

## **WILL THE 'REAL' FALSE FACE PLEASE STAND UP?**

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### ABSTRACT/RESUME

The False Faces of the Iroquois have been replicated on many levels. They exist firstly as dreams and myths, and then in material form as wooden masks. They are found in replica form in museums and can be seen in photographs and read about in monographs. This replication, together with the continued carving and use of False Faces, has contributed to the survival and stability of the Iroquois.

Les Visages Faux des Iroquois ont été reproduits à bien des niveaux. Ils existent d'abord comme rêves et mythes, et ensuite sous une forme physique comme masques de bois. On les trouve sous forme de réplique dans les musées, et on les voit dans les photos et les étudie dans les monographies. Cette reproduction, ainsi que le fait de découpage continu et l'emploi de Visages Faux, ont contribué à assurer la survivance et la stabilité des Iroquois.

A prime object concerns radical invention, while the replicas vary from their archetypes by small discoveries, based upon simple confrontations of what has already been done. Hence radical invention is most likely to occur at the beginning of a series; it is marked by many prime objects; and it resembles artistic creation more than it resembles scientific proof. As a series "ages", its primes are less numerous than at the beginning .... Everything made now is either a replica or a variant of something made a little time ago and so on back without a break to the first morning of human time (Kubler, 1962:2;70).

### **False Faces Out of Context**

The title of this essay "Will the Real False Face Please Stand Up?" is intended not only to spark the curiosity of the reader but to introduce him or her to the many levels upon which the False Face of the Iroquois have been replicated. The False Faces have many dimensions and shapes in time. They themselves have public and private, sacred and profane 'faces'. They have been considered elements inseparable from ritual, curiosities to be kept in a cabinet, objects of material culture, and fine art. They exist as the intangible objects of dream and mythology, and take on a form tailored to the particular person who dreams of them or who recites the legend of their origin. The originally fluid form of the dreams and myths in which they exist has also been fixed in the shape of a written text and with this the mental form of the Faces. Perhaps most importantly for us, this mental construct has been crystallized in the shape of the artifact itself: the wooden False Face carved from a live tree; the tree signifying the Face's unarticulated but potentially ubiquitous presence in the world of nature. From the idea of the Face have come other innovative, original types of Faces and replicas of each type have been made for posterity. Added to the list of levels upon which the Faces exist are the decontextualized Faces and facsimiles of Faces which hang in museums around the world. These in turn have given rise to Faces made exclusively for the tourist trade which take on still a different existence. Lastly, there are the photographs which freeze them within the covers of another version of the museum - the monograph - in which is also contained yet another replica of the material artifact, the written description of extant Faces.

Any masks made as copies in the tradition of the original Faces are replicas; the original Faces themselves are replicas of Iroquoian dream visions of masks and all are contextualized replicas made for ceremonial use within the Iroquoian community. A photograph in a book, a facsimile in

a museum, a mask carved for sale are also replicas, but of a different order, a decontextualized order made for the international community.

An irresistible question, in view of the numerous and varied shapes in time of the False Faces, is whose creation they are in the final analysis: the Iroquois or the European, the conquered or the conqueror, the artist/user or the historian/observer? "Historical knowledge", writes George Kubler in *The Shape of Time*:

consists of transmissions in which the sender, the signal, and the receiver all are variable elements affecting the stability of the message. Since the receiver of a signal becomes its sender in the normal course of historical transmission...we may treat receivers and senders together under the heading of relays. Each relay is the occasion of some deformation in the original signal. Certain details seem insignificant and they are dropped in the relay; others have an importance conferred by their relationship to events occurring in the moment of relay, and so they are exaggerated. One really may wish for reason of temperament to stress the traditional aspects of the signal; another will emphasize their novelty. Even the historian subjects his evidence to these strains, although he strives to recover the pristine signal.

Each relay willingly or unwittingly deforms the signal according to his own historical position (1962:21-22).

Therefore, the sender/artist/Iroquois and the receiver/historian/European are both involved in the deformation/creation of the signal/artifact/False Face. The European exacerbated the problem of disease for which the False Faces were the solution and hence accelerated their development; the European has created the historical literature interpreting the Faces and collected the Faces themselves. In this way, the Iroquois and the European have each shared in the evolution of this masking phenomenon. The alternative levels of existence upon which the False Faces exist, or in other words the many replicas and ways of replicating the Faces, have the potential of telling us what the Faces mean in terms of their respective replication under the influences of Iroquoian and Western culture, what they mean today, and just which of their many shapes in time is the true shape or, paradoxically, the "real" False Face, the prime object, the pristine signal.

In view of these remarks William Fenton's comments in a forward to a work on St. Lawrence prehistory become even more meaningful: "...as Thoreau wrote in his *Journal of arrowheads*, 'They are...as it were, fossil

thoughts, forever reminding me of the mind that shaped them'. Since cultures are a product of the mind, so the study of cultures is an affair of the mind" (Fenton). As such we must examine the Western mind as thoroughly as the mind of the Iroquoian culture in order to determine the influence of the Western intellect upon our (and the Iroquois') conception of the Faces. Then we shall proceed to explore the Faces in the context of Iroquoian culture. Yet, in as much as most of our knowledge of the Iroquois begins with the arrival of Europeans in America and that which we have ascertained of Iroquoian prehistory has been according to the principles of Western archeology, we are still in essence studying the Iroquois through our own European derived perceptual grid. This acknowledged, let us begin our investigation of the False Face Masks of the Iroquois by calling into question the tools with which we are examining the Faces, namely the Western art historical method, the photographs, replicas and facsimiles we look through to see the original message of the masks, and the monographs which we read.

William Fenton himself has expressed concern over the western penchant for analyzing the masks formalistically according to European principles of art history:

I was aware that one might derive a typological classification from the masks themselves after the manner of archeologists, and this I subsequently attempted. But I wondered whether such a classification, although it might make a system out of the material, would bear any relation to how the Iroquois themselves grouped the mask beings of which the masks are portraits (Fenton, 1987:13).

George Kubler comments upon this problem of western classification schemes as follows:

In that earlier transfer of biological ideas to historical events, of which so many traces survive in the historian's diction, both typology (which is the study of kinds and varieties) and morphology (the study of forms) were misunderstood. Because these modes of biological description cannot be made to account for purpose, the historian working with biological ideas avoided the principle aim of history, which has been to identify and reconstruct the particular problem to which any action or thing must correspond as a solution. Sometimes the problem is a rational one, and sometimes it is an artistic one: we always

may be sure that every man-made thing arises from problems as a purposeful solution (Kubler, 1962:8).

It is then possible to become distanced from an awareness of the problem from which the solution of the False Faces arose by focusing on the Faces as art objects with a characteristic typology and morphology. Even the Iroquois have fallen into this by responding to Fenton's call for classification. Fenton's typological, morphological classification of the False Faces can provide clues as to the larger meaning of the False Faces, but cannot comprehensively communicate their meaning in Iroquoian culture. What does become apparent in examining Fenton's classification is the imposition of western art historical method upon the Iroquois masks. Fenton's classification is made on the basis of the variations in the mask's predominant facial feature and the difference in local carving styles. His method was to note such characteristics as "colour, form of chin, shape of mouth, nose, presence or absence of supplementary wrinkles and supra-orbital ridges, spines on the nose bridge extending to the forehead, shape and method of attaching metal eyes, and presence of tobacco bags (Fenton, 1987:18). He then mounted photographs which he took of the Faces on sheets of paper and pasted the relevant descriptive data below. These were shown to informants in the hope of stimulating commentary useful to further classification.

When asked to classify the masks, the Iroquois informants found themselves at a loss. The morphological classification together with the experiment of using photographs of masks in museum collections did not accord with their understanding of them. Henry Redeye maintains that there are as many types of False Face masks as there are people. The task of the wearer of the mask is to dramatize the nature of the supernatural he (for only men may wear them) represents during the performance of the False Face Society; to this end role supersedes form, as Fenton observes, and taxonomic, formalistic categories of mask types break down. Masks slide from one function and category to another depending upon the performer; they can therefore be used interchangeable. The most important element in the performance of the False Face ceremony is the acting and dancing ability of the individual who dons the mask, not the form of the mask (Ibid:28-29). Nevertheless, Fenton's categories were derived from interviews with a variety of informants who arranged the photographs typologically into twelve groups (Ibid:31) and these categories in turn have formed, in part, the foundation of Fenton's study of the faces. In other words, a point of view - the need to classify - which was considered unimportant or even irrelevant to the function of the Faces in Iroquoian society has formed the basis of the West's understanding of them.

It seems profoundly strange that the Iroquois informants classified the masks at all given their assertion that they are used without regard to such classifications. One cannot but wonder how much Fenton's method of determining categories actually influenced the outcome. If the nature of the photographic medium is added to Fenton's western bias toward typology and morphology, some insights emerge as to why the Iroquois seemed to have helped prove a classification of the masks antithetical to their own non-classification of them - for photography, as we all see, represents the quintessential eye or viewpoint or perspective of Western culture.

Let us propose that Fenton's photographs of the False Faces actually become different sorts of masks. As Susan Sontag mused: "A photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an Image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask" (Berger, 1980:50). Roland Barthes agrees with this perception: "Since every photograph is contingent (and thereby outside of meaning), Photography cannot signify (aim at a generality) except by assuming a mask" (1981:34). One could speculate that his perception, while not articulated by the Iroquoian people who examined the photographs, was at the heart of their willingness to classify their own unclassifiable False Faces because those Faces had become completely other objects, seen from a different and alien perspective when translated into the two-dimensional form of the photograph. They became, in George Kubler's terms, replicas of the prime object or the actual False Face, created according to a Western perspective; and thus, the Iroquois who created them could respond to them from a distance which objectified the Faces and divorced their appearance from meaning and experience.

To understand this phenomenon more clearly, we must note that upon its introduction into history, the photograph was thought to make the real directly accessible, thereby replacing "the world as immediate testimony" (Berger, 1980:48). However, as Sontag noted:

Through photographs, the world becomes a series of unrelated, free-standing particles; and history, past and present, a set of anecdotes and fait divers. The camera makes reality atomic, manageable, and opaque. It is a view of the world which denies interconnectedness, continuity, but which confers on each moment the character of a mystery (Ibid:49).

Thus, the photograph is a tool appropriate to western culture with its propensity to examine reality in a linear, atom by atom fashion instead of in an holistic, non-linear way, this same methodology being evident in the atomistic approach of morphological art history. But it is not appropriate to the tradi-

tional Native American view of a reality as a series of interconnected, cyclical processes. Just as the act of writing down the oral legends of the Iroquois, and other peoples with no written word, changes the nature of the legends,<sup>1</sup> the very act of using the photograph as a replacement for memory (Ibid:50), and specifically the memory of the False Faces when in use, changes the nature of the Faces, for the "photographs in themselves do not preserve meaning. They offer appearances..." (Ibid:51). In a very real sense, such photographs do become "death masks" which signal the European influence over the prime object of the False Face by forcing the Iroquois to look at their own False Faces through the objectifying lens of the Western eye. Let's look to John Berger to understand how this has occurred. He asks:

Has the camera replaced the eye of God? The decline of religion corresponds with the rise of the photograph. Has the culture of capitalism telescoped God into photography? The transformation would not be as surprising as it may at first seem.

The faculty of memory led men everywhere to ask whether, just as they themselves could preserve certain events from oblivion, there might not be other eyes noting and recording otherwise unwitnessed events. Such eyes they accredited to their ancestors, to spirits, to gods or to their single deity...

Memory implies a certain act of redemption. What is remembered has been saved from nothingness. What is forgotten has been abandoned...

The camera relieves us all of the burden of memory. It surveys us like God, and it surveys for us. Yet no other god has been so cynical, for the camera records in order to forget... (Ibid.:53-55).

It seems that this supernatural, western eye of the camera, of the Western God, has usurped the vision of the Iroquois and their own gods or spirits, as its way of seeing has encroached upon that of the Iroquois community. For it has made public (ie. outside of the Iroquois community) what once was private (ie. inside the Iroquois community) and in doing so has profaned what was once held sacred. It has called into question the sacred Iroquois tradition of interaction with gods and supernaturals by abstracting the masks from their Iroquoian context through the eye of a more aloof God. It is not difficult to imagine that seeing the masks in two-dimensional form, out of the context of the ritual for which they were designed, revealed and

not hidden away as they normally would be when not employed in a ceremony, would change the informants perception of the Faces. It is almost as if the camera had gained power over the masks by its ability to reveal what had traditionally been hidden. The camera photographs the Face but forgets its context. This act of photographic conquest has provoked statements about the Faces such as "it ought not to be in a museum unfed and uncared for" (Fenton, 1987:19); an assertion evidencing the resistance on the part of the Iroquois to the Western viewpoint. As Berger (1980:56) states "The public photograph...is torn from context, and becomes a dead object...just as the False Face hanging in a museum becomes a dead object to the Iroquois who created it.

Dead objects are much easier to classify and analyze than living ones as science has proven and continues to prove. As Carlo Ginzburg writes of medicine and applies to the art of connoisseurship: "Once dead of course it could be dissected, but how did one make the leap from the corpse, irreversibly changed by death, to the characteristics of the living individual?" (Ginzburg, 1980:21). This seems to be the task facing the art historian today with regard to the False Faces - how to revivify the Faces deadened and irreversibly changed by the practices of connoisseurship, photography and museum display - practices which are crystallizations of the objectifying, distancing, 'supernatural' eye of Western culture and which are epitomized by the nature of photographic reproduction.

What we are arguing is that photographic reproduction, as a manifestation of the Western worldview, has changed the way the Iroquois view the False Faces and the way that they themselves use them, the most telling example being the masks cawed for the tourist trade, subsequent to exposure to photographs of the ceremonial masks. This is because when the camera reproduces a Face, it not only strips it of its context, but nullifies its uniqueness, thereby changing its meaning. Or, as Berger clarifies, "its meaning multiplies and fragments into many meanings" (1986:19). In the following passage we have substituted the term False Face for painting and the italicized statement is the author's addition:

In an age of pictorial reproduction the meaning of False Faces is no longer attached to them; their meaning becomes transmittable: that is to say it becomes information of a sort, and, like all information, it is either put to use or ignored; information carries no special authority within itself [as the Face would during the performance of a False Face ceremony]. When a False Face is put to use, its meaning is either modified to totally changed...It is not a question of reproduction failing to reproduce certain aspects of an image faithfully; it is a question



of reproduction making it possible, even inevitable, that an image will be used for many different purposes and that the reproduced image, unlike the original work, can lend itself to them all...

Consequently a reproduction, as well as making its own references to the image of its original, becomes itself the reference point for other Images. The meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it. Such authority as it retains, is distributed over the whole context in which it appears (Ibid.:24-25;29).

Thus, the False Face displayed in a museum, or a commercial art gallery, or reproduced in a monograph, suffers from a dilution of its power because its power is being used to achieve something originally alien to it and to its purpose as part of a curing ceremony. For instance, it may be used in a museum to educate the public about the Iroquois or to compare their art with that of other Native or non-Native groups; it may be used to illustrate the argument of a particular author, it may be used to endow the prestige of owning "art" on a private or public entity. Yet, its original meaning was in the sacredness of the performance of the Iroquoian healing ritual. Further, those agents, public or private, possessing these particular replicas of Faces or holding copyright over photographic reproductions of them, pose questions as to the real ownership of the masks and, by extension, who has the real control over Iroquoian culture. As Berger explains: "A people or a class which is cut off from its own past is far less free to choose and to act as a people or class than one that has been able to situate itself in history. This is why - and this the only reason why - the entire art of the past has now become a political issue" (Ibid.:33). Decontextualized replication - whether on the part of the non-Native who collects, photographs and displays the masks or the Iroquois who manufactures profane versions of the Faces for sale - has made the False Faces a political issue. Let us turn now to contextualized replication with the aid of Roland Barthes and instead of looking at the cultural overlay which the West has imposed upon the False Faces and which is revealing mainly of the West, look through this overlay to what the masks themselves have to tell us about the Iroquois. The semiotic paradigm which Barthes uses has been the unstated paradigm of scholarly investigation since history began; its uniqueness today is that it exists in explicit, and not merely implicit, form. It makes us explicitly aware of our implicit biases.

### False Faces in Context

Barthes writes in *Mythologies* that: "Myth is a system of communication, that it is a message...since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters its message...Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society...(1987:109). Therefore what we want to know about the False Faces of the Iroquois is what message they communicate, the discourses beneath the masks which convey the message, and the way in which the message is communicated.

Myth as a type of speech is not confined to oral speech but includes "modes of writing or of representations (Ibid:110). As Barthes writes, "We shall therefore take language, discourse, speech, etc., to mean any significant unit or synthesis, whether verbal or visual...This generic way of conceiving language is in fact justified by the very history of writing: long before the invention of our alphabet, objects like the Inca quipu, or drawings, as in pictographs, have been accepted as speech" (Ibid: 111 ). The unit or mythology we shall deal with is the False Face.

"Mythology...studies ideas-in-form" (Ibid.:112). To study Iroquoian ideas in the form of the False Faces we must investigate in turn the signifier or form of the masks, what the form signifies or the concept behind the masks, and the union of the form and concept of the masks - that is the masks as sign which as Barthes says "points out and ...notifies...makes us understand something and...impose its meaning on us; we do not impose our meaning on it - ideally.

As Barthes writes of the signifier or form of myth, it "presents itself in an ambiguous way: it is at the same time meaning and form, full on one side and empty on the other. As meaning, the signifier already postulates a reading, I grasp it through my eyes, it has a sensory reality...there is a richness in it" (Ibid). So Fenton by naming the masks makes them into "credible wholes", which "have at their disposal a sufficient rationality" (Ibid). That is, we can study them as objects in themselves, objects which belong to the category of masks, and study them in a very formalistic way - as an empty form or signifier because, as Barthes writes, when mythology "becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind: it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter [or the form] remains" (Ibid). That is, if we study only the form of the False Faces, the form does not suppress the meaning but it does put it at a distance (Ibid.: 118). A study of empty forms opens up the possibility of filling the form with a different meaning or purpose - the nature of decontextualization - as we have seen

happen with the Iroquois themselves in classifying the photographs of masks and in carving masks for sale.

Now, if we look at the signified or the concept of the False Faces, "the meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history... [and] this history which drains out of the form will be wholly absorbed by the concept" (Ibid). The concept can be defined as "motivation which causes the myth to be uttered...The concept reconstitutes a chain of causes and effects, motives and intentions. Unlike the form, the concept is in no way abstract: it is filled with a situation. Through the concept, it is a whole new history which is implanted in the myth" (Ibid.: 118-119).

Before we go on, we must clarify that while we are taking the False Face mask as the particular mythology we are investigating, we shall investigate the False Face in a form as close to the origin of the series of replicas we have named as we can get: the False Face as it exists in the myth describing its origin and hence its primal, mental form. The very first dream or vision of the False Face would be the ideal form to investigate but this, of course, is inaccessible to us. Another reason for taking our starting point in the myth of the False Face instead of the twelve types of Faces is so that we do not repeat the oversight of which we accused Fenton, namely that of basing a study of the Faces upon a number of categories which the Iroquois did not originally observe. Therefore, let us look at the form of the oral legend (now written), then the concept or motivation behind the myth and finally, the history contained in the concept.

The Iroquois legend is about a meeting of magical powers involving the Spirit Medicine Man and a stranger. The Spirit Medicine Man had been granted supreme powers by the Great Good Spirit because of his true love of people, birds, and animals. On the day of his confrontation with the stranger, he was standing in a valley cradled by mountain. Their backs to the mountain in question, the stranger tried twice to magically move the mountain but succeeded only in causing it to tremble and quake. "Your medicine is powerful. You lack only complete faith, not skill," surmised the Spirit Medicine Man. It was upon making this comment that the Spirit Medicine Man empowered the mountain to come forward. The stranger anxiously spun around, smashing his face against the side of the mountain. His face and mouth grotesquely twisted, his nose detached and hanging from his face, his name became Old Broken Nose. yet, after his face was healed, Spirit Medicine Man taught Old Broken Nose the secrets of healing and the Dance of the False Faces emerged in reverence of him, Old Broken Nose.<sup>2</sup>

Fenton (1987:95) calls this myth about the origin of the wooden False Faces "the epic struggle for control of the earth." There are amplifications

and variations upon the elements cited above depending upon which version of the myth one examines. For example, the Spirit Medicine man is also referred to as the Creator, God, Chief, Master, Our Maker, Skyholder, the Sapling, the Holder of the Heavens, the Master of Life, etc...The Stranger is alternatively called the False Face, the headman of the Faces, Hadu'i, Gagohsa (Face), the conjurer, the Thunderer, the split-faced man-being, the Great Humpback, Crooked Face, the Great Face, and in many versions carries a turtle rattle. The confrontation between the two begins in most variations as a way of settling the boasts that each makes of being the creator of the earth, by seeing who can move the mountain (Ibid.:95-128). The most common result of the confrontation is a contract between the Creator and the False Face who is "to provide for human welfare by curing the sick, dying and wounded, provided that occasional feasts be held in his [the Creator's] behalf (Ibid.:113).

The concept or motivation behind the legendary figure of Old Broken Nose is of course the desire to heal on the part of the Iroquois. The elements present in the legend are those of the spirit world of the Iroquois, the stranger, confrontation (Medicine Man and the Stranger), magic or conjuring (the relationship between the Iroquois and the supernatural forces they perceived in nature), violence, movement (of the mountain), deformation (change), a new landscape or world (orographic uplift) a contract between the two characters of the myth, and the dance of the Faces. Exploration of these will help us understand more fully the mask as a mythology.

If we ask what connection the moving of mountains has with the motivation to heal or control disease, we get an answer which begins to unravel the historical origins of the motivation to heal. An earthquake occurred in 1638 which worried the English who had just colonized the coast of New England. This inspired one of the colonists, Roger Williams, to question the local Narragansett Indians about the history of earthquakes in the area. They could indeed recount the earthquakes in chronological sequence because they had mentally associated the earthquakes with past episodes of epidemic disease (Dobyns, 1983:118). As mountains are created through orographic uplift, or the piling up of stone and earth by earthquake activity, the association in the legend between mountain moving, trembling and quaking earth, and the ability to heal disease is clear, if we take the Narragansett association as typical of Natives in northeastern America. The energy with which the stranger spun around only to experience the impact of a mountain smashing into his face must have been the only symbol which the Natives of the Americas, and the Iroquois in particular for our purposes, found powerful enough to represent the profound devastation of European disease. Thus, beneath the forms of the mythology of the False Face legend

is the historical discourse of the spread of European pathogens to the Americas.

In a fascinating study called *Their Number Become Thinned*, Henry F. Dobyns analyses Native American population dynamics in Eastern North America in pre-contact and contact times and specifically, the "dramatic decrease of the Native American population during most of historic time in North America, which led Colonial and then national policy makers to believe that native groups would eventually vanish" (1983:11).

The process which Dobyns calls "widowing the coveted land" (Ibid:7) began with the introduction of Old World pathogens by colonists to the New World. Diseases which occasionally afflicted the naturally immunized colonists, fatally affected the Native population which lacked any previous exposure to these Old World viruses and germs. By 1520, outbreaks caused by these European pathogens had reached epidemic proportion throughout Native America and continued intermittently until 1918. However, "native American depopulation during the sixteenth century far exceeded that of later times" (Ibid:8).

Dobyns provides us with a Disease Chronology for the Seneca tribe of the Iroquois (Ibid.:313ff). In 1510, North America was apparently free of Old World Diseases. Smallpox invaded the continent in 1524, typhoid in 1528, measles in 1532, the Bubonic Plague from 1546-48, influenza in 1558, an unspecified epidemic in 1574, measles again in 1596, the Black Death again in 1618 and 1630, measles in 1634, scarlet fever in 1638, smallpox in 1640, measles in 1658, and smallpox in 1662 and from 1670-72.

In section two of his book, Dobyns studies the relationship between epidemic mortality and settlement shifts in Iroquoian speaking peoples during the contact period. The author focuses on the Seneca tribe and finds a direct relationship between disease and village movement and suggests that the relationship is a casual one. Thus, the discourse of disease is tied to that of movement not only in the legend but in reality, and these in turn are tied to the discourses of violence and confrontation in the legend, or warfare in reality (Ibid).

Susan Johnston argues that recent studies suggest that the virgin soil epidemics which occurred at the time of initial contact may have been responsible for some of the changes in Native society traditionally attributed to culture contact with Europeans. It is now thought that the epidemic experience cause demographic and attitudinal changes of such profundity that they affected every aspect of Native society, be it political, economic, social or cultural. Johnston (1987:14) argues specifically that the wars of the Iroquois of the mid-seventeenth century in the St. Lawrence-eastern Great Lakes region were just such a response to the epidemic experience.

Epidemics originating in Europe spread in successive waves between 1634 and 1646 in the St. Lawrence-eastern Great Lakes region. Warfare had increased by the 1640's and by the 1650's many of the Aboriginal groups of the area had dispersed, leaving their territories abandoned, except for the Iroquois, who not only increased their population with captives and those who had not fled with their original group, but had succeeded in maintaining the cohesiveness of their culture (*Ibid.*).

These virgin-soil epidemics were far more severe to the previously unexposed Native groups than to the Europeans who had some immunity to them. To make matters worse, the epidemics were accompanied by famine, and the traditional Native cures only served to exacerbate the effects of the diseases (*Ibid.*:17). To take the Hurons as an example, people were decidedly stoic in their reaction to the first epidemic, a stoicism which soon melted into dread and despair. Their fear grew as they realized that they could not identify the source of the disease - what spirit, what person - and thus could not pinpoint the proper cure. At last it was the Jesuits whom the Hurons blamed because they did not reveal to them their apparent powers over disease (ie. they had immunity) and the associated famine, drought and enemy raids (*Ibid.*:22). The Jesuits with their mysterious power to control disease would seem to correspond to the stranger of the legend who assumed the spirit medicine man's control over disease. In this way Europeans, and the introduction of European pathogens which accompanied them, becomes bound up with the unseen spirit world in the mind of the Iroquois.

The Native solution to epidemic depopulation, deduced from an analysis of epidemic and warfare data on the western Iroquois, St. Lawrence groups, the Neutral, and the Huron, was to attempt large captures from enemy groups following the heavy epidemic losses. Although this was the strategy of all of the groups cited above, the Iroquois were the most successful at increasing their numbers by this method, thus maintaining their territory and their cultural identity. Hence, warfare was perceived as mainly Iroquoian, even though ironically Iroquois villages in the last analysis must have been composed of more non-Iroquois, and of the most intense warfare, was the seventeenth century. This is also when the tradition of False Faces became firmly entrenched in Iroquoian culture, the False Face dance of the legend (*Ibid.*:24-28).

The mythic elements of deformation or change, and a new world, are in history the radical change brought about by the impact of the European on the Iroquois which led to the Iroquois' new world. One symptom of this change, of this new world, was the development of the False Face Society, its masks and rituals as much a response to the devastation of disease as

was warfare, both of which can be considered acts of survival (Fenton, 1987:453). It has been argued that the trauma of these new diseases was so great that a reevaluation of the spirit forces occurred with the result that the False Faces were seen both as the agents and the curers of windborne disease (Ibid.:71) - a perception in accord with the observation of the Europeans as agents of diseases to which they themselves were immune - thereby appearing to be able to cause and cure illness.

"The concept," as Barthes writes, "is a kind of nebula, the condensation, more or less hazy, of a certain knowledge. Its elements are linked by associative relations: it is supported not by an extension but by a depth...its mode of presence is memorial" (1987:122). The concept of healing is supported in the Iroquois legend by the elements of the spirit world, the stranger, confrontation, violence, movement, deformation, and a new world, each of which has its origin in an historical discourse. The mask and the legend are signifiers of the same concept of healing, yet if the mask is difficult to read when divorced from the performance of which it is an integral part; its message becomes clear only within the context of performance.

The False Face Society which performs the ceremony is the preeminent medicine society of the Iroquois. Within that society itself, the order of membership is based upon specific cures, particular dreams, and participation. A version of the legend of the False Face is recited at each ceremony of the False Face Society (Fenton, 1987:101). The pattern of events which is generally followed in all Iroquoian medicine feasts begins with a invitation by messenger, a meeting at which is made an announcement of intent, an invocation of tobacco to the spirit forces asking for their cooperation, the ritual itself, and a feast to terminate the events. Usually there is also a speech of thanks to those who participated (Ibid.:23-24).

A brief investigation of the ritual or ceremony (Fenton, 1982:360-364) in which the masks are used illuminates their function and brings out the parallels between the elements of the legend and the ceremony. Spring and autumn housecleaning is performed by the False Face Society to scare away any diseases the settlement may still harbour. The False Faces visit every house in turn, and are heralded by the subsidiary medicine society of the Husk Faces who represent "another class of earthbound supernatural beings who formed a pact with mankind and taught them the arts of hunting and agriculture" (Speck, 1965:70). The terrifying cries, the sounds of rattles, and singing issue from the false Faces company. They scour the outside of the house, crawl through the door and make their way through each room. Every room, every alcove, even the area under the beds is searched for disease by these masked men. If someone is discovered ill, tobacco is burned and the resulting hot ashes blown on to him.

Later the entire community gathers at the longhouse where all the spirit forces are thanked. Husk Faces again announce the arrival of the False Faces who bolt into the room and creep toward the fire. Those who wish to be healed are summoned toward the fire to be minisitered to by the False Faces.

Dances take place for each class of Faces, first with the matrons of the tribe who then designate couples to imitate the dancing of the healers. Everyone must dance and participate in the ritual. Those who resist, risk possession by malevolent forces. The Doorkeeper, also masked, ensures this participation. The dancing ceases with songs for requests to blow ashes, after which follows the feast.

This ritual is repeated during the Midwinter Festival and also on an individual basis for anyone who needs healing. The key to the ceremony is the belief that whenever the help of the leader of the common forest people is invoked by burning tobacco and singing the songs of curing, those who wear the masks will be infused with the supernatural power to heal (Fenton, 1982:331).

The warfare/confrontation discourse is implicit in the fact that the False Faces were ceremonially fed the warpath diet of a thick gruel of parched cornmeal and maple sugar. Illness was regarded as the work of a secret enemy (Wallace, 1972:80-84). Again, it is tied to the element of violence represented by the terrifying screams, and to the chasing away of disease and therefore death, like their warrior counterparts. As Wallace writes, "Death aroused the most violent reactions..." which arguably are acted out in the public exorcism of disease and sounded out through the cries of "mock terror" (Ibid.:84). The element of movement present both in the legend and historically is implicit in the Faces visits to each house in the community and thereby, the 'chasing away' of disease. This is the so-called "Travelling rite" of the False Faces as they visit each house on the way to the longhouse for the main feasts of the spring and fall housecleaning and also at the Midwinter Festival (Fenton, 1987:65). The movement discourse is also underscored by the shaking of the turtle rattle throughout the ceremony, for the earth rested on the back of a giant snapping turtle in Iroquoian cosmology and shaking it corresponds to the movement of earth and mountain in the legend, or the creation of a new world, albeit due to the arrival of the European, the stranger. The assumption of supernatural power by those who wear the mask corresponds to the spirit world alluded to in the legend.

Barthes writes that, "in myth the meaning is distorted by the concept... The concept, literally, deforms, but does not abolish the meaning" (Barthes, 1987:122-123). The concept of healing can distort a full reading of the False Faces. It is easy to overlook or to dismiss the historical situation from which



the concept derived in favour of, for instance, an emphasis on the mysticism of Iroquoian healing rites. However, as Barthes writes: "Myth has an imperative, buttonholing character: stemming from an historical concept, directly springing from contingency...it is I whom it has come to seek. It turned toward me, I am subjected to its intentional force, it summons me to receive its expansive ambiguity" (Ibid.:124). The False Faces as masks alone cannot fulfill this definition of a mythology; they must be seen in the context of the False Face ceremony to have this appeal to the spectator, to create an imperative, to bestow the possibility of meaning, to evidence the elements outlined above which point to their history. Otherwise, again as Barthes tells us, a mask is only a "frozen speech: at the moment of reaching me, it suspends itself, turns away and assumes the look of generality: it stiffens, it makes itself look neutral and innocent. The appropriation of the concept is suddenly driven away once more by the literalness of the meaning" (Ibid.:125).

It seems that in using Barthes' approach to the False Face as a mythology, we have stumbled upon the reasoning behind the insistence by the Iroquois today that the masks not be taken out of context. Their sacredness is in their aliveness, an aliveness which cannot tell its tale through frozen speech, but which must be reenacted in a live performance of the False Face ceremony or an oral recitation of the legend. As Fenton writes: "...I can say that the distance between a collection of masks in a museum and the False Face society in action is of the order of a transport into another world" (Fenton, 1987:28). To examine the False Face as an independent art object, or to write the legend down as a language object, is to empty out the form of meaning, of history. It is to see only the frozen mask and not the living face. Just as Native Americans had no word for art and did not separate art from life, the early Iroquois had no word for mask; it was instead a living face with a living history. Today the Seneca term for mask is still "face", the Onondaga refer to the mask as *Hadu'i* or *Hodo:wi* (Hunchback), and the Mohawk call the mask "face," while on other reserves the masks are called False Faces in English (Ibid.:27;503).

#### The "Real" False Face Resurrected

No words adequately convey the dramatic behaviour of these actors; there is no substitute for seeing the False Faces in action...Even if the Iroquois were to make a formal distinction between mask types based on the content of myths, it should be noted that the members of the society do not consistently use the same mask always to portray the same being, and the same mask does not perform a consistent function in the ceremony.

But with it, the individual owner performs several roles of increasing importance during his lifetime. This disregard of native theory in ritual practice makes a shambles of overnice formal distinctions...the False Faces are like people: They express different moods and characteristics (Fenton, 1967:14-15).

The creation of new Faces is ongoing despite the well-established tradition of mask types. This continuous creation or renewal of form is largely due to the fact that the best carvers are also members of the Society of Faces and performers of its ceremonies (Ibid.:15); that is, the masks are part of a living tradition, a living performance and context, and thereby signal the aliveness of the Iroquoian culture. An interesting corollary of this is that the pictographic carvings of human faces on canes, which continued into the nineteenth century, were used to stimulate the memory of the rituals of the Condolence Council for mourning a dead chief and inaugurating his successor. These faces found their opposite in the Iroquoian concept of "Death, The Faceless." To the Iroquoian there was no person where there was no face (Ibid.:70). The Faces of the Iroquois and their ongoing creation attest to the survival of the Iroquois. To paraphrase Kubler and apply his thoughts to the specific situation of the Iroquois, the universe of the Iroquois maintains its form by perpetuating the self-resembling shapes of the False Faces. This replication process which has filled their history since the advent of European epidemics in North America, prolongs the stability of the Iroquoian past and allows its sense and pattern to emerge (Kubler, 1962:71-72).

In Kubler's view, ritual is but another form of replication and the False Face ceremony is therefore another level of replication of the original False Face as we examined it in the Iroquoian legend above.<sup>3</sup> It is the ritual replication which is the "real" False Face, the contextualized Face. For the ritual puts the Face back into the context out of which it emerged; it situates its present in its past. What Bertold Brecht wrote of acting in the following poem is perfectly applicable to the act of placing the Face back into the ceremony for which it was made.

The word *instant* has been replaced by False Face and the word *acting* by study (Berger, 1980:61).

So you should simply make the False Face  
Stand out, without in the process hiding  
what you are making it stand out from.

Give your study  
That progression of one-thing-after-another,  
that attitude of

Working up what you have taken on. In this way  
 You will show the flow of events and also the course  
 Of your work, permitting the spectator  
 To experience this Now on many levels, coming from  
     Previously and  
 Merging into Afterwards, also having much else Now  
 Alongside it. He is sitting not only  
 In your theatre but also  
 In the world.

### NOTES

1. Greg Ing, comments in Northern and Native Studies Graduate Seminar, Carleton University, 1988.
2. Legend paraphrased from MacFarland, 1968:88-92.
3. These comments take off from Berger, 1980:61.

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