Nations people of Canada were considered a "vanishing breed", making them attractive to artists and adventurers. First Nation peoples' supposedly primitive way of life, their close connection with nature, their religious rituals and their beautiful, but old fashioned clothing and their curious art forms became subject to various attempts by Westerners to document the true native spirit before it disappeared. But with only fragmentary experience with the natives, the truthfulness of the Indian image presented by explorers and artists of European descent was rather dubious. The romanticized image of Indians wearing buckskin suits and feather head-dresses was suitable for telling tales around the campfire, but in matters of politics and economy, the Indian living in such a close relationship to nature was no good, since this was a part of Western civilization Indians were not able to comprehend. Depending on the situation, the image Euro-Canadians had of the Indians could be quite contradictory;

³⁷ Ibid.

the Indian both represented a romanticized relationship to nature, a stoic and wise take on the big questions in life, beautiful craftsmanship, and barbarianism and drunkenness at the same time.³⁸ Although the First Nations have had their reputation normalized since the nineteenth century, the image of the 'Imaginary Indian' does to some extent still live on.³⁹

The last decades have seen a steady increase in the popularity of First Nations' art even outside of First Nations' communities. The art works of Haida artist, Bill Reid, are worth mentioning here as an example of the widespread popularity of Haida art. Reid's works are not just representing First Nation's culture: his works have gained status as promoters of a national Canadian identity embraced by non-native Canadians as well. In 1991 the Canadian federal government unveiled a large bronze sculpture by Reid outside the Canadian embassy in Washington D.C. The "Spirit of the Haida G'waii" took the shape of a large Haida canoe spilling over with creatures from Haida mythology, thus advertising Canadian national identity as heavily influenced by First Nations' culture.⁴⁰ Further, when it comes to advertising Canada as a tourist attraction, romantic images of Canada's First Nations, come in handy. Pictured as caught up with spiritual rituals, dressed up in traditional costumes, First Nations people are presented as both exotic and authentic in tourist advertisements outside of Canada.⁴¹ Although it is not my intention here to decide the degree of truthfulness in such representations of Canadian First Nations, it is worth pointing out that such presentations do influence the image the outside world have of First Nations peoples. Outside of tourist brochures and official commissions of First Nations' art, First Nation life and identity take on a more complex character. In *Prototypes* this complexity is recognized. The mix of materials positing strong ties to Western cultural ideals, with the references to traditional First Nations' culture, does not represent cultural affiliations as dependent either on a First Nations' identity or a Euro-Canadian identity; there is room for both. The stereotypical view of First Nations thus feels old fashioned and simplistic.

³⁸ Ibid., p.186.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

It's Gotta Be the Shoes!

A curious link between traditional First Nations culture and North American mores, presents itself through the magical number of twenty-three – Michael Jordan's lucky number which he wore on his back throughout his career in basketball. The number of twenty-three appears on several of the Nike Air Jordan models, and has found its place in Jungen's *Prototypes* of which there are exactly twenty-three models. Along with the Jumpman logo – present in all the *Prototypes* – Jordan's magical number references Jordan's almost unearthly accomplishments on court. "It's gotta be the shoes!" Spike Lee exclaimed in a Nike Air Jordan TV-commercial in the 90s, and almost over night his slogan caught on; it became a proverb and the myth about the Air Jordan's magical powers flowered.

Jordan has gained status as a legendary basketball player, and his accomplishments off court have further served to reinforce his status as a legend. Sports journalist in *Sports Illustrated*, Jack McCallum, once called Jordan a sportsman who "has surpassed every standard by which we gauge the fame of an athlete and, with few exceptions, has handled the adulation with a preternatural grace and ease that have cut across the lines of race, age and gender. He transcends sports."⁴² The spiritual dimension to North American sports events should not be underestimated. Be it NBA playoffs or Super bowl, the almost ceremonial aura to these events arguably have a spiritual dimension to them. Not unlike Jungen's *Prototypes*. The First Nations' masks Jungen pays homage to in his *Prototypes* were traditionally made for ceremonial purposes. Although masks were also produced for sale to non-natives interested in acquiring First Nations' artifacts during the nineteenth century, masks were primarily made for use in ceremonies. Considering this, one could perhaps argue that there is a link here between the ceremonial function of the mask and the ceremonial aura that the Air Jordans embody. The reference to the iconic figure of Michael Jordan is in many ways a reference to a ceremonial practice in a modernized and secularized society where focus on religious practices to a great degree has been replaced by rites connected with professional sports events and other cultural events that encourage collective engagement. The experience of an important sports event may fill the need for both a religious dimension to life, and a need to be part of a larger collective experience. Jungen has

⁴² Jack McCallum in David L. Porter, *Michael Jordan – A Biography*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2007), p.1.

created prototypes for new understandings not only of the effects mainstream culture and Western capitalism have on the First Nations of Canada, but also of how Westerners in a modernized, post-industrial and secular society still feel the need for icons and some form of collective experience to establish a footing within the social order. Perhaps the difference between past and present, First Nation and the larger North American community is not so great after all?

Nike seems to believe in the uniting spirit of sports. Offering a way to higher life is good for business just about everywhere, independent of the population's cultural background. The company presents the tale about their sponsored sports heroes as if it was the gospel, knowing that stars like Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods and Serena Williams have an appeal transcending conflicts around religious beliefs, race, age and gender.

Public Reception

After four years of making *Prototypes*, Brian Jungen ended his *Prototypes for a New Understanding*-series in 2005 having made the twenty-third *Prototype* for none less than Michael Jordan himself. Although Jungen's artworks were potentially critical of Jordan's business enterprise, Jordan was still interested in buying one of Jungen's *Prototypes*. Even Nike was interested in acquiring a new understanding. Intriguingly Nike used a picture of one of the *Prototypes* in an advertisement for Air Jordans on the back of the popular free Vice Magazine in 2006. The issue was dedicated to Native cultures in North America. One would perhaps think that Nike would be skeptical of embracing *Prototypes*, but as Nike take care to keep even counter cultural groups the targets of their marketing campaign, there was no way around embracing Jungen's work. Neglecting the *Prototypes*, or even worse, taking a stand against them, could turn out to be bad for business. By buying into the legacy of the *Prototypes*, Nike and Jordan contributed to a possible change in the interpretation of Jungen's transformed trainers – as a consequence they do indeed provide new understandings. The critique of Nike's blurring of economic and cultural values inherent in the *Prototypes*, was subverted and applied as a part of Nike's marketing strategy aimed at First Nation Canadians and Native Americans.

First Nation Canadians too, welcomed the *Prototypes*, understanding them to update the decipherment of what it means to be a First Nation Canadian. In distinguishing First Nations' identity from mainstream Canadian national identity, difference is often called upon as a demarcation line. But difference, invoked in relation to questions of identity, is more often than not, the opposite of a clear cut case. Difference, as artist Trin T. Minh-ha writes, is not necessarily opposed to sameness; it is not necessarily separate.⁴³ For Canadian First Nations this gives meaning in the sense that they both affiliate themselves with mainstream Canadian cultural references and their own indigenous cultural references at the same time. This makes them different from Euro-Canadians, but not separate; not un-Canadian. For First Nations Canadians welcoming the *Prototypes* then, the artworks seemed to express this type of relation between First Nations and the larger Canadian community quite well; the *Prototypes* are different from the traditional First Nations' masks, but that is still what they are nevertheless.

Consenting to a reading of *Prototypes* as expressing an updated decipherment of First Nations' identity also implies consenting to the kind of self-reflexive critique possible to read out of Jungen's art works. For the fusion of Nike and First Nations masks does not only read as a critique of Euro-Canadian oppression of native culture, the masks could also read as critical of the way First Nations have dealt with Euro-Canadian domination. Hence, on the part of First Nations acquiring new understandings, an updating of First Nation identity means recognizing the role of First Nations in counteracting cultural domination.

⁴³ Trin T. Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference". In *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* ed. by Anne McClintock, Aamir Muft, and Ella Shohat (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp.415 -416.

La Bouche du Roi

Where are we going?
What is our destination?
Deign, *Oshoun*, to bring us back home.
Help! Help!
Obatala, come rescue us!
Can you bring us back home?

Refrain from Yoruba
song ⁴⁴

Created between 1997 and 2005 the installation of *La Bouche du Roi* (“The King’s Mouth”), like the *Prototype for a New Understanding* series, consists of several masks. Hazoumé has used as his starting-point a woodcut prepared for the anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson in 1789, showing how the crowded Liverpool-controlled slaver, Brookes, would accommodate its slaves in the eighteenth century. Three-hundred-and-four cut out plastic jerry cans have been assembled to represent slaves shipped across the Atlantic between the West Coast of Africa, South America and Europe during the Atlantic Slave Trade. In addition to the ship formation made up by jerry can masks, the work also includes a video concerning the activity of illegal petrol trading in Benin and two soundtracks, one in which a litany of slave names in Yoruba, Wémé and Mahi are called out, and another representing the voices of singing slaves, expressing the lamentations of lost belonging. As discussed here, the title *La Bouche du Roi*, will refer to the art work as it was exhibited as a touring British Museum exhibition in Bristol’s City Museum & Art Gallery in September 2007. While exhibited in Bristol, the work was accompanied by several photos of Yoruba people living in Benin, but as these photos are not originally part of *La Bouche du Roi*, they will not be addressed in the following. My main concern is with the material installation.

To an untrained eye and mind the masks come across as quite simple with eyes, noses, and mouths, straightforwardly embodied in the cut out cans. However,

⁴⁴ Refrain from the one of the soundtracks accompanying *La Bouche du Roi* as transcribed and translated into English in *Romuald Hazoumé, La Bouche du Roi* (exhibition catalogue) ed. by Matthew Drutt (Houston: The Menil Collection 2005), p. 23.

by taking a closer look at what looks like bead bracelets adorning some of the masks, the handle which makes up what seems to be a nose, could also read as the stylized embodiment of an arm. Some masks hold scraps of paint or colored feathers; others have small wooden statuettes attached to their noses (arms), emphasizing the uniqueness of every mask within the relatively homogenous collective. The bead bracelets, the feathers and the wooden statuettes also serve to provide the masks with references to each of the Benin tribes –Yoruba, Wémé, and Mahi – and these tribes' religious beliefs. Like the traditional ceremonial First Nations masks of Canada, the masks of the Yoruba, the Wémé and the Mahi people serve to establish a sense of cultural belonging and cultural identity. The red feathers reads as a symbol of the god of thunderstorms, Xevioso, the bracelets of blue and white beads shows which masks represent the followers of Mammy Wata, and the wooden statuettes, ibeji, symbolizes a lost twin.⁴⁵

The woodcut prepared for anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson in 1789, which Hazoume has used as his reference in the setting up of *La Bouche du Roi*, describes the crowdedness on the slaver Brookes. Originating in Liverpool, Brookes was renowned to have carried over six-hundred slaves on one of its journeys between the West Coast of Africa and the West Indies. Clarkson's famous woodcut depicts only four-hundred-and-fifty-four slaves on the main deck, the amount of slaves actually allowed onboard on this ship, still the sense of crowdedness is overwhelming. To the anti-slavery campaigners it was important keeping the representation as neutral as possible. Only thus would the effect of the woodcut come across with authority. Although an effective strategy of campaigning in Great Britain in 1789, when slavery was still legal, depicting a slave ship as schematically as in Clarkson's woodcut would have seemed out of place today. Aiming to make his version of a description of a slave ship worthy of belief, Hazoumè has chosen a strategy of representation less concerned with neutrality. Without sacrificing the powerful impact of the woodcut's schematic representation of crowdedness, Hazoume has allowed for more focus on the individual, providing each mask with a name and somewhat unique features. Such a move emphasizes the individual worth at stake in slave trading, both in a historical and in a contemporary context. Hazoumè opens up the otherwise anonymous historical accounts of slavery and the

⁴⁵ *La Bouche du Roi: An Art Work by Romuald Hazoumé* (exhibition brochure) (London: The British Museum 2007).

anonymous news reportages about the underpaid workforce involved in the illegal oil business in Africa in order to give the participants in slave trading a name and a possible personal history.

The three-hundred-and-four names listed in the catalogue published by the Menil Collection, which showed *La Bouche du Roi* in 2005, are all Yoruba names.⁴⁶ The Yoruba people made up a substantial majority of the slaves transported from the area around the Bight of Benin on the Slave Coast (now more commonly referred to as the Gulf of Guinea) to the Americas. More than a million people designated as Yoruba were sent to ports in the New World during the period of trans-Atlantic trafficking.⁴⁷ Himself of Yoruba ancestry, Hazoumé has included Yoruba names which, in accordance with Yoruba tradition, relate to different markers of family and tribe identity. Serving to reference specific influences on the life of a Yoruba person, Yoruba names may relate to gods, traditions, societies, families of birth, village stories, events leading to success or wealth, as well as the dead and so forth. A Yoruba proverb goes “ilé làá wò ki a so mo wa loruko”, literally meaning “We look at the inside of the house before we name a child”.⁴⁸ By providing his masks with names then, Hazoumé has intended to provide his historical account of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade with a focus on the individual stories behind history as it is presented in the history books.

Modern Slavery

Scarred and blackened from the brutal molding process applied to jerry cans for the purpose of expanding them, the jerry can masks expose the traces of their mistreatment. There is little doubt that these plastic cans were deployed in exhausting labor before they reached their current position. Like the Nikes Jungen used for his *Prototypes*, the jerry cans Hazoumé has used in his *La Bouche du Roi* are heavily impregnated with associations, not to professional sports heroes or North American popular culture, but to Benin’s ongoing illegal trade in contraband petrol

⁴⁶ Romuald Hazoumé, *La Bouche du Roi* (exhibition catalogue) ed. by Matthew Drutt (Houston: The Menil Collection 2005).

⁴⁷ *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World* ed. by Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2004).

⁴⁸ Romuald Hazoumé, *La Bouche du Roi* (exhibition catalogue), ed. by Matthew Drutt (Houston: The Menil Collection 2005), p.32.

with its neighboring country, Nigeria. As shown in the video accompanying the installation, the illegal petrol trade between Benin and Nigeria consist in young boys and men transporting and trading petrol in plastic jerry cans, which have been enlarged by heating in order to contain greater amounts of petrol. The jerry cans are transported out of Nigeria and into Benin, where petrol is sold on the black market. The enlarged cans, visibly scarred by the enlargement process, become substantially less sustainable under pressure – frequently leading the cans to explode while being transported. Since the cans are transported bundled together on mopeds, explosions – when they occur – often lead to the death of the motorcyclist and the people who happen to be in the immediate surroundings when the petrol cans take fire.

Situated between Togo and Nigeria, Benin is not as rich with oil deposits as its neighboring countries on the Niger-delta. This means that the country is heavily dependent on importing fuel for transport and commercial interests. But legal imports of fuel are unstable as the main suppliers of oil and petrol operates from the highly precarious Nigeria where international oil companies tend to ship their oil off to other continents, leaving little for local oil supply. Years of unstable fuel supplies and high unemployment rates have left Nigerians with little choice but to tap into the international oil plants illegally to take back some of their “black gold”. Estimates suggest that at least ten percent of the oil produced in Nigerian plants is subject to illegal bunkering – the illegal tapping of pipelines and outright stealing of shiploads of fuel. Since a large percentage of the oil leaves Nigerian pipelines before it reaches the oil plants, oil supplies in Nigeria and Benin resides in the black market. The people of Benin are therefore dependent on contraband petrol. Like demands for contraband petrol, the unemployment rate is high, even if Benin has a fairly stable economy compared to the rest of the region. Subsequently, operators involved in contraband petrol trading hardly have any problems recruiting new employees for their illegal transporting business. Having no choice but to continue what they are doing, the motorcyclists participating in the contraband petrol trade risk their lives in their job, knowing that it is, ironically enough, this risky business that brings food on their plates on a day to day basis. They have become the victims of a modern form of slavery.

The plastic jerry can cannot escape the connotations of African oil wars. The black gold has often seemed to be more of a burden than a blessing. Nigeria is a case in point. After years of military regimes in charge of the country’s government,

the first elected government was installed in 1999, but politicians are often highly corrupt and the potential economic surplus contained in the country's rich oil deposits therefore does not benefit the large bulk of Nigerians. Underdevelopment is severe, and crime rates high. Militias and gangs rule the large cities by violent behavior, only too eager to use their guns. Domination by threat and scare, as the shotgun placed above the two ruler masks in *La Bouche du Roi* illustrates, knows no other way of establishing power than by creating anguish.

Little wonder then, that poor and disenfranchised West-Africans push their luck trying to re-settle in Europe. Several thousand Africans make use of the illegal and hazardous arrangements set up to ship venturesome Africans off to European shores annually. Risking their lives in the hands of people smugglers, setting out on dangerous sea crossings and living through intervals of hiding from official authorities, poor Africans gamble on a better life in Europe. Illegal immigrants washing up on the beaches of Spain and Malta are not captives of war or victims of kidnapping violently forced to leave Africa by boat for the sake of serving as slaves for white Europeans. Still, trying their luck with migration is hardly a truly deliberate choice, the opportunities of the self-made man are still presided over by Europe and the West. Upon arriving in Europe most illegal immigrants receive the cold shoulder, and should consider it lucky if they are able to obtain a low-wage job.

The situation is somewhat different for skilled workers leaving Africa for the sake of a better paid, and perhaps less distressing, job outside of Africa. The draining of skilled labor has become a problem, especially in poor regions in bad need of skilled workers in order for the economy and relative welfare of the society to stabilize. A steady job in Europe lessens the chance of going back to Africa.

The Atlantic Slave Trade

At the stern of *La Bouche du Roi* two masks stand out; a yellow jerry can mask with a cutout crown and braided white hair possibly made of split nylon rope, and a black mask with a triangular hat made from a piece of sheet metal decorated with yellow paint – at its nose, a piece of thin sheet metal serving its purpose as a nose-ornament. The yellow masks call into mind the image of white slave traders and slaver captains – men usually with only limited concern for the well being of their

slaves. The black mask references the black kings and slave trade exploiters trading with the Europeans – slave trade participants are all too often overlooked in the more general history books of modern Europe trying to redeem a post-colonial consciousness of the misconduct involved in former European colonizing enterprises.

La Bouche du Roi, however, presents a more nuanced picture of the Atlantic Slave Trade, acknowledging an active role of the West Coast Africans in trading slaves with the Europeans during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The whole slave trading business of the colonial era is commonly understood to have been initiated by the Europeans, but this is not necessarily true. The keeping of slaves was already a well established practice on the African continent previous to the intervention of European traders. When European ships first arrived on the West Coast of Africa in the seventeenth century, the Europeans did not initiate the slave-trading all by themselves: they were backed by native kings and rulers already in the business of keeping slaves. The kings and rulers in the area of today's Benin, then the Kingdom of Dahomey, were indeed active in the slave trading business. *La Bouche du Roi* testifies to this as the name 'La Bouche du Roi' was in fact the name of one of the major slave trade ports of Dahomey during the era of trans-Atlantic slave trading. Often located at a place where one or more rivers ran out into the sea, ports like 'La Bouche du Roi' were strategically placed. Captive slaves from inland areas could be easily transported by boat down to the ports by local slave traders. Having arrived at a port like 'La Bouche du Roi', the captives would be kept in waiting for European slavers to arrive, at the time of which the captives would be sold off as slaves. Translating into "The King's Mouth", the name 'La Bouche du Roi' thus alludes to the megalomania of black rulers in the costal area of the former Kingdom of Dahomey, exchanging their captives with white traders for cotton, cow wire shells, alcohol and tobacco – not concerned with the inhumanity of their business deals.

Often kept in provisional earth cellars while in waiting for further transportation across the Atlantic, the slaves suffered squalid living conditions. The living conditions were hardly any better once on board a slaver. As provision of professional medical care for the slaves and other passengers on a slaver was expensive and not laid down as mandatory by the European governments and slaving companies controlling the Atlantic Slave Trade, slaver captains tended to be even less concerned with the slaves' health than the slave traders overseeing the whole trade business. In order to

profit from the trade, it was essential for the European traders that as many slaves as possible survived the journeys across the Atlantic. For the slaver captains the death toll was of less concern, however, since the introduction of new diseases made death tolls high on all parts participating in the slave trading anyway – the rationale of the slaver captains therefore seemed to be that extensive medical care and good care was useless in any case.⁴⁹ Accounting for his experience serving as a doctor on board one of the many British slavers trading slaves along the West Coast of Africa, Alexander Falconbridge, described the inhuman conditions for the slaves on board as follows:

The men, on being brought aboard the ship, are immediately fastened together, two and two, by handcuffs on their wrists and by irons riveted on their les. They are then sent down between the decks and placed in a space partitioned off for that purpose. The women are placed in a separate space between decks, but without being ironed. An adjoining room, on the same deck, is set apart for the boys. (...) [T]hey are frequently stowed so close as to admit no other position than lying on their sides. Nor will the height between decks, unless directly under the grating, allow them to stand; especially where there are platforms on either side, which is generally the case. (...) In each of the apartments are placed three or four large buckets, of a conical form, nearly two feet in diameter at the bottom and only one foot at the top and in depth about twenty-eight inches, to which, when necessary, the negroes have recourse. It often happens that those who are placed at a distance from the buckets, in endeavoring to get to them, tumble over their companions, in consequence of their being shackled. These accidents, although unavoidable, are productive of continual quarrels in which some of them are always bruised. In this situation, unable to proceed and prevented from getting to the tubs, they desist from the attempt; and as the necessities of nature are not to be resisted, they ease themselves as they lie.⁵⁰

As exhibition visitors walk along *La Bouche du Roi* they might actually catch a whiff of unpleasant smells, not of urine and sweat perhaps, but the smell of burnt plastic and oil spills permeates the installation, conjuring up blurry images of poor living conditions.

⁴⁹ Jeremy Black, "Introduction". In *The Atlantic Slave Trade Volume III, Eighteenth Century* ed. by Jeremy Black, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), p. xvii.

⁵⁰ From Alexander Falconbridge's "Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa". In *Slave Ships and Slaving* by George Francis Dow, New York: Dover Publications Inc. 1970, pp. 142-143.

Among the rows of jerry can masks, are green bottles, small baskets with tobacco, beads and shells. The goods displayed are examples of goods the European traders brought with them to barter for slaves once they arrived in West Coast Africa. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the green bottles would have contained gin, a major British exporting good, especially in Liverpool where the slaver represented in Clarkson's woodcut originated. Serving not only its purpose as an exporting good, alcohol also provided both the crew and the slaves a popular short-term escape from the harsh realities on board slavers like the Brookes. Needless to say, the consummation of alcohol contributed to heated arguments and violent behavior on board.

Reminding its audience of how both Europeans and Africans took an active part in the slave trading, the two masks at the stern of *La Bouche du Roi* calls to mind slavery in its historical, as well as in its present form. The yellow mask with the royal crown symbolizing the white ruler may allude to the presence of international enterprises in West Africa, past and present. The coast of West Africa has long been the source of international illicit business deals starting with the Europe-dominated Atlantic Slave Trade, later extending into European efforts to colonize the African continent, and now most noticeable in the presence of international oil industry. From the seventeenth century onwards the Slave Coast (Gulf of Guinea) was frequented by slave traders from different European countries; chief among them Britain and France. The British controlled much of the slave trade in the area through the Royal African Company and various other smaller enterprises. The area that today constitutes Nigeria – parts of it had previously been considered a part of Dahomey – became a colony under British rule around the turn of the 20th century. The British kept the country a protectorate of the British Empire until 1960, when Nigeria was granted independence. France colonized most of the area formerly known as Dahomey, today known as the Republic of Benin, in 1872. Thus European commercial interests in the region were secured. The modern day Republic of Benin came into being simultaneously with Nigeria in 1960.

Functioning much like the yellow mask in terms of association, the black mask with African regalia at the rear of the *La Bouche du Roi* alludes to the continuous exploitation of easily accessed cheap labor for work in illegal businesses. Slavery, in its modern form, is still a problem on the African continent (and elsewhere) as several African governments fail to provide for stable conditions in the labor market. Thus,

the scales of justice located between the two rulers at the stern of *La Bouche du Roi*, might still seem to be tilting unfavorably in gain of the white European.

Floating in the Atlantic

Scales are shifty things, however. Seemingly tilting in gain of a white Europe at one point, the scales might shift their weight by the next wave. *La Bouche du Roi* does not give any easy answers as to which are more to blame for the historical and present commercial exploitation of Africa and its people – the white West or the black Africans. The installation avoids running aground by not simplifying the historical background of the present underdevelopment in parts of Africa and by also taking into consideration Africans' own responsibility, or lack of such, to contribute to development and stable governing. Thus, Hazoumé's ship has allocated itself a position in the Atlantic between destinations; it has entered what Paul Gilroy has called the Black Atlantic.

Gilroy launched the concept of the Black Atlantic in 1993, understanding it as a chronotope⁵¹ for the study of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its long-term consequences of various sorts. The Atlantic, Gilroy argued, can be understood as a space where maritime activity initiated the age of modernity through its historical accommodation of trans-Atlantic trading and thereby contributed to the cultural exchange so characteristic to the modern world.⁵² Gilroy specifically mentioned the ship as a site of cultural exchange since "ships were the living means by which the points wherein [the] Atlantic world were joined".⁵³ "[Ships] were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected."⁵⁴ Therefore the ship provided a chance to explore the articulations between the discontinuous histories of England's ports – its interfaces with the wider world.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Gilroy adapts the term *chronotope* from Bakhtin who understands the word to signify "A unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented... The chronotope is an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. and tans. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.426.

⁵² Paul Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity". In *Visual Culture, Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith (New York: Routledge 2006), pp.181-220.

⁵³ Ibid. p.195.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.195.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.195.

Without going too much into Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic here⁵⁶, I find it worth mentioning it because Gilroy's proposal to look at the ship as a complex unit in terms of cultural difference and cultural exchange seems relevant in relation to *La Bouche du Roi*. Like Hazoumé, Gilroy points to the complexity of power relationships in the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Contrary to the common understanding that white Europeans were in total command of the black Africans, the relationships between black and white were of a more complex character. Not all Africans on British ships were slaves, nor did all white Europeans consider themselves higher in rank than the Africans. Freed slaves could for example be working as sailors. By the eighteenth century a substantial part of the British navy was made up of Africans working as sailors or shipbuilders. White sailors and black sailors alike often considered themselves allies since they all belonged to the same socio-economic class. A joining of forces was indeed necessary if the underpaid sailors were to succeed in charging their employers with revolt. Europeans and Africans working together as sailors also took part in extensive cultural exchange visiting different ports in different countries and learning to know people from different parts of the world. Such experiences contributed to alignments across the lines of race, color and mother-tongue.⁵⁷

Making human sacrifices in the name of business enterprise is, as mentioned, not exclusively a European doing, not historically, nor in the present day. Thinking of the ship, then, as a unit where a complexity of relationships between different cultures are allowed to develop, make it easier to avoid a reading of *La Bouche du Roi* as reductive in terms of placing all guilt of slave trading with a white Europe.

Public Reception

Perhaps this is why the British Museum felt it only to be right to purchase *La Bouche du Roi* for the commemoration of the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade within the British Empire in 2007. First exhibited at the British Museum in London, and then touring various cities throughout England, including Bristol and Liverpool – both cities with a history of slave trading – *La Bouche du Roi* is part of

⁵⁶ Suffice to say it might very well have proved an interesting experiment to read *La Bouche du Roi* in light of Gilroy's Black Atlantic theory, but there is not room for such an experiment here as it would require me write a whole new thesis.

⁵⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity* in *Visual Culture, Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith (New York: Routledge 2006), pp. 191 -195.

Britain's post-colonial project of confronting historical mischief abroad. Recognizing Britain's part in the exploitation and colonizing of the African continent, the purchase of *La Bouche du Roi* offered a way to update the former one-sidedly guilt-ridden project of reconciliation with the colonial past.

In this manner the ship of *La Bouche du Roi* feeds into the notion of British identity as much as Beninese and African identity. In the context of being bought and displayed by the British Museum, *La Bouche du Roi* conveys as much about British history as it conveys about the history of Benin. Traditionally in Britain the ship would constitute a symbol of pride – Britain was able to become an empire much because of their excellence in naval skills – but Hazoumé's ship subverts the symbol by making the ship into a marker of ambivalent feelings towards the driving forces of modernity. *La Bouche du Roi* seems to be questioning the cost of development. On the part of British authorities and a British audience the will to confront a morally questionable past has increased ever since they were confronted with a slave ship in the form of an artwork. J.M.W. Turner's depiction of a sinking slave ship, throwing overboard its dead and dying as it is hit by storm, was difficult to tackle when it was introduced to the public in 1840, even if slavery had been abolished for over thirty years.⁵⁸ The past history of slavery was perhaps too close in time to be fully confronted.

The tide has changed since then and has allowed Hazoumé, in the same way as Jungen questions the legacy of Nike and Western cultural domination, to question European influence on West-Africa whilst also managing not to blame Europe and the West for all the wrongdoings in the region.

⁵⁸ Paul Gilroy, Art of Darkness, and the Problem of Belonging to England in *The Visual Culture Reader* ed. by Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 331-337.

Prototypes of Bricolage?

My last remarks in the presentation of *Prototype for a New Understanding* and *La Bouche du Roi* here, regards my main concern in this chapter: is it bricolage? Let us quickly recapture the technical criteria for an art work to fit with the Lévi-Straussian bricolage. First the bricolage consists of materials already used, or meant to be used, in other contexts, serving other specific functions. The materials contribute to the bricolage with a range of different associations. Thus, the new constellation of materials makes for new myths or concepts to be abstracted. Second, the bricolage allocates itself midway between the abstract and the concrete; the materials are concrete but the meaning embodied in the bricolage is somewhat abstract. Third, the bricolage is in continuous flux, it is never settled and can always be expanded on. Fourth, the somewhat coincidental assembling of old materials into a new entity with a new function, refer both backwards and forwards in time, the bricolage being synchronous.

In terms of the first criterion, both artworks should be easy to assess. Jungen's Nike Air Jordans and Hazoumé's jerry cans certainly contribute to the artworks with a whole range of different associations which make for new understandings to be gathered. The second criterion seems easily fulfilled too: the *Prototypes* and *La Bouche du Roi* are both concrete, in the sense that they are material, and abstract, in terms of meaning and function. Taking the third criterion into consideration offers more resistance. One could with good reason ask if the artworks are as open to change as is required of a bricolage. Arguably, both the *Prototypes* and *La Bouche du Roi* have found their final form; once they found their way to the first gallery exhibition they were bound to keep the same material shape. I would, however, argue against this, that the artworks' changing potential resides in the abstract part of their being – the one that is subject to interpretation – because the interpretation of an artwork will always be subject to change as time passes and new information is found to contribute to the reading of a work. The fourth criterion is also fulfilled in *Prototypes* and *La Bouche du Roi*: both artworks refer backwards and forwards in time simultaneously, they yield a synchronous conceptualization of time.

Except for these quite technical reasons which justify giving *Prototypes* and *La Bouche du Roi* the bricolage label, there are other aspects of Jungen and Hazoumé's

works pointing in the direction of bricolage. Both Jungen and Hazoumé seem to address myths about cultural belonging and identity, they question stereotypes for the sake of updating old truths. At the same time, their art making activity and their mythmaking is no different in technique than the technique used to construct the myths they are questioning. There is no denying that Jungen and Hazoumé are creating myths about identity which, sooner or later, will have to be updated in the same way as Jungen and Hazoumé are updating them right now. The updating of myths comes as a natural consequence of expanded knowledge – in this case expanded knowledge of what goes toward making up identity. Both artists, by acknowledging this, allows themselves to exercise criticism through their art without drawing overly conclusive judgments. Even if they were not consciously aware of the potential of criticism in their bricolage art form, their art would still have had potential for criticism. The bricolage is by implication a form of critique; it is inherent to its structure. In the act of updating old myths to new truths, the act of criticism is implicit.

I think it is probably fair to say that my early interest in art-making was rooted more within a craft or folk-art tradition: which on a primary level would be how my mother's family continues to relate to the production of art and aesthetics.⁵⁹

Brian

Jungen

Brian Jungen has been classified as a conceptual artist. Canadian artists operating in the genre of Canadian photo conceptualism – Jeff Wall, Ken Lum and Rodney Graham perhaps being the most well-known names – are frequently mentioned as sources of inspiration when Jungen's art is under discussion. Arguably, his *Prototypes* are conceptual, as are Jungen's other works which are not discussed here. But as Jungen himself suggests, conceptual art was not his primary concern when he first started making art. Rather he felt himself at home with the craft-making tradition of his Dane-zaa band. The practice of making art from left-over materials of various sorts is thus rooted as much in his affiliation with native Canadian culture as it is with a contemporary and international art practice.

This should perhaps come as no surprise. The reason I mention it here is because conceptual artists have frequently made a point out of their responsibility to

⁵⁹ Brian Jungen in interview with Matthew Higgs, *Scession – Brian Jungen*, (Vienna: Scession, 2004), p.18.

produce art which function as a means of critiquing societal structures. An early example is Hans Hacke who made it his obligation to question the gentrification of New York in the seventies. Also, if Jungen is to be considered a conceptual artist I find it well worth distinguishing his conceptual art practice from the more conventional type of conceptualism, where the practicing of criticism is almost entirely a conscious act. Involved with the practice of a first Nation tradition of recycling and remixing, Jungen was engaged with an art practice that had critical potential from early on in his career as an artist. As practiced within native communities, the recycling of old materials into arts and craft objects is not necessarily a conscious critical act. But to my mind the recycling and remixing that goes on in First Nation Canadian art has inherent critical potential; it is in certain ways conceptual even before it is elevated to the level of gallery art. Thus, the bricolage structure empowers the critique of stereotypical views on identity and history which Jungen seems to be advocating.

Hazoumé's masks, including masks made previous to *La Bouche du Roi*, also fit with the general currency of conceptual art as politically subversive and critical of societal structures. As in North American First Nations cultures, making art from recyclable materials is not a new phenomenon in African arts. Until more recently the practice has often been written off as 'folk art' in Western discussions of contemporary art. When Hazoumé has won acceptance within the Western art market, together with artists like El Anatsui, it might suggest that the tide is about to turn. Like Jungen, Hazoumé is welcomed both on the international art market and in his local community. The practice of making masks from plastic jerry cans does not only serve as a function within the arena of conceptual art, as one would perhaps anticipate: Hazoumé – and the community in which he lives – does not differentiate between the authenticity of ceremonial masks made from wood and masks made from plastic canisters. In order to put his masks to the test in terms of authenticity, Hazoumé offered some of his canister masks (made previous to those of *La Bouche du Roi*) to a voodoo priest in Benin to test if the priest would approve of the masks for ritual use. Much to Hazoumé's satisfaction the masks were accepted and employed in subsequent ceremonies.⁶⁰ Such an episode is illustrative: the practice of recycling materials for artistic purposes is well enough established for a Beninese priest to accept Hazoumé's plastic jerry can masks as authentic masks on par with masks

⁶⁰ Paolo Israel, "Irony, Ambiguity and the Art of Recycling – Reflections on Contemporary Rural African Art and 'Africa Remix'" in *Third Text*, Vol. 20 Issue 5 (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 587.

made of wood. Like with the *Prototypes*, the bricolage structure empowers *La Bouche du Roi's* critical voice. Even if Hazoumé had not been advocating his opinions about the current condition of West Africa and its history, like he has done when being asked about *La Bouche du Roi*, the potential for criticism would still have been inherent in his art work.

The most potent reason for linking the Lévi-Straussian bricolage to *Prototypes* and *La Bouche du Roi*, is, as I have already suggested, that the artworks address issues of cultural belonging and identity. Lévi-Strauss' concern with myths was in many ways an attempt to come to grips with what constitutes cultural identification. For me cultural identification asserts itself as the subject matter in the art of Jungen and Hazoumé; their discussion of "cultural migration" says something about how identity is formed. In the next chapter I will therefore discuss more closely what kind of identity concept I take to be implied with the concept of the bricolage.

*All he'd ever wanted, from earliest childhood
on, was to be free: not black, not even white
– just on his own and free.⁶¹*

Philip Roth

CHAPTER IV

CULTURAL IDENTITY: IDENTITY INTERPRETED AS HYBRIDITY

Applying the term cultural identity to a discussion of art and how it offers perspectives on identity is not without its problems. In Chapter II I suggested that we think of cultural identity as a sense of belonging in a society whose members agree to an understanding of a common past and a common future. I also wrote that the kind of cultural identity I am concerned with here is not dependent on genealogy. But avoiding the question of genealogy entirely in a discussion of identity is of course impossible.

The oppressive treatment of African-Americans facilitates [a] distancing response, by requiring every African-American to draw a sharp distinction between the person he is and the person society perceives him to be; that is between who he is as an individual, and the way he is designated and treated by others.⁶²

Adrian Piper

Adrian Piper's account of how genealogy indeed functions as an important marker of identity if you are an African-American in the US is proof in point. If the color of your skin gives away African-American genes, then genealogy becomes an issue in terms of identity, individual and cultural, whether you like it or not. Still, the genetics of ethnic identity is not my main concern here, because the differences in genetics are

⁶¹ Protagonist Coleman Silk in Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*, (Boston: Houghton, 2000), p.120.

⁶² Adrian Piper in "Passing for White, Passing for Black", *Transition*, No 58, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1992), p.13

not really what settle our identity. Rather it is how we deal with these differences and how they surface in discourse.

I will argue here, in agreement with Homi K. Bhabha whose take on identity-formation I will soon introduce, that identity is manifested discursively. By looking at identity as a discursive practice, I understand discourse in the widest sense, meaning I understand discourse as a practice that takes place not only in spoken or written language, but as a practice that also manifests itself in the field of the visual. Jean-François Lyotard has argued that discourse (*discours*) is not opposed to the visual (*figure*). Rather, discourse understood as a linguistic system of opposing concepts does not leave the visual to a realm of its own, because language alone cannot account for all the meanings embodied in the visual: it cannot represent them. We should therefore, Lyotard argues, not think of discourse as belonging exclusively to the realm of spoken and written language, but also consider the visual as a field involved with discourse.⁶³

A distinguished theorist in research on cultural identity in colonial and post-colonial literature, Homi K. Bhabha offers a rationale for defining cultural identity as being pronounced through discourse. Bhabha concerns himself mostly with cultural identity as it finds its expression in literature responding to issues of colonialism. His trademark concept of *Hybridity*, with which I shall concern myself in the next few pages, was developed in pursuance of literary texts such as the writings of the anti-colonial writer and psychologist Frantz Fanon. Writing in response to texts relating to discourses of colonialism Bhabha has come to be associated with a distinctive post-colonial discourse within the field of arts and literature.

Although Bhabha's theories are developed primarily for the interpretation and analyzing of literary texts, I believe his concept of Hybridity and hybridization to be applicable in the interpretation of the visual arts as well – providing the selected art works relate to the same kind of colonial or post-colonial issues as those discussed with Bhabha. Indeed, Bhabha himself uses examples from the visual arts to illustrate his theories. Keeping in mind Lyotard's encouragement to relate to discourse as both textual and visual then, I want to find out whether Bhabha's Hybridity concept can contribute to the reading of Jungen and Hazoumé's works.

⁶³ Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard – Art and Politics* (London: Routledge 1991), pp 3-4.

In his book *The Location of Culture*, consisting of a series of essays published between 1985 and 1994, Bhabha develops his interpretation of how the (anti)colonial subject constitutes itself through the process of what he terms Hybridity. Bhabha's Hybridity concept has been widely debated and his theories have not gone uncontested, so an account of my reading of his Hybridity theory is in place. I will start at the end with "cultural difference".

According to Bhabha, Hybridity denotes an understanding of cultural identity as something constructed in a process of discursive articulation – a discursive practice characterized less by fixity than by fluidity and flexibility. The hybrid notion of identity is not something stable and unified: it is the continuous process of negotiating what constitutes its sense of self that characterizes it. Such an understanding of identity is valuable, Bhabha argues, because it is able to accommodate complexities in the experience of "cultural difference" in late capitalist societies.⁶⁴

Affiliating oneself with an ethnic minority in a larger national context might contribute to a feeling of being culturally different from the majority. Such cultural difference often has an ambivalent tinge to it; as a subject identifying with an ethnic minority it is still possible to identify with the national majority in terms of national belonging. Experiencing oneself to be culturally different, then, is not necessarily a question of either/or, and implies ambivalence in the anti colonial or post colonial subject. The culturally different subject feels itself different from the cultural and ethnic majority and at the same time not different enough to be separate from it: it is "a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."⁶⁵

*The enunciative process introduces a split in the performative present of cultural identification; a split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as practice of domination, or resistance.*⁶⁶

When the need to articulate this difference makes itself felt, the anti colonial or post colonial subject encounters difficulties. How does one express this feeling of being different and the same concurrently? The concept of cultural difference thus

⁶⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge 2004), pp. 55 and 95-96.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p122.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 51.

expresses a problem that arises when the subject tries to articulate how it struggles with cultural identification seemingly presented as a choice between colonial or anti-colonial sympathies, identification either with the past or present, with tradition or modernity, because it feels uncomfortable choosing between such binaries. The discursive practice of colonialism or a situation where one culture dominates another does not accommodate the enunciation of cultural difference, rather it becomes difficult for a subject to transgress the opposition between self and other; the separation between mother culture and alien cultures. A *discursive space* where such oppositions can be overcome is therefore needed – a *Third Space* of enunciation, as Bhabha terms it, where the hybrid identity is located.⁶⁷

In the Third Space where the binary oppositions between self and other can be transgressed, there is no denying of the doubling of identification. Such a space is the precondition for the enunciation of cultural difference; it is the precondition for the development of the hybrid identity. Bhabha cites Frantz Fanon's book title "Black Skin, White Masks" as an illustrative example of a discursive practice proving the possibility of such a Third Space. Fanon's choice of the phrase "Black Skin, White Masks" does not make a distinction between black and white, it expresses an acceptance of the impossibility of differentiating the two – of the impossibility of making distinctions between black and white identities, colonizer and colonized – because without each other there is neither.⁶⁸ Fanon, who grew up on the Caribbean island of Martinique – a former French colony and still a French *département* – in the 1930s, was able to acquire a good education despite being black. He then went on to become well-renowned for his practice as a psychiatrist. But as black and well-educated, Fanon experienced being recognized as *different*, both by blacks and by whites. "Black Skin, White Masks" was thus a response to the ambivalence Fanon experienced by being treated differently by people, depending on how much they knew of his background as a well-educated man, because the color of his skin would always lead to assumptions about who Fanon was, one way or the other. For Bhabha the title of Fanon's book reads as a pin-pointing of the ambivalence Fanon felt towards his identity, not being able to resolve whether he was more black than white or vice versa.⁶⁹ By articulating his ambivalence Fanon represents what Bhabha terms

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 51-53.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.64.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

as “that ambivalent ‘turn’ of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification – a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority.”⁷⁰

Hybridity in this manner is “not to be understood as a term that resolves the tension between two cultures (...) in a dialectical play of recognition.”⁷¹ Rather, Hybridity is to be comprehended as a continuous process of negotiation – “a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that the ‘other’ denied knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition.”⁷² The concept of Hybridity, according to Bhabha, furthermore encompasses “a reevaluation of the symbol of national authority as the sign of colonial difference” because the “difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply there to be seen or appropriated”.⁷³ This has normative consequences: the notion of hybridity that Bhabha offers is potentially subversive of dominant ideologies and practices, leading to the dislocation and destabilization of the dominating cultural authority in colonial and post colonial contexts.⁷⁴

Cultural identity understood as a function of Hybridity, then, has very much an unstable size: it cannot embody any representations of essence. This way of thinking about cultural identity might be seen as a way of making it even harder to define what identity actually consists in, but it also makes the notion of cultural identity more flexible and adaptable to change. I have chosen to use Bhabha’s concept of Hybridity and hybrid identity here for this reason. The way I read the artworks of Jungen and Hazoumé as discourses on identity, exactly prompts an understanding of identity as something open to continuous revision and re-inscription.

Critical considerations

Some critics have questioned Bhabha’s adaptation of the term Hybridity as it is traditionally associated with nineteenth century racist discourses on the intermixing of the races. Originating in biology the term was invoked to effect fear about

⁷⁰ Ibid. p162.

⁷¹ Ibid. p 162.

⁷² Ibid. p. 162.

⁷³ Ibid. p. 163.

⁷⁴ Peter Wade, “Hybridity Theory and Kinship Thinking” in *Cultural Studies*, 2005, Vol. 19, No.5, p.602.

miscegenation marriage and racial interbreeding which presumably would pollute the pure European (white) race. On the basis of the term's disreputable history, critics have argued that the term is best put to rest – that it does not deserve to be re-invoked in a post-colonial discussion on identity. I disagree with such an argument. Having a disreputable history indeed makes the adaptation of the term in a discussion on identity that seeks to revalue the intermixing of cultural references and cultural heritage in positive terms a proper answer to previous racist understandings of hybridity. The term is restored by a discussion that subverts the racist connotations. Bhabha's use of the term Hybridity for the purpose of rereading colonial and post-colonial literature in search of the small differences that point to the resistance in the anti-colonial subject is exactly an exercise in the kind of bridging of theory and practice that Bhabha encourages in *The Location of Culture*. By altering the content of the term Hybridity, Bhabha turns racism's own rhetoric against itself.

Bhabha's writings have been criticized for being difficult to access due to his dense prose style. Critics have questioned Bhabha's tendency to become too complex and too elitist in his writing, reinstating the essentialist practice of racism which he sets out to counteract. However, as Bhabha himself has replied to such criticism, identity formation is complex and accounting for complexities in a relatively complex manner does not mean the complexities are not worth discussing.⁷⁵ Besides, the hybridity concept that Bhabha presents seems to be malleable to different types of discursive practices and thus offers valuable perspectives on questions of identity.

Bhabha states himself that his writings are heavily indebted to thinkers like Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Jaques Derrida and Jaques Lacan, all of whom are mentioned a number of times throughout *The Location of Culture*. This is not the place to track down all his sources of inspiration; it will have to suffice to say but a few words about his theoretical foundation. Although inspired by Said and his notion of Orientalism, Bhabha does not agree with Said in opposing the West and the Orient as binary opposites. As previously mentioned it is exactly such binaries Bhabha seeks to transgress. The hybrid identity is neither Western nor Oriental: it can be both at the same time – even if such a situation is ambivalent.

⁷⁵ Homi Bhabha in interview with W.J.T. Mitchell in *Art Forum* Vol.34, No 7, 1995, pp 80-84.

Hybridity is perhaps best understood as a permanent situation for the subject, rather than a situation that comes into being as a result of the merging of two opposites. Always finding itself in a situation of hybridity, the subject continuously struggles to overcome the opposition between self and other. Lacan's influence on Bhabha surfaces here with Lacan's ideas about the other which is not quite the other, but rather a part of the subject's ego (*objet petit a*). By taking a post-structuralist stand, also leaning on Foucault's notion of discourse and Derrida's deconstructivism as his theoretical fundament, Bhabha places himself in a quite different theoretical paradigm from that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who as I mentioned in Chapter II subscribed to the structuralist approach to theory.

As a supplement to Lévi-Strauss' bricolage concept then, the Hybridity concept of Homi K. Bhabha offers an up-date to Lévi-Strauss' theoretical approach. Serving as a guideline for understanding what cultural identity consists in, I believe that Bhabha's Hybridity theory fits well with the bricolage concept. It will, I hope, contribute further to my interpretation of the works of Jungen and Hazoumé as bricolage in the next chapter.

She was drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music, blown out, ripped out, beaten out, by the joyous, wild, murky orchestra. The essence of life seemed bodily motion. And when suddenly the music died, she dragged herself back to the present with a conscious effort; and a shameful certainty that not only had she been in the jungle, but that she had enjoyed it, began to taunt her. She hardened her determination to get away. She wasn't, she told herself, a jungle creature.⁷⁶

Nella Larsen

CHAPTER V

BRICOLAGE AS A FUNCTION OF HYBRID IDENTITY

The central question in this chapter concerns the bricolage's engagement with hybridity. How does it express a hybrid cultural identity? We have already touched on the answer in previous chapters by discussing how the bricolage expresses cultural identity in general, but here I want to focus primarily on how the bricolage concept accommodates identity as understood by Hybridity. In the following I intend to first examine how the Hybridity concept of Bhabha fits with the bricolage concept of Levi-Strauss, before I move on to see if the Hybridity concept can possibly offer additional perspectives on the artworks of Jungen and Hazoumé to those already discussed in Chapter III.

The Bricolage - An Expression of Hybridity

With the bricolage we identified the re-use and re-contextualization of materials and their representative potential as signs, as a first marker of agency. Re-use and re-

⁷⁶ Nella Larsen, Quicksand, *Quicksand and Passing* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 1986) p.59

contextualization of meaning is also encompassed in Bhabha's Hybridity concept; in a situation of Hybridity there is a "revaluation of the symbol".⁷⁷ Indeed, like bricolage on an abstract level, the re-negotiation and shifting in symbolic meaning is a key feature of Hybridity. Bhabha's own practice of re-reading and reinterpreting the word hybridity is a case in point, the word remains, but the content has shifted. The difference need not be detected immediately; at first glance the word may seem to signify the same kind of content as before, nevertheless the content has shifted. The same thing happens with the bricolage. Every time something is added or subtracted, the bricolage is changed in terms of its signifying potential; it need not be a shift immediately recognizable, nonetheless it alters the possible interpretation(s) of the bricolage. This shifting justifies an understanding of the bricolage as discursive, a characteristic which also describes Hybridity.

The flux and fluidity in the process of development are a characteristic of both the bricolage and the hybrid identity. Like the bricolage, the hybrid identity is always adaptable to change. Unstable and unfixed can describe both concepts. Neither of the two claims for themselves any one true essence. They offer no resolutions to the problem of belonging – no consistent genealogy – they simply assert that their influences come from many and diverse sources.

The two concepts thus have several features in common, but combining the two concepts is not without some complications. When Lévi-Strauss accounts for his bricolage concept, there is no mention of ambivalence. The bricolage seems to develop in a harmonious fashion, whereas the hybrid identity in Bhabha's Hybridity theory is bound to struggle with ambivalence throughout the process of development. For a subject of hybrid identity choosing between what fits with identity preferences and what does not, is not always an option. The hybrid subject carries within itself an ambivalence that follows as a consequence of issues unresolved. For the bricoleur things seem to be easier, however, she needs only to accommodate that which fits. What does not go with the rest of the construction can always be thrown back in the stockpile, or can it?

The fact that Lévi-Strauss does not discuss ambivalence in his presentation of the bricolage need not mean that we have to exclude the notion of ambivalence from the bricolage altogether. I am going to make the argument that incorporating the

⁷⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge 2004), p. 163.

Hybridity concept into the bricolage may be fruitful in terms of accommodating issues of ambivalence in the formation of identity. I argue this because the bricolage is suitable for adapting heterogeneity and difference. The bricoleur is able to cope with heterogeneity, she does not perceive of differences as polarities and binary opposites. Rather, she deals with the heterogeneity of bricolaging much like she would deal with the heterogeneity of a linguistic system; where the degree of difference between each sign – not polarity – is that which makes meaning possible. In fact, I would argue that the bricolage in many ways can function as a Third Space. The structure of the bricolage – consisting in odds and ends from here and there – is particularly suited for accommodating difference and ambivalence. The bricolage, like the Third Space, transgresses oppositions between opposites; the bricolage would be nothing if the bricoleur excluded elements for the reason of being too heterogeneous, too foreign. It is exactly the heterogeneity of materials and meanings that defines the bricolage. Even if the bricoleur has some freedom to maneuver when she is making a bricolage, she still has to take into consideration the limits of her stock and her quasi professional capabilities. In the end, she has to make some ambiguous choices in her construction process. With this in mind I now want to look further into how *Prototypes for a New Understanding* and *La Bouche du Roi* express ambivalence.

A New Understanding

In the eyes of the white world, any Indian woman was the same as all other Indian women. Only white people got to be individuals. They could be anybody they wanted to be. White people, especially those with the most minute amount of tribal blood, thought they became Indian just by saying they were Indians. A number of those pretend Indians called themselves mixed-bloods and wrote books about the pain of living in both the Indian and the white worlds. Those mixed-blood writers never admitted their pale skin was a luxury. After all, Marie couldn't dress up like a white woman when she went to job interviews.

From *Indian Killer* by Sherman Alexie⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Sherman Alexie, *Indian Killer*, (New York: Warner Books, 1996), p. 232.

The difficulties involved in trying to decide between Euro-Canadian and First Nation Canadian belonging are unresolved in Jungen's *Prototypes*. *The art works* do not simply present a harmonious merging of two cultural identities into one; the tension and memories of past events are still present, still lurking behind the masks. As bricolages and as hybrids the *Prototypes* are manifested by their incorporation of cultural signifiers from both Euro-Canadian and First Nation Canadian cultures, none of which can be cancelled out. The vigor of *Prototypes* relies exactly on the ambivalence initiated by the two cultures coming together in one without offering concrete solutions to the difficulties involved.

Appropriating Indianness – The Production of Stereotypes

Much of the ambivalence in *Prototypes* is due to Jungen's act of appropriation. The act of appropriating materials and visual expressions from other visual cultures or other visual fields than art, is not as revolutionary or rebellious as it was when Marcel Duchamp made his first urinal signed R. Mutt in 1917. However, Jungen's act of appropriation is progressive in that it involves the revaluation of an icon of mainstream North American popular culture for the purpose of making a statement about First Nations. It is an act of critiquing mainstream popular culture's appropriation of Indian imagery.

Had it been the other way around, mainstream popular culture appropriating First Nation cultural icons, the effect would still have been ambivalent, but it would probably not have been immediately recognized as such – at least not by people being normally ignorant of popular culture's uncritical and unhistorical appropriation of "other" cultures for the purpose of spicing up a product, be it an advertisement, a movie or an artwork. When white artists appropriate foreign artistic expressions, the reflection on the original context of what they are appropriating is often lacking – an example would be the many Western artworks referencing African sculpture without concern for the cultural context in which these sculptures originate. The result then, is an artwork that incorporates only formal semblance and thus effectively denies the contextual meaning of the appropriated object or artistic expression access to the artwork. Being a white artist, the act of appropriating without taking the context of the

appropriated into consideration is not disagreeable in itself. But it becomes disagreeable when white artists appropriate objects or artistic expressions from ethnic minorities if one considers which ethnic groups has the most access to public discourse. Since it is the voice of white people – I am now referring to North-America in general – that is represented most substantially in the mass media, white people do not have to accept being misinterpreted as often as people of ethnic minorities. The ambivalence inherent in mainstream North-American culture appropriating First Nation cultural icons thus often goes unnoticed.

In Europe as well, we are so used to seeing the stereotypical mythic Indian in advertising and pop cultural imagery that we do not stop to hesitate that First Nation Canadians and Native Americans might become intimidated by the continuously unhistorical appropriation of their culture. I myself am quite sure I have seen more half-fictional representations of North-American First Nations produced by non-First Nations in mass media, than I have seen North-American First Nations representing themselves. I need only to think of the many Western movies and comic books I have seen and read. Being a Norwegian and having spent most of my years in Norway, my perception of Indians is probably even more dependant on pop cultural representations of Indians than they would have been had I been living in North America. There is no mention of the protesting against Indian stereotypes in Norwegian media. My latest experience of encountering the stereotypical Indian as represented in mainstream popular culture was in the spring of 2008. Walking down the busy shopping street Karl Johans Gate in the city center of Oslo – the Norwegian capital – I came by a shop window where a large photo of an Indian wearing a buckskin suit and an elaborate feather headdress was on display behind a pair of ladies' moccasins. The shoe shop had advertised their latest news in spring fashion by calling upon the traditional Indian for ethnic glamour. After pausing in front of the shop window and then continuing further down the block, I was unable to make up my mind whether I should sigh over this obviously romanticized image of an Indian, or whether I should laugh thinking of the photo as an ironic gesture. What were the owners of the shoe shop trying to communicate by displaying this image of an Indian? Were they playing with the tradition of using stereotypical images of Indians in advertising or were they not? I am still not sure, but that is perhaps not important. What would have been interesting to know, however, is how this image affected other

people who passed by the same shop window. Did they even think twice about the stereotypical representation of Indians?

Glamorous, but with a more pronounced uncanny quality, the transformed shoes of Brian Jungen express stronger ties with the context of the appropriated cultural icon than the photo in the shop window in Oslo. When Jungen appropriates Nike Air Jordans he implicitly questions the practice of appropriation in mainstream popular culture; the Nikes are appropriated not just for the sake of their formal qualities, but for the meaning embedded in their context as well. *Prototypes* invite their audience to take the time to reflect on the possible meaning of appropriation. The result are hybrid bricolages which are more than a glossy set of appropriated styles and expressions, they contain within themselves the knowledge of their origin without being able to resolve the tensions embedded in it.

Stereotypes and Sports

"I take the middle ground", says Leigh J. Kuswansiwma, 51, director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office in Kykotsmovi, Arizona, and a long devotee of the Atlanta Braves. "I don't see anything wrong with Indian nicknames as long as they're not meant to be derogatory. Some tribal schools on Arizona reservations use Indians as a nickname themselves. The Phoenix Indian High School's newspaper is The Redskin. I don't mind the tomahawk chop. It's all good fun. This is sports, after all. In my living room, I'll be watching a Braves game and occasionally do the chop.

From *Indian Wars*, Sports Illustrated 2002⁷⁹

The appropriation of aboriginal names and imagery in North-American mainstream organized sports has been subject to severe stereotyping – most often presenting aboriginal people as rebellious warriors. The tradition of naming sport teams by derogatory Indian nicknames goes back to the early twentieth century when nicknames like Redskins, Braves (nickname for an Indian warrior) and Chiefs started appearing as team names associated with aggression and war. By the early 1900s the threat of major rebellion against white domination was gone and the use of nicknames and mascots associated with First Nations Canadians and Native Americans was part of a larger tendency of presenting stereotyped aboriginals in the

⁷⁹ Scott L. Price, "Indian Wars", *Sports Illustrated*, 4. March 2002, pp. 66-72.

media (e.g. western movies, comic books, advertising and art). In the aftermath of the civil rights movement in the 1960s the use of derogative nicknames and mascots in organized sports decreased, but team names such as Washington Redskins, Kansas City Chiefs, Cleveland Indians and Atlanta Braves – names of professional teams – are still in use. In addition to professional sports, come college sports where names of teams such as the Seminoles (Florida State University) and the Lamar Savages (Colorado) have been widely debated. Further, the tradition of mascots dressed up as stereotypical Indians in buckskin suits, moccasins and headdresses performing supposedly ritual dances at gaming events have been widely protested by both aboriginals and non-aboriginals.⁸⁰

Although obviously a remnant of past racism against North American indigenous peoples, sport fans have been reluctant to change the derogative names and mascots. In 2002 the vice president of the Washington Redskins, Karl Swanson, said to Sports Illustrated that he, and the Redskins' fans, thought of the Redskins name as a positive name. "The name symbolizes courage, dignity and leadership and has always been employed in that manner", Swanson said. He further argued that as long as the name was not applied with racist intentions, there was nothing wrong with calling a team the Redskins. As the quote from Leigh J. Kuswansiwma testifies, there are Native Americans that agree with Swanson. For people who agree with Swanson and Kuswansiwma the logic behind their rationale is this: by changing what was previously a derogative name or tradition into a honoring name or tradition, it is possible to create a new trend and counter racism.

But even if the image of the courageous and dignified Indian is positive, it is still a stereotype. Professor in American Cultures at the Washington State University, Richard G. King, has pointed out that even if some people have come to believe that positive stereotypes of the indigenous peoples of North-America actually serve to counter racism by honoring the native peoples, the continuous stereotyping does not benefit the native peoples in the long run. Stereotypes, positive or negative, fail to recognize the diversity among the people who are being stereotyped, King asserts.⁸¹ Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between native people referring to themselves as Indians or Redskins and white people referring to native peoples as

⁸⁰ G. Richard King et al., "Of Polls and Race Prejudice: Sports Illustrated's Errant 'Indian Wars'", *Journal of Sports and Social Issues*, vol.26, issue 4, 2002, pp.381 – 402.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Indians or Redskins. Making a positive word out of a slur like “redskin”, makes subscribing to an “Indian” identity a prerequisite, just like calling someone a “nigger” makes it a prerequisite that you are a “nigger” yourself.

Subverting the Stereotypes

Brian Jungen thus has an advantage in his dual heritage when he constructs works such as *Prototypes*. Jungen’s own identity both as a First Nation Dane-zaa and a Canadian with roots in Europe is central to the nature of the reception of his art. Jungen’s hybrid identity provides him with freedom to criticize both native peoples and North-Americans of European descent. He is free to negotiate stereotypes on both sides; stereotypes about primitive Indians and stereotypes about hostility in the white North-America to ethnic minorities.

By remaking the indigenous mask – an image of First Nations’ culture often appearing in settings where First Nations’ culture is reduced to an exotic remnant of the past – into a mask which is “almost the same but not quite”, Jungen subverts the logic of the stereotype. The masks are emblematic and unsettled at the same time. Both viewer and artist is poised at the zero degree standing full of possibilities in terms of interpretation, unable to decide which interpretation gives the best explanation of identity. Having done away with authoritarian stereotypes, *Prototypes* generate a variety of meanings.

*Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (...). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in its strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.*⁸²

Appropriating and then subverting stereotypes about native peoples in North-American organized sports, *Prototypes* “turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power”.

⁸² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge 2004), p. 160.

In A King's Mouth

*They say everything can be replaced
Yet every distance is not near
So I remember every face
Of every man who put me here⁸³*

La Bouche du Roi exhibits an uneasy relationship to modernity – if by modernity we think of progress in the settling of the nation state. In *La Bouche du Roi* the meeting is unsettled between a post-colonial capitalist West and a Third World still struggling to shake off the remnants of colonial rule. The core values of the Western nation state – democracy, freedom and capital markets – are put under pressure. Has modernity really brought progress to the Third World?

In Chapter III I briefly mentioned Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic. Here I want to bring attention to the concept of the Black Atlantic again, this time as an example illustrating Hybridity. Gilroy's designation of the Atlantic as a site of cultural difference and cultural exchange where the ship is on its way to an unspecified destination makes the Black Atlantic a perfect example of the Third Space of Hybridity. The ship is marked by movement and relocation; its crew and passengers are in a continuous process of picking a route to a final destination. On their way cultural differences are negotiated.

On board *La Bouche du Roi* too, passengers and crew are searching for a destination. But while cultural exchange may take place and cultural differences might be overcome, the ship seems to be drifting out of control. If we are to believe Romuald Hazoumé, the passengers on board in *La Bouche du Roi* have been drifting for so long they have forgotten which port they left behind, and they still have not learned which port to aim for. "They didn't know where they were going, but they knew where they came from. Today they still don't know where they are going, and they have forgotten where they come from", Hazoumé has said.⁸⁴ Who is more to blame, the white captain or the black king?

Expressing uncertainty about the past and the future, and a strong ambivalence of how to relate to history, the masks of *La Bouche du Roi* represent a strong lamentation against the current political and financial situation of African

⁸³ "I Shall Be Released", folk song popularized by Nina Simone.

⁸⁴ Inscription on the wall accompanying *La Bouche du Roi*, Bristol City Museum 2007.

countries like Benin, where economic and political power to a great extent resists governmental rule and regulation. For the majority of underdeveloped countries in Africa, politics and business is dependent on the political and financial conditions provided for by foreign trading partners and global markets. African land containing natural resources like oil and diamonds – to mention only two of the most controversial raw materials of the continent – has made Africa the site of major investments from international companies. With power lodged in large transnational corporations which transcend nations in their organization and loyalties, the power of the nation-state to regulate the economy internally is constricted. The consequences of such transnational powers are at once unprecedented global unity and unprecedented local fragmentation. The once identifiable and localizable Western centre of capitalism is disappearing into transnational corporations while local production is fragmented in sub-national regions and localities. Localities within a single country find themselves competing in providing the best conditions for production. The nation state, which ideally in part consisted in containing fragmentation, is under attack both from transnational organizations and sub-national economic regions.⁸⁵

For underdeveloped countries in Africa this means global capitalism contributes to the production of local inequalities and discrepancies of a kind once associated with colonialism.⁸⁶ The shift in power from the nation states to the transnational corporations makes development in underdeveloped regions dependent on the transnational corporations' will and capacity to contribute financial, social, and political support in the regions where they are operating. Although some corporations take pains to provide for development, others take less of an interest. The situation in Nigeria where transnational companies involved in the extraction of oil who have been more interested in profit than in helping regions develop is but only one example of the down-side to global capitalism and its effects on African countries. The underdevelopment in Nigeria has, as is obvious from *La Bouche du Roi*, consequences that reach across state borders. Although investments in Nigerian oil industry are local, the effects of such investments, negative and positive, are distributed over larger areas in Western Africa. The problem for the passengers

⁸⁵ Arif Dirlik, "The Portcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Padmini Mongia (ed.), (London: Aronold 1996), pp. 309 -311.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

of *La Bouche du Roi* and the people living in West-African countries is therefore where to look for a safe haven. If neither the democratic nation-state – hailed by the West as the ideal for the protection and development of a country’s citizens – nor the transnational private corporations can provide the much needed security and stability for the passengers on *La Bouche du Roi*, where are these people to look for support?

Grounding a sense of belonging in a community is vital to any human being. Security in the form of employment, health care and stable relationships to family and friends ranks as number two in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. When societal structures fail to provide for such security, the sense of belonging is partially or completely dissolved. As for Benin, the government and its population have managed better than other African countries. Since the early 1990s Benin has been one of the most stable democracies in Africa. Elections are generally free and fair and levels of violence are lower than in its neighboring countries. But corruption, underdevelopment and HIV/AIDS remain major problems.⁸⁷ Modernity might have brought democracy and certain improvements in terms of life quality in Benin, but it has also brought the Beninese new problems to grapple with. In this sense modernity, understood as progress, has ambivalence, and even outright conflict, at its very core.

Black Gold, White Capital

Rich on natural resources, but with only limited capacity to develop these, underdeveloped African countries face an immense challenge in developing their industry so that the revenues will benefit people locally instead of being transferred directly into Western bank accounts. Asserting control with the petroleum industry is one of the major challenges in Africa, as Africa’s oil is of great interest to numerous international corporations, many of which have their corporate employees based in Western Europe, the U.S., and in later years also in China.

Nearly 21 percent of all imported petroleum in the U.S. in 2007 came from Africa, more than what was imported from the Persian Gulf. The U.S. National Intelligence Council, a government think tank, estimates that figure will rise to 25

⁸⁷ “Benin”, CIA Factbook [web-site online], available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bn.html#Intro>; Internet; last accessed 07.10.2008.

percent by 2015.⁸⁸ As the conflict in Israel-Palestine seems to be no closer to a resolution and the war in Iraq is still not over, analyzers point to a heightened U.S. governmental interest in Africa and its oil deposits, arguing that conflict levels in the Middle East will probably prevent extensive American imports from this region in the future.

A heightened U.S. interest in African oil deposits may have positive effects on African countries and can possibly fuel development. But critics are concerned that an increased interest in Africa's black gold will cause more harm than it will benefit development. In 2007 the American Federal Government launched a new governmental body called the Africa Command (AFRICOM). The new body is to coordinate military and security interests in Africa previously managed by several separate federal commands and agencies. Upon announcing this new governmental body the U.S. government remarked that the coordination of previous separate commands in AFRICOM mainly has to do with peacekeeping and development concerns for Africa.

However, critics are more prone to believe the real issue has to do with the securing of petroleum imports. AFRICOM itself has acknowledged that oil is a motivating factor in the development of the command, but has also been careful to reassure the public that the potential for a direct role for the U.S. military in protecting oil supplies in Africa is greatly exaggerated.⁸⁹ But opponents of AFRICOM are not convinced by attempts to smooth things over. AFRICOM has attracted much critique for its heavy emphasis on military presence on the African continent in favor of softer means towards peace and development. They argue that the developmental and humanitarian focus previously guarded by the U.S Agency for International Development (USAID) – now a part of AFRICOM – has been downplayed.

The coordination of U.S. interests in Africa in one command has one main objective: securing petroleum imports, says Horace Campbell, professor in African American Studies and Political Science at Syracuse University.⁹⁰ With as much as one quarter of all U.S. petroleum imports originating in Africa, mainly on the West Coast from countries such as Angola and Nigeria, there is little wonder what the U.S.

⁸⁸ Lawrence Delevingne, "Critics Target U.S. Military Command", *Inter press Service News Agency* 2.06.2008, available from <http://www.ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=42623>, Internet; last accessed 15.07.2008.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Horace Campbell, "George Bush Visits Africa to Promote the US Africa Command" at *Global Research* 18.02.2008, available on-line from <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=8119>, Internet; last accessed 15.07.2008.

government is after with the introduction of AFRICOM, according to Campbell. In an interview Campbell expressed discontent with what he sees as AFRICOM's attempt to further militarize the African continent.

[U]nder this AFRICOM, all agencies of the United States of America would be under the United States Department of Defense, so that whatever work is being done in Africa by the United States Agency for International Development, the United States Treasury, the United States Department of Agriculture, the United States Department of Commerce, all agencies, Peace Corps, university work, will come under the US military. In other words, this will be the new step for the militarization of the continent of Africa. And more—even more serious is the fact that behind this, mercenary firms, like Dyncorp, Blackwater and Lockheed Martin, and the other military contractors will then come in behind the US Department of Defense to set up military contacting organizations to protect US oil companies in Africa.⁹¹

Africa's black gold is certainly an ambivalent matter. It could possibly bring wealth and development to the continent – in later years a country like Angola, whose national economy was previously paralyzed by civil war, has been able to translate the revenues of oil production into improved infrastructure and city-planning – but economic exploitation and environmental damage has been a far more common result of international oil businesses' African enterprises. Therefore, slowly coming to terms with the many pitfalls of doing business with transnational companies, some African countries have started restricting access to national oil wells. Except for Liberia, none of the African countries have agreed to let AFRICOM set up commands on their land. For now, AFRICOM's headquarters remains outside of Africa, in Germany.

On the verge of being consumed by rough weather at sea, the passengers in Hazoumé's ship are probably blissfully unaware of institutions like AFRICOM. Had they known of AFRICOM's existence, they would have felt their chances of finding a safe haven even more daunting. For the spectators, however, who can see the ship is drifting, the knowledge of AFRICOM and other institutions with similar agendas are frightening. Living in the privileged West, it becomes impossible not to see parallels to colonial times upon

⁹¹Horace G. Campbell in interview with Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now* 18.02.2008, transcript of the interview available from http://www.democracynow.org/2008/2/18/analyst_on_africa_visit_bush_pushes, Internet; last accessed 16.07.2008.

watching *La Bouche du Roi*. The current imbalance in economic distribution between Africa and the West follows the same pattern as in colonial times. Production takes place in Africa, but the profit largely benefits the former colonial powers.

Counteracting Faith

Inequality in economic distribution thus has consequences for the quality of life for the African people, not only in terms of low incomes, poor health care, and environmental damage and so on, but also in terms of the power to define their history, their origin and their cultural identity. With so much economic power lodged in transnational corporations, the power to create an independent identity is reduced. Political power follows financial power, and ultimately cultural and social powers follow politics and finances. When the dissatisfaction on board Hazoumé's ship is so pronounced, it is because the passengers of *La Bouche du Roi* are frustrated by being barred from the power to define their own history and identity. Forced to leave their homeland behind they are left no chance but to reinforce the power of capital to decide both their past and their future.

However, by presenting the frustration he has towards the West and the imbalance in the economic system, Hazoumé is trying to counteract the sense of lost belonging and lost identity. By mixing historical events with the events and artifacts of contemporaneity Hazoumé provides the ground for renegotiating what cultural history and cultural belonging consist in. The mixing of historical and contemporaneous references serves to broker between different and coexisting cultural contexts, between different identities and different degrees of modernity.

It is evident from *La Bouche du Roi* that while globalization has made the world smaller and linked countries like Benin with the larger world both culturally and economically, globalization has not yet led to the complete homogenization of culture. In *La Bouche du Roi* Hazoumé has made the feeling of a lost history and sense of lost cultural identity work for him instead of against him. In trying to reestablish what is lost, Hazoumé implements a strategy of appropriation because only by claiming as his own, what was initially

alien, do the passengers of *La Bouche du Roi* have a chance of picking the right route. Hazoumé aims at taking back the identity that was lost on him and the Beninese people due to colonialist enterprises. Like Jungen, Hazoumé ventures to turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon eye of power.

The global economy is an enemy hard to track down precisely because it is global, lacking a stable geographical centre and responsible individuals within one or a few corporate entities only. Attempts to counteract the negative effects of globalization may therefore feel impossible to realize. Still, Hazoumé has come a long way by exposing the effects of globalization so explicitly in *La Bouche du Roi*.

The Empire Strikes Back

The anthropologist Arnd Schneider has described how appropriation is a much used strategy of identity formation in Argentina, where identity by definition has hybrid qualities due to continuous immigration. In order to keep identity something personal, it becomes a given that identity consists of appropriated bits and pieces of reference from a diversity of sources, historical as well as contemporaneous.⁹² I mention this because appropriation is also the strategy of the bricoleur. The bricoleur has no other choice than making her heterogeneous sources of intellectual materials and artifacts function together in the bricolage since there is no user manual or set of parts that fit together perfectly. Furthermore identity, as should be clear by now, is a bricolage, and because it is a bricolage it has the ambivalence and tensions of Hybridity built into it. Indeed, the bricolage is in a continuous state of Hybridity, always evolving, never settling and therefore never completely harmonious.

In the pages of this chapter I have tried to show that the bricolages of Brian Jungen and Romuald Hazoumé, being a strategy of identity formation, originate in a state of Hybridity. So, going back to my initial question in this chapter of whether it is possible to combine the concepts of bricolage and

⁹² Arnd Schneider, *Futures Lost: Nostalgia and Identity Among Italian Immigrants in Argentina*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000.

Hybridity, the answer would have to be yes. Indeed, Jungen and Hazoumé's bricolages serve as concrete visual examples of the hybrid identity.

*But I ain't got no bullets. And I ain't bullet
proof. And you can take you aim, but you
can't kill the truth. Ay, yo untie that noose.
Son we ain't free we're loose.*⁹³

Saul Williams

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters have all been concerned with how the notion of cultural identity surfaces in the artworks of Brian Jungen and Romuald Hazoumé. Using the bricolage concept of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Hybridity concept of Homi K. Bhabha as analytical tools, I have tried to dig deeper into the question of how cultural identity takes shape and how it may be communicated in visual arts.

I wrote in my introduction and in my second chapter that I wanted to find out whether the bricolage concept of Lévi-Strauss had any potential in bringing to light how the artworks of Jungen and Hazoumé communicate, and how these artworks function as metaphors. Although I hope that my use of the bricolage as a strategy of interpretation has found resonance with the reader, I cannot know whether the reader agrees with my ways of presenting the stories I have told in relation to each artwork. For example, the reader might not agree with my way of presenting colonial history. Independent of that, however, I believe I have demonstrated that the Lévi-Straussian bricolage concept can offer interesting perspectives on visual arts where questions about cultural identities are implied. If there are any conclusions to draw from my experiment of using the bricolage as an interpretive strategy, it is that the bricolage concept may serve a purpose both as an analytical tool, and by implication as a strategy of mediation. Even if it was not a fully conscious act on the part of Jungen and Hazoumé, both artists have made use the bricolage as a mediation strategy.

As for my use of the concept of Hybridity, I believe it has served to prevent me from dealing with identity in too simple a manner. Indeed, the notion of Hybridity has

⁹³ Saul Williams, "PG", *Saul Williams* (CD album), (New York: The Fader Label, 2004).

contributed to a further development of my use of the bricolage as an analytical approach. In attempting to bridge the Lévi-Straussian bricolage and Bhabha's Hybridity concept I have sought to avoid making overly simple assumptions about identity formation. Deciding who you are is no easy task to embark upon. Anyone can agree to that, regardless of affiliations to cultural groups. The ambivalence aspect in Bhabha's Hybridity concept has therefore served as an important supplement to Lévi-Strauss' bricolage theory.

For the purpose of illustrating the potential in the bricolage concept and the Hybridity concept as tools for interpreting artworks of a certain character, I have limited myself to discussing two artists, each represented with one artwork (or series) each. Brian Jungen and Romuald Hazoumé both have several other artworks that could possibly offer further perspectives on cultural identity, but it has been necessary to limit the scope of this thesis. Still I hope it is evident from my discussion that the bricolage concept of Lévi-Strauss and the Hybridity concept of Bhabha can be applied to other artworks as well. International contemporary artists like El Anatsui (Ghana), Pepon Osorio, (Puerto Rico/New York), and Ai Weiwei (Beijing) to mention a few, have come to mind as equally interesting artists to look at through the lens of my bricolage binoculars. This has led me to believe that the use of the bricolage as a strategy of interpretation is applicable to a wider context than what has been considered in this thesis.

That being said, it is perhaps necessary that I take a moment to question the relevance of the kind of interpretive experiment I have presented in the preceding chapters. What purpose does it serve to read artworks as examples of the Lévi-Straussian bricolage?

First, I believe the bricolage strategy of interpretation may easily lend itself to research on art practices that in one way or another deal with appropriation. As a result of the ever more widespread practice of appropriation within contemporary arts – of which visual art is just one discipline – symbols and artifacts migrate from one culture to another, and they do so in the context of globalization where they become available on a worldwide scale. In an attempt to make sense of such practices of appropriation, using the bricolage as a strategy of interpretation might offer insight.

In a post-colonial and post-modern era increasingly characterized by globalization, contemporaneity poses an extreme challenge for everyone trying to understand what governs cultural identity and identity politics. I have mentioned that

we tend to think of contemporaneous cultural identity in a post modern fashion; that is as a measure always in flux, ever evolving and ever changing in reaction to the times. I have also mentioned that understanding identity in such non-essentialist ways may serve to confuse identity issues more than they explain and structure them. Although a small contribution, I believe the bricolage strategy, the way I have presented it here, may serve to keep the post-modern, non-essentialist ideas of identity somewhat structured and understandable. Critics of Lévi-Strauss who emphasize the need to pay attention both to structure and individual factors when analyzing social interaction might have criticized the social anthropologist for his structuralist approach to science, but Lévi-Strauss was right in assuming that to understand what first appears as chaos, one needs order and structure in the research and analysis of it.

Second, I believe that the bricolage as an interpretive strategy is applicable to art practices world wide, independent of artist's familiarity with the Western art world and its appraisal of conceptual art. As I mentioned earlier the structure of the bricolage is in itself conceptual whether the bricoleur is conscious of it or not. Thus the bricolage strategy of interpretation allows for thorough attention to non-Western artworks that would otherwise have been written off as naïve and primitive on the grounds of not being involved with the debates on conceptual art in the Western art world. My choice of *Prototype for a New Understanding* and *La Bouche du Roi* as examples of artworks associated with bricolage was founded on the similarities I saw in these two artwork's way of communicating despite the fact that they were made by artists who come from two very different continents and who grew up in two very different cultures. Their bricolaging technique goes to show, however, that identity formation tends to follow a similar path independent of where you grow up. The bricolage strategy thus allows artists to pay attention to local issues while at the same time negotiating issues that has relevance on a global scale. For an artist taking on the role of a bricoleur then, the bricolage offers an opportunity to create an artwork that is at once locally rooted and globally sited.

LITERATURE

Alexie, Sherman. *Indian Killer*. New York: Warner Books, 1996.

Amorales, Carlos. 20 Million Mexicans Can't Be Wrong in *SLG5*. London: South London Gallery, 2002.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London: Verso, 1991.

Bakhtin, M.M *The Dialogic Imagination*. Edited and translated by Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Bhabha, Homi in interview with W.J.T. Mitchell in *Art Forum* Vol.33, No 7, 1995, pp. 80-84.

Black, Jeremy. "Introduction" in *The Atlantic Slave Trade Volume III, Eighteenth Century* ed. by Jeremy Black. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006.

Caessus, Ulrik. "Superstar, Air Jordan Celebrate 35 Years of Sneaker Fashion" in *Virginia Law Weekly*, Vol.57, iss. 24, 2005, p. 4.

Campbell, Horace G. in interview with Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now* 18.02.2008, transcript of the interview available from http://www.democracynow.org/2008/2/18/analyst_on_africa_visit_bush_pushes, Internet; last accessed 16.07.2008

Campbell, Horace G in "George Bush Visits Africa to Promote the US Africa Command", *Global Research* 18.02.2008 , available on-line from <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=8119>, Internet; last accessed 15.07.2008.

Delevingne, Lawrence. "Critics Target U.S. Military Command", *Inter press Service News Agency* [web-site online] 2.06.2008, available from <http://www.ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=42623>, Internet; last accessed 15.07.2008.

Dirlik, Arif. "The Portcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Edited by Padmini Mongia. London: Aronold, 1996, pp. 309 -311.

Dow, George Francis. *Slave Ships and Slaving*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1970.

- Drutt, Matthew. *Romuald Hazoumé, La Bouche du Roi*. Houston: The Menil Collection, 2005.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage, 1972.
- Escobar, Ticio "Identity and Myth Today" in *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*. Edited by Rasheed Areen, Sean Cubitt, and Ziauddin Sardar. London: Continuum, 2002, pp.144-151.
- Falola, Toyin and Childs, Matt D. (ed.) *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2004.
- Feit, Josh. "The Nike Psyche", *Willamette Week* 28. May. 1997.
- Ferguson, Deanna (ed.). *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery and Douglas & McIntyre, 2006.
- Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian In Canadian Culture*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992.
- Gilroy, Paul. "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity" in *Visual Culture, Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith. New York: Routledge 2006, pp. 181-220.
- Gilroy, Paul. "Art of Darkness, and the Problem of Belonging to England" in *The Visual Culture Reader* ed. by Nicholas Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 331-337.
- Harrington, Justin. *The legacy of Michael Jordan*, Suite 101tm.com [website online], available from http://basketball-players.suite101.com/article.cfm/the_legend_of_michael_jordan, Internet, last accessed 15.11.2007.
- Israel, Paolo "Irony, Ambiguity and the Art of Recycling – Reflections on Contemporary Rural African Art and 'Africa Remix'" in *Third Text*, Vol. 20 Issue 5. London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 585-598.
- Jungen , Brian in conversation with Matthew Higgs. Vienna: *Secession*, 2004.
- King, G. Richard et al. "Of Polls and Race Prejudice: Sports Illustrated's Errant 'Indian Wars'" in *Journal of Sports and Social Issues*, vol.26, issue 4, 2002, pp.381 – 402.
- La Bouche du Roi: An Art Work by Romuald Hazoumé* (exhibition brochure). London: The British Museum, 2007.
- Larsen, Nella. "Quicksand". In *Quicksand and Passing*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986.
- Leach, Edmund. *Lévi-Strauss*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1973.

- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Minh-ha, Trin T. "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference" in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. by Anne McClintock, Aamir Muft, and Ella Shohat. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- MacDonald, George F. *Haida Art*. Canadian Museum of Civilization, Quebec: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.
- Piper, Adrian. "Passing for White, Passing for Black", *Transition*, No 58. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1992, pp 4-38.
- Porter, David L. *Michael Jordan – A Biography*. London: Greenwood Press, 2007.
- Price, Scott L. "Indian Wars" in *Sports Illustrated*, 4. March 2002, pp. 66-72.
- Readings, Bill. *Introducing Lyotard – Art and Politics*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Roth, Philip. *The Human Stain*. Boston: Houghton, 2000.
- Schneider, Arnd. *Futures Lost: Nostalgia and Identity Among Italian Immigrants in Argentina*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000.
- Wade, Peter. "Hybridity Theory and Kinship Thinking" in *Cultural Studies*, 2005, Vol. 19, No.5, p.602-621.
- Williams, Saul. "PG", *Saul Williams* (CD album). New York: The Fader Label, 2004.