

THE POSTMODERN AND
THE PALEOLITHIC:
NOTES ON TECHNOLOGY AND
NATIVE COMMUNITY IN THE
FAR NORTH

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There is an intimate relation between the way the Inuit have appropriated "advanced" southern technology and their cultural life. For example, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) have been, with remarkable swiftness, appropriated by Inuit hunters as an important method of all-season transportation; electronic amplification, synthesizers, and electrical musical instruments are all part of community cultural events. The Inuit have their own television station, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, and their own hard rock band, Northern Haze. The image of the Inuit hunter who returns home to his computer has almost become a cliché.

Feast, Pangnirtung, March 1985

This feast and talent night that I've been invited to, possibly celebrating the arrival of spring though I'm never quite sure, is held in the school gym that also acts as a community center. As I arrive I am struck by the amount of ATVs and skidoos parked outside: it looks like a snowmobile convention. The feast part of this town event is a fairly straightforward affair. Most of the community is present, including about twenty or so *Qallunaat* and a few hundred Inuit. The food — seal, caribou and arctic char — is placed in huge piles on the gym floor, which has been covered in plastic. We stand

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around it in a circle as a prayer is said in Inuktitut. Then everyone dives in with their knives, cuts off bits of meat and wanders around eating and chatting. Most of the *Qallunaat*, because they have to cook their meat, are off to one side. At some point the old Inuit women, who have come prepared, stuff the remaining meat into plastic garbage bags. This is called the redistribution of material goods. It is a clear signal that the feast portion of the evening has ended.

The talent night begins fairly sporadically sometime after all of the meat has disappeared. Although there was a prepared list of performers, people are heckled onto stage at various points in the evening and the organization side of things breaks down. Among the Inuit performers are an Elvis imitator, two pairs of traditional throat chanters, a country band, an Inuk elder playing old European whaling songs on a squeeze box and a twelve year old with his synthesizer compositions.

The use of this technology in northern Native cultural and economic strategies, however, has not necessarily contributed to an erosion of the "traditional" Inuit way of life. On the contrary, advanced technology has been used by Inuits to strengthen their culture and economy. While some of the cultural products of this combination can only be described by those outside the process as bizarre, as an impossible hybrid, there remains something in the singularity—the mad eclecticism—of this culture that cannot be dismissed.

The ability of the Inuit to make use of advanced technology suggests two interesting theoretical possibilities or theses that I want to tentatively explore in this paper. The first thesis is that technology alone is not a sufficient agent of change that leads to the destruction of gatherer-hunter societies. Since Harold Innis' *The Fur Trade in Canada*, non-Native historians have tended to represent the destruction of Native peoples as primarily the result of the inability of gatherer-hunters to absorb western technology. In his historical narrative, Innis states that "the new technology with its radical innovations brought about such a rapid shift in the prevailing Indian culture as to lead to wholesale destruction of the peoples concerned by warfare and disease."¹ This narrative of destruction wrought by technology remains influential as an account of Native history. The Inuit example, however, suggests the possibility that non-Native cultures and economies may be more resilient than this historical narrative suggests. The Inuit example also suggests the possibility of a subversive strategy through which advanced technology can be used to strengthen rather than undermine Inuit culture and economy.

The second thesis is that advanced technology itself contains an emancipatory possibility and lends itself to emancipatory social projects, such as that of Inuits. This thesis is obviously related to the first. There is a strong tendency in recent social thought to suggest that advanced technology is

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somehow inherently or essentially a dominating power. Jean Baudrillard is clearly situated within this tendency when he argues about television, for example, that "it is not as vehicles of content, but in their very form and very operation, that media induce a social relation; and this is not an exploitative relation: it involves the abstraction, separation and abolition of exchange itself."² The use of technology by Inuits suggests that Baudrillard's description may only be relevant to late capitalist or postmodern society. Inuit use of technology, including television, suggests that the media do not induce a social relation but that social relations condition the way in which the media will be used.

Inuit live in what are commonly characterized as "hunting societies." This does not mean that they have continued to live as paleolithic gatherer-hunters. Today, Native people hunt with the help of different technologies and sometimes for different reasons than they may have had centuries ago. Nevertheless, it may be that they share as many features with hunting societies as they do with capitalist ones. They may work for wages while still depending on fresh meat as a crucial part of their diet. I want to suggest, then, that there may be as much of the paleolithic as there is of the postmodern conditioning Inuit life today. In effect, if we are to develop any understanding of Inuits in the modern world we need to understand the risks and the possibilities raised by this particular economic and cultural cross-breeding. Although understanding and disentangling these is difficult, there are a few observations and analyses that can be made. What needs to be done first is to briefly explain our understanding of both the paleolithic and postmodern periods.

Pangnirtung, March 1985

While in Pangnirtung I am told of an old Inuit woman – in her eighties – who loves Bruce Springsteen. The reason she gives is simple: she likes his ass. At the time Springsteen's "Dancing in the Dark" video was generally popular among Inuit. I am convinced that Springsteen's popularity stemmed from the fact that in the "Dancing in the Dark" video when he walks across the stage he adopts a rolling, side to side gait that strongly resembles the way many Inuit walk. The Bruce Springsteen that many Inuit see is an Inuk.

The paleolithic period is generally understood as the period of human social development that preceded the agricultural or neolithic period. The paleolithic was a period of relatively small, nomadic, gatherer-hunter societies. In his influential analysis *Stone Age Economics*, anthropologist Marshall Sahlins characterizes paleolithic peoples as living in the "original affluent society", primarily because of the large amount of leisure time that is available, the minimal need for structure, and the generally egalitarian social relations.³ The term gatherer-hunter, which has also been adopted by feminist anthropologists including Eleanor Leacock, stresses the impor-

tance of woman's role as gatherer in these societies and the roughly egalitarian gender relations that characterize them. Also of some importance to our understanding of the paleolithic is the fact that crucial distinctions central to our own time may not have any relevance: Sahlins argues that kinship relations appear as an economic force⁴ and, especially in his later work, he suggests that culture and economy, both super- and sub-structural are not clearly defined, the boundaries blurr.⁵ Stanley Diamond's definition of the primitive in *In Search of the Primitive*⁶ might be mentioned in this context. Although Diamond is concerned with a broader category than the paleolithic much of his argument remains trenchant, especially his sense of the loss entailed by civilization: "what primitive possess—the immediate and ramifying sense of the person, and all that I have tried to show that that entails—an existential humanity—we have largely lost."⁷

The term postmodernism has been increasingly used to describe the culture of our time. Already there is an implicit division, since we use the term late-capitalist to describe our economy. Frederic Jameson's "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" provides a useful description and analysis of our period. Jameson argues that in the postmodern a new way of experiencing time and space has emerged and that this has led to a culture characterized by aesthetic populism, a new depthlessness, an effacing of history, and a fragmentation of subjectivity. Although Jameson distances himself from an approach that suggests that these changes are caused by new technologies, he does relate them to the loss of affect implied by recent technology, especially computers. Ours is a society in which needs have become so unlimited, so divorced from any link with materiality, that the very concept has been questioned.⁸ The western world has produced an economy based on excessive surplus and a culture characterized as excremental.⁹ Jameson's analysis of postmodernism can be read or understood as a reflection on the implications of the further extension and expansion of the commodity form into cultural life.

Yellowknife, Summer, 1985

At the "Fold on the Rocks" music festival in the summer of 1985 the feature act is an Inuit hard rock band called Northern Haze from Igloolik. By the time they reach the stage it is midnight, the sun has just set. The lead guitarist plays a charge-ahead fuzz guitar, the music is hard rock. The lead singer occasionally mutters something like "this song is about a dream I had once about hunting, but you won't understand it because it's in Inuktitut." They hope to make it big in the south.

The paleolithic implies a society of minimal goods but also one of minimal needs; hence an affluent society. The postmodern is a society of excessive material goods but virtually unlimited needs; hence a society of scarcity. The relation between gatherer-hunters and late-capitalist societies

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is one of domination where the latter is generally seen to be in the process of overwhelming the former. As Hugh Brody has observed, "the hunting societies of the world have been sentenced to death. They have been condemned, not in any one verdict, but by a process, an accumulation, of judgments."¹⁰ Capitalist society can be seen as a totalizing machine that imposes the commodity form on everything that falls within its hegemony. The struggle that Inuits engage in to preserve and adapt their language and culture is a struggle against this totalizing logic. Given that postmodern culture itself involves a certain stylistic eclecticism, a seemingly random juxtaposition of radically distinct styles, it could be argued that the cultural phenomena I am pointing to is wholly contained and indeed produced by the dominant cultural logic. Modern Inuit culture resists such a neat categorization precisely because we need to know as much about the paleolithic as we do about the postmodern in order to understand it.

Most northern natives, I would argue, have adopted a strategy of mixed economic activity to support families and communities. This understanding is not new, social scientists like Hugh Brody, Peter Usher, and Michael Asch¹¹ have made similar arguments. I would stress here that the mixed economy does not in my mind involve two separate, co-existing economic spheres, but rather a primary economy based on gatherer-hunter economic strategies, and a secondary economy based on wage labor that is taken advantage of by Native hunters. There are four main aspects that constitute this mixed economy: 1) the use of hunting as an important source of food; 2) the use of hunting and trapping as a source of income; 3) the use of welfare as an occasional but consistent source of income; and 4) the use of occasional wage labor to supplement income. Any one of these might take priority for an individual or a family, but most families rely on some combination of the first pair and the latter pair. In community life in the north all of these strategies are used. What is much more rare is the use of wage labor as the primary or sole basis of a domestic economy. With this in mind, a few basic questions about material life can be addressed. What is most important is the relative strength of the mixed economy, which allows Native people to take advantage of the wage work that sporadic, "bust and boom," non-renewable resource extraction projects bring without a major disruption of the basic economic strategy. It is only when attempts are made to impose wage work as a dominant economic model, and to create a dependence on it by dispossessing Native people of access to the usual means of subsistence, that the strategy is disrupted. Resistance to this form of domination can be seen as a locus of the political dynamic of the north.

Native peoples like the Inuit in Canada's north are often seen as very poor. To characterise Native people as poor is to imply that the gathering-hunting economic strategy is unsuccessful, and as a result there has recently been a tendency to refute such a characterization. As Marshall Sahlins has argued: "poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between

people. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization."¹² Hugh Brody and Peter Usher have been particularly concerned with stressing the importance of a hidden or Native economy – what I refer to as gatherer-hunter economic strategies – that must be taken into account in any discussion of Inuit and Indian affluence and deprivation.

Yet there still remains a real poverty in the far north, a poverty intensified by the images of wealth that new communications media have exported to northern Canada. This poverty continually makes its presence known even on the silent pieces of paper that are shuffled through the offices of government bureaucrats who are rewarded with extra northern "housing allowances" and "isolation pay" to manage the problem: the morbid line of statistics—higher infant mortality, lower life expectancy, higher deaths due to violence, and so on—offers its own eloquent testimony. In an eleven month period in the mid-eighties in the largely Inuvialuit community of Tuktoyaktuk, population 750, thirty-five people attempted suicide. Seven people "succeeded." There is something simply so wrong about this that even the need to be aware of the politics of representation and of images is overwhelmed.

Brody's argument is persuasive, however, to the extent that he recognizes that social problems tend to be associated with capitalist economy and modernist culture. It is not as gatherer-hunters that Native people are poor, but as peoples dispossessed by the totalizing logic of capital itself. There is more than a semantic difference. What Native people call "traditional" economic activities, those we associate with gathering-hunting culture, are not responsible for native poverty and indeed offer the only viable and lasting alternative to it. But gathering-hunting does not have to be understood as a pure, untarnished, pre-contact social form. Gathering-hunting in the modern world involves adaptation, and the possibility of absorbing some elements of capitalist culture and economy into the gatherer-hunter context. It also involves the risk of being assimilated by those same elements.

The mixed economy is also a mixed culture. It involves bringing together an economy of affluence and surplus with an economy based on exploitation, class difference, and the social production of scarcity; and bringing together a culture based on minimal needs and expanded leisure time with a culture based on virtually unlimited needs and serial leisure time. This is a hybrid culture, and while it is undoubtedly true that the capitalist and postmodern elements are disruptive, are responsible for creating poverty, and which may ultimately result in the complete dispossession of northern Natives, the struggle is far from over. Inuit success will not depend on their isolating themselves from the rest of the world in some state of cultural purity. It will depend on their ability to subvert capitalist economy, technology, images, and institutions.

At the most abstract level of analysis then, the importance of advanced technology to the far north can only be understood in the context of sub

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mission and resistance to totalization. On an immediate, experiential level advanced technology has come to the north because of the peculiarity, the absurdity, of an economy in which very poor people find themselves with cash surpluses. The money they get – from occasional labour or from welfare – is often used to buy consumer goods simply because the Native economy may provide the minimum subsistence requirements and because improving the material quality of life in a more sustained way, for example through better housing, is prohibitively expensive. Excess cash is rarely spent on cars because in most Inuit communities in the far north access by roads is impossible. So the money often goes towards ATVs, VCRs, television, radio, satellite dishes, cassette players, synthesizers, computers, and so on. The people from a culture of affluence meet the technology produced by a culture of excess.

Luccasi Irqumiaq, Puwirnituaq

One interesting point that has come up is the number of radios in Inuit homes. Recently, I visited 40 homes and found that they contained over 100 radios of all makes and types; short wave, A.M. and F.M.¹³

The problem raised by this adoption of technology on the immediate level is one of political control. Inuit recognized the dangers posed by the new communications technology: many communities voted against allowing television satellite dishes until they were assured of Inuktitut broadcasting. The problem of the resistance to assimilation was raised to new levels by the introduction of new technology, which offered powerful support to that process. The political ramifications, however, were very complex since the new technology also offered new opportunities for resistance. On the level of daily experience, the new communications technology could act like medieval village church bells, warning of an impending attack by barbarians, though here the attacker is the State.

Lasarusie Epoo, Inukjuaq

Recently, the government has been asking the people to sign some papers. We do not know the contents because it is not written in our language. The people are not forced to sign these papers but many have done so when asked without understanding the meaning of one's signature. As a result, these signatures have given the people much hardship later on. I know I experienced it myself. If we had our own radio station, we would be able to warn the people quickly.¹⁴

On the immediate level, then, it is fairly obvious that local control of communications media offers some political advantages, especially when contrasted to allowing southerners total control over the dissemination of

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information and images. However, the intricacies of Inuit society and its own internal dynamics raise problems even on this level.

Peter Inukpuk, Inukjuaq

Our Inuit culture creates special problems of exchanging information. In our life it is still enormously insulting for a younger person to presume to give information to an older person. Many white people often think that as more young people like myself receive a white education, that somehow the information we receive as a result of our contact with white culture will seep into our home communities. In fact, this doesn't happen. The implications of this problem are even more serious when one realizes that change never happens in our communities unless our old people are agreed and understand the situation.¹⁵

It is hard to know how messages will be received by communities, what place the new information—even if its dissemination is controlled by Inuits—will play in community political life.

Even more serious, though, than questions of who controls the content of the new communications media, are the questions related to the form messages will take. It might be argued that in as much as the Inuit used the new communications technology surely they submitted to the logic of the dominant system, and even when they used that technology in resistance, their use of it already signaled a strategically crucial loss. That is, the technology itself may embody the totalizing logic of late capitalism, and the Inuit use of it, even for their own political ends, may be a surrender to this logic.

In his powerful critique of the communications media, Jean Baudrillard develops an argument along these lines. He argues, for example, that:

The mass media are anti-mediatory and intransitive. They fabricate non-communication – this is what characterized them, if one agrees to define communication as an exchange, as a reciprocal space of a speech and a response... Now, the totality of the existing architecture of the media founds itself on this... definition: they are what always prevents response.¹⁶

In this view the modern technology of communication is inherently univocal: it is not communication because it is one-way speech. Baudrillard is not concerned with the ideological content of the media, then – and he rejects socialists like Enzensberger who suggest a revolutionary strategy for “capturing” the media – as much as he is with the form.

There is a tendency in modern thought, of which Baudrillard is a particularly good example, that suggests that modern media, and especially television, are univocal. In this view the audience is always positioned as observer or listener and, as such, passive. Debord's characterization of our

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society as a "society of the spectacle" (1983) and Jameson's analysis of the loss of affect, which he suggests is endemic to postmodern technology, serve as examples. Baudrillard's understanding has a specifically political implication: "power consists in the monopoly of the spoken work."¹⁷ Baudrillard, in this analysis, is unfortunately guilty of the same kind of essentialism he so often takes Marx to task for. While it is recognized that in changing the messages Inuit people will have adopted a political strategy that ultimately does nothing to vitiate the hegemonic power of modern communications technology, there is nothing inherent in the technology that suggests they cannot change the form in which their new messages will be broadcast. And this latter process seems to have been the strategy adopted by Inuit communities.

The Inuit Broadcasting Corporation was established in the early seventies in response to the demand on the part of so many communities for Inuktitut broadcasting. IBC now has three main television production centers—Iqaluit, Cambridge Bay, and Baker Lake—and several small production units scattered in communities across the high Arctic. IBC produces a news show and a series of documentaries, which are broadcast by the CBC through a time-sharing arrangement. All of the IBC shows are in Inuktitut. On the level of content, IBC effectively presents the Inuit view. For example, in March 1985 when I visited Iqaluit, officials from the Department of Defense were visiting communities attempting to collect contaminated materials (PCBs) that Inuit hunters may have gathered from abandoned DEW line posts. The IBC news broadcast on these visits served Inuit communities as a warning (the bell approach!) of the impending visits; it also seized the opportunity to question the existence of DEW sites in the north.

More interesting, however, are the documentaries, which themselves spill over that genre to act as visual reflections on the Inuit way of life. It is difficult to use our language to speak of the social processes at work here: the division between audience and performers that marks a society of the spectacle (Debord, 1983) does not exist. In Inuit television there are no performers, so I will use the term producers to refer to the IBC staff and assume no separation between producers and audience: both are part of Inuit community. The relatively small size of the community allows for the immediate possibility that by watching IBC people will see themselves on television. In place of the gap between audience and performer which constitutes a society of the spectacle, the Inuit have created an intimate relation between community and producers. This relation takes place on multiple levels: perhaps most importantly, that of the everyday. An Inuk producer will watch her program with other Inuit who will comment on it; the producer and her production live in the community that is the object of their reflection.

Elisapee Cain, Tasiujaq

If we had our own radio network, we would be able to hear the

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recorded minutes of meetings. It would be especially pleasant to have programmes if we knew the person who would be speaking.¹⁸

The other crucial level in which interaction between producer and community takes place is in the construction of a specifically Inuit visual language. Those who produce the shows are still in the process of learning to use the technology. This learning process is a public one, though. The products of training sessions are often aired. In the past few years, then, an intimate process of (self) educating both the community and the producers has been taking place. The result of this process has been the production of an Inuit visual language that radically alters both the form and content of televised communications.

Luccasie Irqumiaq, Puvirnituaq

I think when the radio first starts, the people will listen to anything so long as it is in our language, but later they will become more discriminating, and we shall have to improve the quality of our programming. We are already making some plays that will be of interest to them.¹⁹

There is, perhaps, a fine line between virtuosity and naïveté. There are two kinds of programs that I have seen on IBC which demonstrate both of these characteristics. What is remarkable is that they can be produced and broadcast:

"Skinning a Fox," IBC Baker Lake

This programme, broadcast with some frequency, consists of an elderly Inuk sitting on the floor, his back to the wall, skinning a fox and explaining in Inuktitut how this is done. The camera never moves, the light glares down from above. Off camera an old woman, perhaps his wife, is knitting. She occasionally leans on camera to explain what she is up to. The programme lasts about twenty minutes.

Since in the mid-seventies the IBC simply sent out video cameras to small communities, with a minimum of training support, the visual results often showed no predispositions as to what television "should" look like:

"Hunting a Seal," Sac Kunnuk, Igloodik

An Inuk is standing over a hole in the ice. His arm is upraised, he is holding a spear. The shot is taken from some distance away, so the figure is very small. It is a dramatic moment, we await its outcome. The figure continues to stand, the camera does not move. The intensity of the moment is not produced by close ups, jump

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cuts, acting or editing. We are in "real time." The intensity leaves us, we are bored. But we still wait. Occasionally it returns, we anticipate the seal, the sudden strike, the action. But it does not take place. How long have we waited, have we watched this hunter— five minutes? ten?—before we realize we are waiting for him to strike and he is waiting for the seal and so, we too are in a way waiting for the seal and perhaps our waiting and his are the same. As we continue to watch we begin to understand that hunting a seal is not the strike, the sudden moment of action, but rather the anticipation, the boredom, the intensity, the exhaustion, the waiting. After about fifteen minutes the video ends. We never see the strike.

In any southern program these images would have been edited in roughly the following way: we would have a shot at a distance, establishing context; a shot of the hunter's face, establishing intensity; a shot of the spear, of the seal hole, perhaps at an increasing pace, and to music in order to establish dramatic pacing; a shot of the spear striking the seal would follow, possibly in slow motion so we could sustain the "climax." We would have been led to believe that we understood in all its intimacy the act of hunting a seal. We would never have been bored and never forced to wait for any significant period. We would be very carefully manipulated or led by the producers; we would see all the essential aspects of hunting a seal, but experience none of them. That is, in being "led" we would have lost the opportunity to experience the activity in a way that the medium of television, as Kunnuk illustrates, allows.

IBC is an example of interactive television. It is conditioned at the levels of production, distribution, and consumption by an intimate relation with the community in which it is produced. This community is geographically widespread and culturally diverse, though admittedly relatively small. The gap between "audience" and "entertainer" does not exist in this context. In its place is the community itself as a material and cultural strategy. Within the community, different forms of production take place: these include the production of material necessities, such as food and the production of cultural reflections such as television programs. The latter allow Inuit to reflect on and re-experience the former. Both forms of production involve the characteristics we associate with the paleolithic and post-modern.

In postmodern culture the audience—and by definition this implies a separation—can have an effect on programming only in the most reified fashion. Intense surveys of the audience will determine whether more people watch "Dallas" or "Miami Vice," and the results will eventually lead to the demise of one of these programs. Both programs are produced by a specialized elite ("stars") and does not inform the everyday life of the audience. Not only do the programs not contribute to the community, but actively work against it. In the paleolithic-postmodern, on the other hand, the community speaks its own language and sees itself on television. The

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producers are slowly creating a visual language that allows the community to see itself in its own terms, which is important: our own (postmodern) representation of Inuit on television involves caricature of the most vulgar sort.

Irish Spring Soap Commercial

A single television commercial for Irish Spring soap features two related visual texts. In one a miner, underground and covered in filth, is magically transported to a lush green landscape, presumably Ireland, through the use of soap. In the second an Inuk in the far north is, much to his delight, similarly transported. While the miner's filth can be equated with his work and excused, the only explanation within the visual text for the Inuk's filth is his existence in a hostile environment where no one would want to live or, more immediately, his "race" itself.

The sub-text of these caricatures is that Inuits strive to escape the north, strive to escape their own cultural identity and desperately seek to live in the same fashion as non-Native, urban southerners.

The Inuit struggle to maintain their social identity takes place on multiple fronts, one of which involves the broadcast media. This struggle is not insignificant to late capitalist societies, especially to those within them who are determined to maintain a vision of emancipation. From the Inuit we understand that the new communications technology, contra Baudrillard and many others, is not inherently dominating or a structure of hegemonic power. It has a potentiality for playing a meaningful role in emancipatory social practices. Perhaps we need to return to a marxist conceptual scheme whereby the use of forces of production—including technology—can only be understood in the context of a dialectical interaction with the social relations within which they exist. Baudrillard, Debord, and others allow us to understand the ways in which these technologies are used in late-capitalist society but say little to the more difficult question of the ultimate potentiality of these technologies.

On a broader level, the Inuit adoption and absorption of postmodern technology raises questions concerning our whole understanding of "development." The logic of development as it is imposed by so-called "advanced," late capitalist social formations on various "other" societies has no place in a meaningful understanding of either social formation. As Stanley Diamond has argued, "the basic apology for imperialism remains the idea of progress."²⁰ The term development implies the idea of simplicity: Inuit society, at least, does not exhibit that characteristic and probably never did. The term development further implies that Inuits should strike for what we have (this is the political significance of the Irish Spring soap commercial, and most southern television representations of the Inuit) while our understanding of their appropriation of technology leads us to con-

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clude that such striving would mean important cultural losses rather than advances. We need to reject all those logical constructions that imply that "other" cultures are inferior, less developed, simpler, primitive or less advanced than our own. Furthermore, we need to reject understandings that hold to a sense of the "pure" pre-capitalist cultures as superior to our own. The latter understandings leave no room for modern adaptations and often involve an underlying sense that "other" cultures are much weaker than our own, and that they can adapt, can successfully absorb the postmodern and retain their integrity. We need, then, to understand the advantages offered by both postmodern and paleolithic cultural and economic strategies, as well as their ultimate limitations. In Diamond's words, "the problem... is to help conceptualize contemporary forms that will reunite man with his past, reconcile the primitive with the civilized..."²¹

Yellowknife, Summer 1985

Another act at the 1985 "Folk on the Rocks" involves an Inuk man and woman. She plays the traditional drum while he dances and sings. Both are dressed in traditional costume. At some point, when he is tired, he leaves the stage. She turns on a nearby drum machine, picks up a bass guitar and sings—in English—a few country and western songs.

In his notebooks on pre-capitalist social formations Marx wrote that "the community itself appears as the first great force of production."²² In the West, we have barely begun to understand the full significance of this statement and perhaps will only be able to when the process of vitiating meaningful community nears its end. For Inuits, it is the community itself that buffers the debilitating shock waves produced by the totalizing power of the late-capitalist State, economy, and culture. Where there is desperate poverty, despair, and violence, only the community can prevent total devastation. But the Inuit community has been able to engage in something more than a holding pattern. They have been able to subvert the ideology of form—to borrow Jameson's evocative phrase—and employ western technology in sustaining and entrenching the Inuit way of life. This is, admittedly, a process that has its dangers. But there is no going back and no "pure" Inuit culture that will somehow exist in isolation from the rest of the world. What may remain distinctively Inuit about the hybrid culture that is emerging is a community that is strong enough to break the logic of the spectacle and to employ "advanced" technology in a radically subversive way: as communication that defies the sender-receiver model and organizes speech with responses.

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Notes

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2. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of Signs*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis, Telos Press, 1981), 169.
3. Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Adline-Atherton, Inc., 1972), 32-39.
4. *Ibid.*, 101.
5. cf. *Ibid.*, 102fn.
6. Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1974).
7. *Ibid.*, 173.
8. cf. Baudrillard, *Critique*, 63-87.
9. cf. Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 10.
10. Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), xi.
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