

ISHI'S STORY

From: James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the 21st Century*. (Harvard University Press 2013, pp. 91-191) Pre-publication version.



[Frontispiece: Drawing by L. Frank, used courtesy of the artist. A self-described “decolonizationist” L. Frank traces her ancestry to the Ajachmem/Tongva tribes of Southern California. She is active in organizations dedicated to the preservation and renewal of California’s indigenous cultures. Her paintings and drawings have been exhibited world wide and her coyote drawings from *News from Native California* are collected in *Acorn Soup*, published in 1998 by Heyday Press. Like coyote, L. Frank sometimes writes backwards.]

Chapter 4

Ishi's Story

"Ishi's Story" could mean "the story of Ishi," recounted by a historian or some other authority who gathers together what is known with the goal of forming a coherent, definitive picture. No such perspective is available to us, however. The story is unfinished and proliferating. My title could also mean "Ishi's own story," told by Ishi, or on his behalf, a narration giving access to his feelings, his experience, his judgments. But we have only suggestive fragments and enormous gaps: a silence that calls forth more versions, images, endings. "Ishi's story," tragic and redemptive, has been told and re-told, by different people with different stakes in the telling. These interpretations in changing times are the materials for my discussion.

I. Terror and Healing

On August 29th, 1911, a "wild man," so the story goes, stumbled into civilization. He was cornered by dogs at a slaughterhouse on the outskirts of Oroville, a small town in Northern California. The man had been hiding for forty years with a dwindling remnant of his kin in the steep ravines of Mill Creek and Deer Creek, feeder streams of the Sacramento River in the Mt. Lassen foothills. His people, the "Yahi," were virtually exterminated by white settler militias in the late 1800s. Some fled north, taking refuge and intermarrying with other Indian groups around

Redding and the Pit River. Those who stayed were pursued, killed, kidnapped, and starved, until only a single individual remained in Deer Creek.

The man's remarkable story has come down to us-- an unfinished legacy of the Gold Rush, that epochal disaster for Native Californians. The survivor, a Yana-speaking Indian, whose personal or family names were never revealed, is known to us simply as "Ishi," a label affixed in 1911 by the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, and made famous fifty years later by Theodora Kroeber's great book.

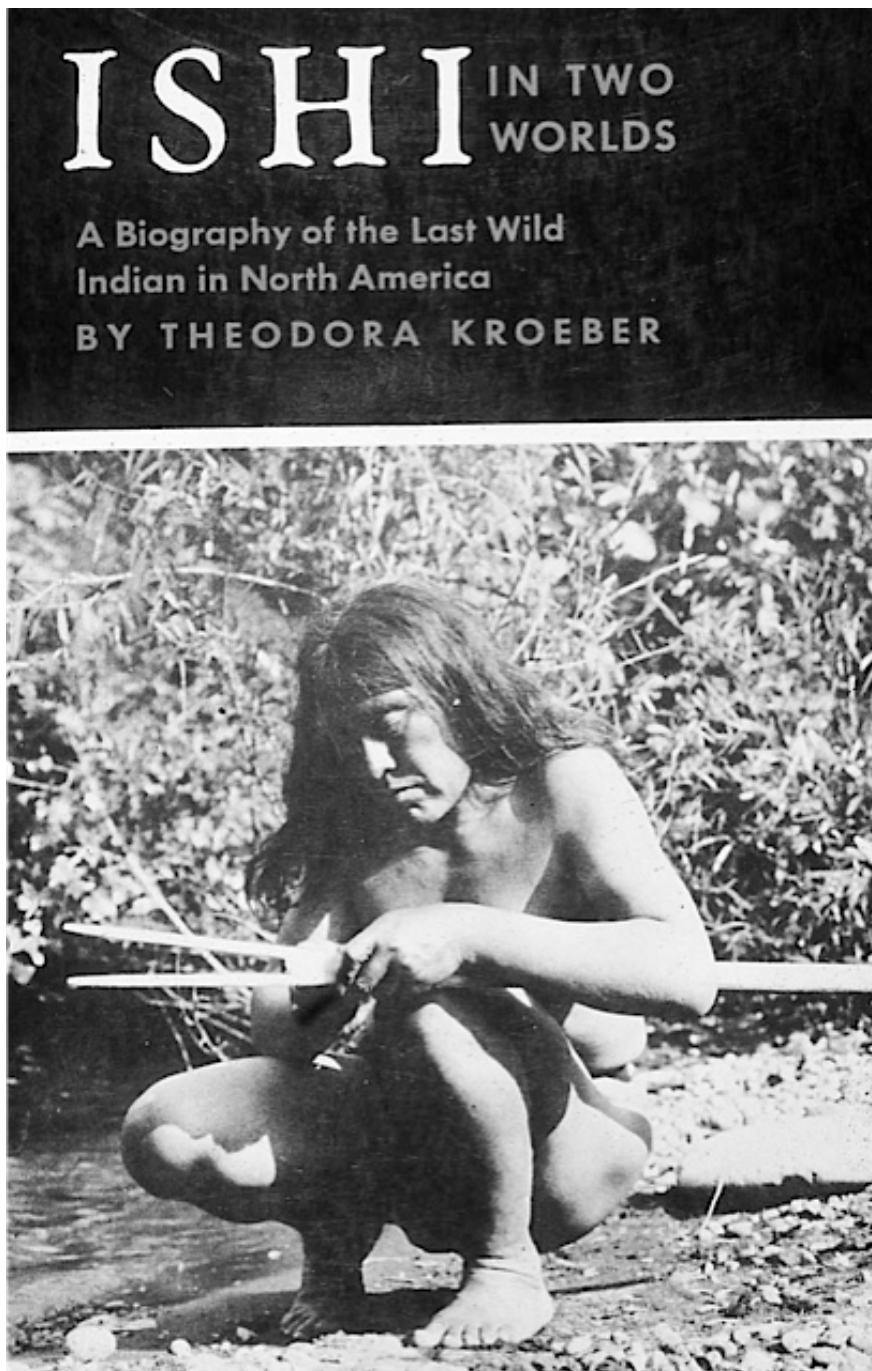


Figure 1 (*Ishi in Two Worlds* original cover)

Theodora Kroeber, Alfred Kroeber's second wife and widow, published *Ishi in Two Worlds* in 1961. This "biography of the last wild Indian in America" was an instant classic, widely translated and a perennial best-seller for the University of California Press. The original cover

photo, reproduced in many later editions shows Ishi in his Mill Creek habitat--an image of pre-contact Indian life, close to the ground. It is a staged performance. For the photo was taken near the end of Ishi's life, after four years in San Francisco, during a return trip instigated by his anthropologist friends. Ishi's face, in partial shadow that has been intensified in the printing, suggests a primitive mask.

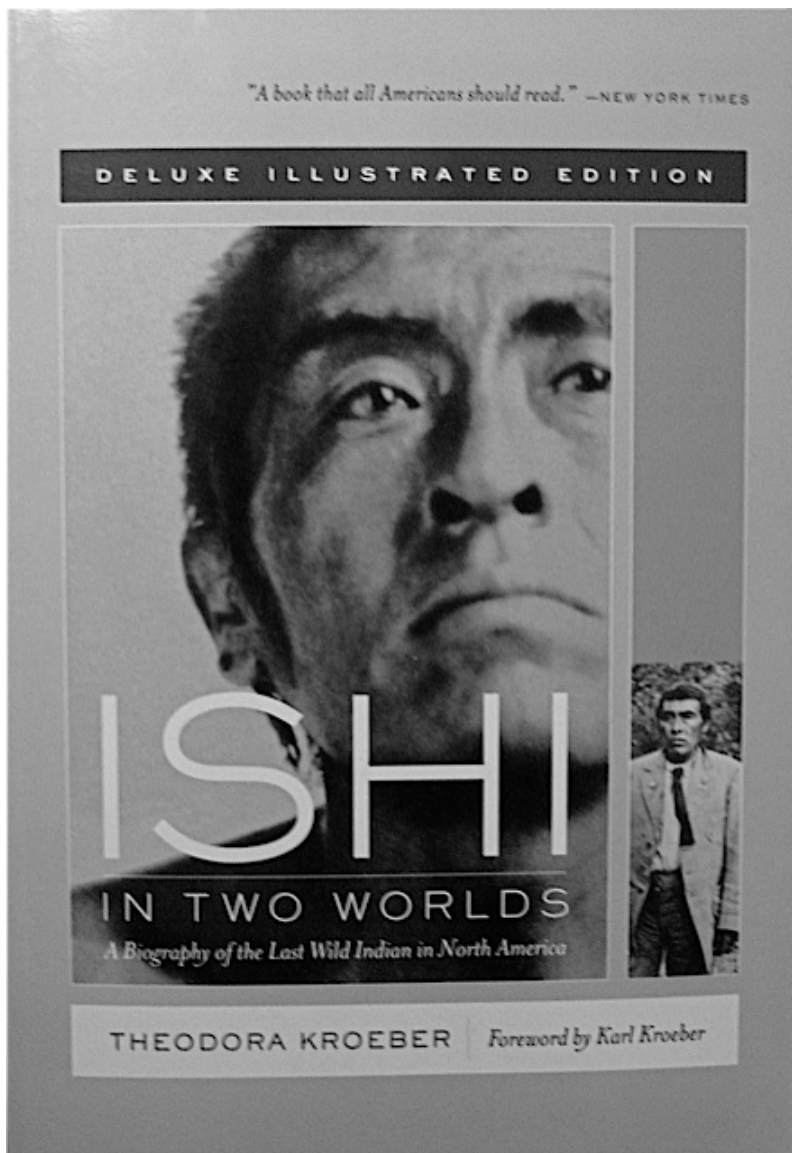


Figure 2

This 2007 edition of *Ishi in Two Worlds* includes a much-expanded selection of photos showing Ishi in many garbs and poses, plus images drawn from the late-nineteenth century historical

record. The cover has been redesigned to suit the changing times. All elements suggesting primitiveness are gone. Ishi is visible in a suit and tie; and the somewhat distanced “object” of an ethnographic gaze from the earlier covers is now a divided, complex “subject.” Seen up close, with part of his face outside the frame, Ishi’s expression is proud, troubled, ambiguous... The photograph, taken at the time of Ishi’s capture, transmits a more defiant mood than more familiar images.



Figure 3 (Ishi at the Oroville jail)

The most reproduced image of the “wild man” was taken in 1911 by a local photographer at the Oroville jail. Ishi was held there temporarily, prior to the arrival of Kroeber's assistant, Thomas Waterman, who would take the refugee to a new home in San Francisco. In the photograph, his fear and emaciation (very different from the well-fed man in the 1961 cover photo) are evident. Normally the Yahi's hair would have been long, but following custom he has burned his short, in mourning for his deceased family. The image is a powerful construct. A weird lack of background-- the result of a backdrop, and perhaps of some work in the darkroom—makes the man seem completely cut off. Hovering nowhere, almost extraterrestrial, a lost soul... Stripped of any context, he is pure artifact, available for collection; pure victim, ready to be rescued.

Theodora Kroeber's book about "Ishi" made this name-of-convenience familiar, personal, even intimate through its absorbing account of the refugee's life in San Francisco where he became something of a celebrity. For five years, he lived and worked at the University of California's Museum of Anthropology. There he was employed as a custodian, and on Sundays, he would cheerfully demonstrate Yahi techniques of arrowhead manufacture and archery for eager crowds. The Indian was also a willing ethnographic informant, particularly in the areas of oral tradition, technology, and language. Many remarked on his "gentlemanly" restraint, his decency and humor. Confronted with the civilization of San Francisco the Yahi sustained a mix of curiosity and reserve. He was less impressed by airplanes than by doorknobs, spring loaded window-shades, and matches. What terrors he certainly felt (of crowds, of human bones stored at the anthropology museum), he largely kept to himself. In 1916, Ishi succumbed to the tuberculosis that was widespread at the time, and particularly dangerous to Native Californians.

Ishi's name, during his five years at the museum, would become closely intertwined with that of his friend and protector, Alfred Kroeber, a towering figure in North American anthropology, and founder of the discipline at the new University of California. A relationship of respect and loyalty

developed between them—a friendship conditioned by both men’s sense of restraint, by Ishi’s dependence on someone he called “Big Chiep,” and by the demands of science. Over time, their relationship has come to be burdened with significance, and so Ishi’s story is also, inescapably, Kroeber’s.

Theodora Kroeber evokes Ishi's time in San Francisco with skill and compassion. While she never knew the subject of her biography, she had access to many who remembered him vividly, most notably, of course, her husband, who died just before the book’s publication. She also drew on a substantial collection of photographic, acoustic, and documentary records preserved by the Berkeley Anthropology Museum (Jacknis 2008). While recent scholars such as Orin Starn, writing from different places of hindsight, have identified factual errors and have questioned some of her emphases (as I do here), *Ishi in Two Worlds* remains crucial. It is still the source for most of what we know about Ishi’s life. With a generous appreciation of human complexity and an eye for the telling detail, Theodora Kroeber, a novice author, created a masterpiece. Reading her, generations have come to know the man called "Ishi."

This knowledge is a mixture of insight and blindness. The book’s compelling human portrait often makes it hard to recall the severe limits on what was actually known of this man by her principal sources. We forget how little Yahi Alfred Kroeber and his colleagues spoke, and how rudimentary was the Yahi's English. His stories and songs, more than fifty hours preserved on wax recording cylinders, remain very partially understood--for there was no other source for Ishi's language, a dialect of the Yana group. The man's excited voice comes across the decades. He loved, apparently, to tell stories. We hear his words distantly, with only a fragmentary sense of what he was trying to say, or to whom.

Ishi's story does not end in 1917, or with its most influential re-telling four decades later. His death and its aftermath are still charged with meaning for diverse California audiences. And it is increasingly significant today that the human portrait created by *Ishi in Two Worlds* was not based on the views of Native Californians. Though Theodora Kroeber apparently did not feel the need to seek out and include, native perspectives on this resonant life, she knew and was friendly with California Indians. The Cherokee Scholar Karen Biestman (2003: 148) notes the omission. "Had Mrs. Kroeber consulted Natives in the region...she might have heard narratives of intermarriage, shared experiences, and mutual histories. Ishi's life and Yana existence are alive in the oral traditions of these people..." Biestman goes on to recognize the value of *Ishi in Two Worlds*, given the 1950s "termination" period, a time when stereotypic Cowboys and Indians populated the general culture, and complex, sympathetic images of tribal people were rare. As we will see, the historical moment has shifted. Theodora Kroeber's perspective seems more partial and her book has become meaningful in new ways, viewed from different distances.

Ishi wouldn't talk about his family--the dead; and we have no idea why, exactly, he walked out of hiding toward Oroville where the dogs cornered him. Why did he travel south? Where was he going? It has long been assumed that, lonely and exhausted, he was simply giving himself up... to white civilization. Oral histories of the Maidu, into whose traditional lands he was walking, come to a different conclusion.

My own recounting of Ishi's story holds off the tendency of narratives to come to closure, it works to keep the gaps open. And it registers the recent claims on Ishi's behalf by Native Californians, claims that make inescapable the question of who should represent his legacy and for what purposes. This is a critical, troubling question that should not be too quickly resolved. I follow the retellings of Ishi's story: additions, critiques, and appropriations that make it

meaningful for the future, not the past, of Native California. For Ishi was evidently not the "last" Indian in California, nor was he, except in a very artificial sense, a "wild" Indian.

Theodora Kroeber wrapped up Ishi's story in a humane, angry, lovely, bittersweet package. Now it's being unwrapped--by people with different stakes in the man, his poignant tale, and in his physical remains.

*

Under the gaze of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, a miner works near the Sacramento river. A grizzly bear rests at her feet and ships ply in the background. Wildlife, agriculture, natural beauty, commerce, and opportunity are all represented on California's Great Seal ... The seal was designed by Major R. S. Garnett of the U. S Army and adopted by the Constitutional Convention of 1849 before California became a state in June 1850.

--"The Great Seal of California" (netstate.com)

My engagement with Ishi's story began in the classroom where I taught *Ishi in Two Worlds* to University of California undergraduates. My course, "Constructions of the Exotic," analyzed images of "primitive" peoples produced by Western scholars, travelers, photographers, and filmmakers. Having offered the class several times, I thought I should find a text closer to home than the Melanesian and African materials I had been featuring. *Ishi in Two Worlds* was a natural choice because it revisits California's founding history, and because it is a complex portrait of an individual Indian that both exhibits and questions stereotypes. Moreover, the book raised important problems of historical perspective: it embodied liberal assumptions still held by my students, while being dated enough to make these assumptions visible. The pedagogical challenge

was to affirm Theodora Kroeber's generous rendition of an exemplary life, while also bringing out her book's blind spots. We needed to recognize a history of changing appropriations of Ishi, including our own.

By juxtaposing this poignant story of the "last wild Indian in America" with works by contemporary Indian authors I hoped to make my students feel less confident about the inevitable disappearance of tribal societies. What was missing from our state's Great Seal, with its images of nature, commerce, mining, and classical culture? How was this vision of progress without California's Indians a self-fulfilling prophecy? Theodora Kroeber's unflinching account of terror and ethnic cleansing disrupted the pastoral landscape. With her help, we confronted the historical amnesia that supported our moral superiority when contemplating violence and genocide in distant parts of the world. Ishi's story reminded us that officially-supported Indian-hunting parties, who fired into sleeping villages and spared neither women, children nor the aged, were little more than a century old in our own Golden State. The world Ishi grew up in was not essentially different from the Congo of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*--another book on the syllabus--where imperial invasion, extractive capitalism and racial extermination coalesced in a kind of normalcy.

Teaching about Ishi resonated with my other research interests. A long-standing concern for the history of Anthropology found much to contemplate. Thus toward the end of this essay I give particular attention to Alfred Kroeber, to the tradition he founded at the University of California, and to current prospects for a postcolonial science. Anthropology tends to be celebrated in early versions of Ishi's story and questioned, even vilified, in its more recent re-tellings. I offer a more dialectical view, drawing on recent reflexive, collaborative trends in a changing discipline. I also find particular support in the writings of Ursula K. Le Guin, who as the Kroebers' daughter, is part of the tale's extended family. Her anthropologically-inflected science fiction meditates on

issues fundamental to Ishi's legacy: colonization, violence, cultural transformation and exchange. And she has helped me think about possible futures in a post-colonial California. The many visions and revisions that populate this essay are all, ultimately, part of this open question. To confront a determinate history and think beyond it—without being frozen by denial, victimhood, or guilt--this is surely the challenge for diverse people living together, trailing specific, entangled, sometimes tragic pasts.

A great deal has been written, said, danced, sung and filmed about Ishi during the past couple of decades. Much of this production finds a hearing in what follows. However I limit myself almost entirely to public expressions, with occasional traces of more discreet local retellings or the oral traditions of California Indians. There are certainly voices, and deep silences, that I don't know about. In the sphere of publication four important books have recently appeared: *Ishi in Three Centuries*, edited by Clifton and Karl Kroeber (2003), *Ishi's Brain*, by Orin Starn (2004), *Wild Men: Ishi and Kroeber in the Wilderness of Modern America*, by Douglas Cazaux Sackman (2010), and *Ishi's Untold Story in his First World*, by Richard Burrill (2011). Readers wishing to update *Ishi in Two Worlds* (still an essential starting point) can now turn, as I have, to these extensions and revisions.

The title, *Ishi in Three Centuries*, is already an intervention. From Theodore Kroeber's "two worlds" (a before/after sequence with inevitable resonances of innocence and loss, a Fall into "the modern world") the story shifts to a three-part history--necessarily open-ended, since the third century of Ishi revisionism is just beginning. The volume brings together a broad range of recent writing: documentary sources and controversies; scholarly articles on Ishi's stone tools, essays on sound recordings and spoken language; close analyses of his image in popular culture and of one of his better-translated texts. Karl Kroeber provides a spirited defense of anthropological humanism (profitably read in counterpoint to my approach here). And space is made for contrary

perspectives, notably an important critique by Nancy Scheper-Hughes. Most significantly, perhaps, *Ishi in Three Centuries* is the first publication or film about Ishi to include significant contributions from native sources.

Ishi's Brain, a very different kind of book, is subtitled "In Search of the Last 'Wild' Indian." Part ethnography, part detective story, part personal quest, part historical revision, Orin Starn's narrative follows in detail the recent repatriation movement and especially the discovery of Ishi's brain, "lost" in storage at the Smithsonian Institution. Having played a key role in this discovery, Starn writes as an engaged anthropologist, a participant-observer and an advocate. He is deeply informed, lucid and fair in his judgments. My own thinking about Ishi's legacy has been strongly inflected by the events of the last decade, and Orin Starn has generously shared his research with me during this period. We attended many of the same gatherings, and I can trace many of the ideas that find expression here to our conversations or to passages in his indispensable book.

Wild Men and *Ishi's Untold Story* were published as I was finishing the present text, and so I have relied on them less than the others. But each has provided materials and insights not to be found elsewhere. Douglas Sackman is a cultural historian who provides a richly contextualized narrative of Ishi's life and times. He is particularly illuminating on contemporary issues surrounding nature and wildness, on Ishi's San Francisco explorations, and on A. L. Kroeber's complex psychological relations with his charge. Richard Burrell is a local historian, Ishi enthusiast, and indefatigable archivist of anything related to settler-Indian relations around Oroville. His self-published book is an annotated scrapbook containing important oral-historical interviews, documentary traces of all kinds, maps, evocative historic photographs and clippings. The many voices collected here are suggestive records of cross-cultural and inter-tribal relations in turn-of-the century Northern California--supplemented by Burrell's sometimes incautious extrapolations.

My own retelling depends on the postcolonial ethnographic revisions of authors such as Greg Sarris (1993, 1994), Les Field (2008), Brian Bibby (2005), L Frank and Kim Hogeland (2007). Each of these innovative works contributes a partial and carefully positioned, view of Native California history and people today. What I have to offer in no way substitutes for their detail and intimacy. My perspective is that of an outsider, empowered and limited by distance and mobility. Joining the newly discordant polylogue about Ishi, I try to keep things interrupted and in process. Ishi has served all manner of people as a source of healing imagination, and I am not immune from his magic. The wild man's reopened story as an important sign of the times, prefiguring an emergent, if always impeded postcolonial California. Perhaps in saying this I am reaching for a different kind of utopia (Le Guin (1982): history moving sideways, looping—syncopated, always emerging, never arriving). At the very least, multiplicity and irony make possible a critique of univocal authority, whether the assertion of a single truth comes from dominant powers or insurgent social actors. In my story of stories the forward movement of progress, revolution, and epochal change are held in suspicion. Instead of a clear historical path, we confront a bush of alternatives, a present reality of entangled relations without an available “outside” or a clearly discernable “after.”

The consequence of such a commitment to complexity *in medias res* is a kind of hesitation, and distance taken: a posture of wait and see; at best, perhaps, an alert, divinatory attitude. This is the “historical” perspective I aspire to, without any guarantee of overview, objectivity or superior sophistication. Perhaps paradoxically, I have found ironic distance to be a catalyst for transgressive hope. Forever interrupting: “What else is there?” “Not so fast...” (Clifford 2000) Of course ironic disengagement need not become an end in itself. Charles Hale (2006) makes a strong case for activist commitment against what he represents as postmodern cultural critique—two pathways for an academic anthropology struggling to become postcolonial. I disagree only when the contrast hardens into a zero-sum, either-or choice. The openness to contingency and

multiplicity I cultivate here is neither a final resting place nor a prescription for all. It certainly does not claim an epistemologically superior “meta” perspective. It is a form of critical attentiveness not of disengagement--a necessary moment in our intellectual work of historicizing and cognitive mapping. This kind of irony can inhibit determinism and moralism, keeping us lucidly off-center among all the contemporary transformations.

An Igbo proverb, quoted a quarter century ago in *The Predicament of Culture* (Clifford 1988) makes even more sense today: “You don’t stand in one place to watch a masquerade.”

*

“Ha, Ha. You white man... Ha. Ha. Ha.

--“Old Mary” (in Jaime de Angulo, *Indians in Overalls*.)

*

Ishi’s story has braided together multiple narrative forms: pastoral fables, a tragic denouement, a survivor’s tale, plots of savagism and civility, loss and reconciliation, sacrifice and healing. For almost a century it sustained an understanding of historical fatality. But under pressure, in new conjunctures, the story has been unraveling.

Figures like Ishi--“the last of his tribe,” “the last wild Indian”--crop up frequently in settler-colonial histories. Wherever pre-existing populations are decimated and violently displaced, the indigenizing ideology of the newcomers will sooner or later require an Ishi: iterations of the “Last of the Mohicans” or “Derzu Uzala.” The new society needs requiems for lost worlds, versions of “imperialist nostalgia” (Rosaldo 1989) However much colonial settlers claim they are entering an empty land, or a place whose inhabitants are less than human, childlike, or needing

“improvement,” they know, at some level, that what’s happening is an invasion, a brutal conquest. For some, “exterminate all the brutes,” or “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” will suffice, especially at times of insecurity, real or manufactured. But for most, the violent replacement of one people by another requires more scientific and humanistic rationales. In the nineteenth century, ideas of racial evolution and survival of the fittest justified the “necessary” replacement of one people by another. Notions of natural historical “extinction” based on an analogy with animal species, could justify brutal acts. Killing savages, or letting them die in isolated holding areas, was just helping along the inevitable. (Lindqvist 1996) In a more humane mode, projects such as the “civilizing mission,” religious “conversion,” or civic “assimilation” all pointed toward the same end.

But these more liberal rationalizations of conquest could never be quite adequate as founding myths for a settler society, a new population sinking roots in a vacated land, aspiring to permanence. Projects of conversion and assimilation were too contradictory and uneven. At least some of the prior occupants of settler lands, spatially segregated by necessity of conquest, survived, holding onto a distinctive racial and cultural disposition. “Savages” could never really be “civilized.” Assimilation would always be incomplete. A clearer break was needed, some terminal moment that could symbolically end the violence of occupation and found the settler nation. As Deborah Bird Rose argues in an illuminating discussion of settler-colonial violence and its aftermaths, a teleological, Christian, historical vision required a sharp break, or “year zero.” This before-after hinge structured an inevitable progress: civilization replacing savagery, white people supplanting aboriginals (Rose 2004). Stories like that of Ishi, served a sacrificial purpose, bringing the period of conquest to a close, often in a spirit of tragic pathos. The physical death of an individual could stand for a collective birth: a historical period definitively ends, another opens, finally in the clear.

None of this is very clear now. The finality condensed in figures like Ishi cannot obscure the many deaths, transformations, struggles, negotiations, and rebirths that remain integral to unfinished settler-colonial histories. Tasmania's famous Truganini may or may not have been the last pure specimen of her race, but there are plenty of indigenous Tasmanians active today in land claims and sovereignty politics. Likewise, the California Indians whose death knell tolled in the name "Ishi" are a growing presence in the state, active in linguistic and cultural renewal, expansive gaming operations, repatriation and tribal recognition claims. In California, as in many settler-colonial nations, the struggles of indigenous, "first nations," people, have become newly visible. Ishi's story no longer functions as an elegiac resolution for the state's founding violence. It takes on new meanings, messier and more ambiguous.

Ishi's story is being "taken back," in consequential ways, by Native Californians. The present essay affirms this necessary process. And it argues that what is underway can't simply be a matter of reversing a colonial relationship or returning to a true account, as if it were a question of uncovering, finally, the man's real, proper name. For no one, of any tradition, can credibly claim to know Ishi's name or very much about his subjective reality. He remains, powerfully, an enigma--or as Gerald Vizenor (1994) calls him, "Ishi Obscura." We hear the personal name "Ishi" in a veritable forest of quotation marks. Yet this very obscurity sheds a kind of light. As we will see, the changing versions of the wild man of Oroville bring us in touch with the ongoing contact-histories, simultaneously wounded and inventive, of Native California.

*

Ishi in Two Worlds was written in the late 1950s and published in 1961, a year after Alfred Kroeber's death. While the book, in style and tone, is Theodora Kroeber's, it strongly reflects the view of her main informant. She tells us that even forty years later her husband found the story

too painful to write. She accepted the task. *Ishi in Two Worlds*, although it reflects a particular, now dated, retrospective view, remains the best-documented, fullest account of Ishi. One often finds it cited as if it were a primary source (along with her later compilation of documents relevant to Ishi, co-edited with the Berkeley anthropologist Robert Heizer). Theodora Kroeber, who began to write late in life, when her children had grown up, skillfully wove together an individual's biography with California history to create an engrossing, often moving narrative. What Ishi and his people suffered is told with a restrained, but unflinching, outrage. In style the book is literary but not flowery, never sacrificing precision for sentimental effect. The details of Ishi's life in San Francisco are recorded in evocative detail, with a nice eye for incongruity. And though "pre-feminist" by recent standards, Theodora Kroeber does at times gently register a distanced view of male relationships: Ishi's friendships at the museum. While she takes seriously her work as a documenter and historian, she is primarily a biographer concerned to make a violently interrupted life cohere — the portrait of a sympathetic, knowable individual. Karl Kroeber (2004), in a new introduction to his mother's book, stresses the continuing value of her project: recognizing and translating Ishi's fundamental humanity. The present essay explores the ways this fundamental human access has been produced and disrupted, made and unmade by differing social actors. Ishi is still being found and lost in translation.

Reading *Ishi in Two Worlds* today is an exercise in self-historicizing. We confront the difference between 1961 when it appeared, and our own standpoint almost a half-century later. What has intervened? The sixties and their aftermaths: most importantly the various Indian revival movements. Red Power, The American Indian Movement, Wounded Knee II (the 1973 standoff), a complex tribal and pan-Indian politics that has broken the monopoly of whites speaking for Indians in a broad range of public spheres. At global scales, the political landscape has been altered by the cumulative effects of post-war decolonization--uneven and locally articulated, hemmed in by neo-colonialism, but making spaces for a broad range of contestations and voices.

Tribal capitalism has more recently made its appearance (development corporations in Alaska, Indian gaming in California, cultural tourism virtually everywhere). New, urban-based forms of identity politics, and “indigenous” mobilizations are being pursued at regional, hemispheric and international levels. Much has changed.

Theodora Kroeber's book is a work of the 1950s reaching back to the early years of the century and the heroic institutionalization of Boasian anthropology. But it also reflects a darker late twentieth-century consciousness. Tim Buckley, in an acute discussion of Alfred Kroeber and his legacy, observes:

By 1960, the year of Kroeber's death, a half-century of cataclysm suggested that his faith in progress had been misplaced. Theodore Kroeber was twenty-one years younger—a writer fully in and of the twentieth century.—and she seems to have written *Ishi in Two Worlds* in part in response to what the mid-twentieth century had revealed about Western Civilization. The Nazi Holocaust in Eastern Europe, the bombing of Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Stalin's mass murders, the collapse of empire and the end of classic colonialism after the Second world War, the Negro civil rights movement in the United States of the mid-fifties, all helped to place the history of Indian-white relations in late nineteenth-century California in a harsh new light. In the late 1950s, the evidence that a profound potential for genocide, racism, and oppression lay darkly in the very heart of Western civilization seemed irrefutable. (289-91)

No reader can forget Theodora Kroeber's uncompromising narrative of genocide. As Buckley emphasizes, *Ishi in Two Worlds* “confronted a wide, twentieth-century audience for the first time with some of the bare facts” of early California colonialism. Her book is very raw, very specific, on the relentless, cold-blooded, extermination of California's original inhabitants, and in

particular Ishi's people the "Mill Creek Indians" as they were called. After the 1860s, a diminishing tribal remnant, which included the boy Ishi, was driven into deep hiding for forty years. Ishi thus grew to maturity in a situation of unnatural isolation. (Though exactly how isolated the Mill Creeks were during this period, both from white society and from their Indian neighbors, has been questioned by recent revisionist history and archaeology, as well as by native oral traditions.) The ordeal ends with Ishi, his mother, sister, and another old man scattered by a surveying party that stumbles on their refuge, which they called "Grizzly Bear's Hiding Place," invisible up under a cliff. Ishi apparently never sees his sister and the man again. His ailing mother dies soon after, and then he's left alone. Three years later he walks south toward Oroville and the lands of the Concow Maidu.

From the wild man's first appearance in 1911 through *Ishi in Two Worlds*, and beyond, this journey would be framed in white society as a passage from "the Stone Age" to "the modern world." The refugee's actions were interpreted as "giving himself up," a kind of suicide or acceptance of fate... In any event, once he left Mill Creek there seemed to be only one historical path he could follow. It led inexorably to the "future:" white civilization and death in the Anthropology Museum.

However, the question of where Ishi was going depends on a more specific topography. Feeder streams of the Sacramento River such as Deer and Mill Creek ascend toward Mount Lassen through country that is, even today, wild and difficult of access--valleys bordered by steep ridges, tangles of brush and poison oak. In the mid-nineteenth Century, Yana-speaking groups occupied this territory. Ishi's kin, those widely known as "the Mill Creek Indians" (and later by the name of their Yana dialect "Yahi") lived a couple of valleys north of several branches of Maidu-speaking peoples. To the West there were Wintu speakers, to the North, Atsugewi (Pit River). The Yana-speakers who survived the killings of the 1860s and 70s joined with other language

groups to the north, either the Redding (largely Wintun) or Pit River Indians. In Ishi's time, boundaries and identifications were rather fluid. The "Yahi" inhabited a tribal borderland.

To anticipate a later discussion, recent Indian retellings have questioned the assumption that Ishi was "walking into civilization," giving himself up. Maidu oral tradition asserts they were his kin too, sometimes claiming that Ishi's mother was Maidu. Bride capture, as well as voluntary marriage across linguistic borders was not uncommon. Contemporary Maidu point to a history of peaceful contacts between the two groups, as well as recurring fights. Butte Meadows was a traditional meeting place for summer "Big Times" of trading, gambling, socializing. Would Maidu communities have welcomed the Yahi survivor? We'll never know. (The dogs that cornered him outside Oroville emerge here as decisive historical actors.) Given the contingency of Ishi's "capture," we have, at least, to question long-accepted assumptions that the conquering civilization was his only possible destination.

*

Theodora Kroeber portrays Ishi's sojourn in San Francisco as the best outcome for a tragic history—a soft landing in extinction. But were there any alternatives? The option of settling the survivor with other Indian groups was apparently never seriously considered, either by the anthropologists or by Ishi. He might have lived in small rancherias to the north where some speakers of Northern Yana (a distantly intelligible dialect) had found refuge. Or he might have lived among Maidu to the south, had there been willing hosts. There he would have been isolated linguistically but recognizable as a member of a neighboring group with established links of both rivalry and exchange, and possibly (the point is contested) kinship through his mother. In a 1973 interview the Maidu artist Frank Day recalled that his father, one of the last Concow Maidu headmen, was called to the Oroville Jail in hopes that he could communicate with Ishi. He failed

completely. In any event, there is no guarantee that Ishi would have been well received in one of the crowded tribal enclaves into which California's Native peoples had been forced by the relentless miners and settlers. Ishi might well have been treated with suspicion, viewed as a dangerous outsider. Fear of witchcraft was a fact of life in the artificial communities that brought together diverse, sometimes hostile, Indian groups. Distant kinship ties could have made some difference, but Ishi was, almost certainly, the last of the Mill Creek band. He had no known family left, at least no one he would recognize. And it is risky to project back in time a trans-local "California Indian" solidarity, something that has only begin to emerge, and quite unevenly, in recent decades.

Alfred Kroeber and Thomas Waterman certainly saw in Ishi a precious, uncontaminated, specimen from an older California. They had a strong interest in keeping him near at hand, in a research setting. But they did, at least once, present him with an alternative: life in the museum or on an Indian reservation. In concrete terms, it was not much of a choice. For a devastated, starving man, a comfortable place among friendly people no doubt seemed good, far better than whatever reception he might have imagined from a white world that had sent armed men to kill his people. Today one sometimes hears comments to the effect that Ishi was "captured" by the anthropologists, held "prisoner" in the museum. In literal terms this is unfair: Ishi was generously treated, had a job, spending money, and freedom of movement. The comments may, however, express a sense that the refugee was a prisoner of drastically limited options, a narrowed freedom created by colonial violence, with an inability to imagine alternatives. Of all the choices made, more or less consciously, by Ishi or on his behalf, the one that gives most pause concerns his exposure to disease in the city and in his public roles at the museum. Would it not have been better to find him a home on a ranch, or in some healthier environment? Perhaps he might not have relished isolation in a rural setting. It is hard to disentangle Ishi's own wishes, the research interests and convenience of the scholars, and a realistic assessment of risk. Would Ishi have been

less likely to contract tuberculosis outside a city or town? There was disease in the rancherías. In any event, assumptions that Ishi naturally belonged with other California Indians, that the Anthropology Museum could never be a “home” for him, reflect contemporary identity politics more than any real access to his feelings. (Starn 2004: 263, 275-6)

All this is hindsight--questions made pertinent by the subsequent history, the non-disappearance, of California Indians. It is now possible, necessary, to imagine that things could have turned out differently. But given the concrete options as they appeared at the time, and assuming Ishi's acceptance of his circumstances, the narrative of *Ishi in Two Worlds* takes on a sense of inevitability. The effect is reinforced by the book's overall structure: a before/after story of historical destiny, divided into two parts called "Ishi the Yahi," and "Mister Ishi." The book's “two worlds” are firmly identified with past and future: the journey into modern civilization can only be a path of no return.

The book's two parts could also be called: "The Terror" and "The Healing." Both words are used repeatedly by Theodora Kroeber, and they recall Michael Taussig's analysis of New World Colonial cultures, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*: which he subtitles: *A Study in Terror and Healing* (1987). The wild man myth, as critics like Roger Bartra (1994) have shown, has long accompanied European visions of “civilization.” While the imagination of a savage “other” predates the early-modern period, it received fresh life with Europe's expansion into the New World. Taussig calls the wild man myth a “left-handed gift” to the colonized, for it justified the exploitation and extermination of uncivilized “savages,” while also endowing them with an occult power, even eventually a moral superiority. Once the period of murderous pacification was complete, the surviving remnant could be romanticized, endowed with extraordinary powers—spiritual, shamanistic, close to nature. Out of defeat inspirational figures such as the famous Lakota visionary Black Elk would emerge. The savage Indian became, almost overnight, a wise

Indian, a soulful Indian, a source of healing in a materialistic society. A troubled society, perhaps, but overwhelmingly powerful: Taussig never loses sight of the fact that the colonizer's receptivity to the Indian's wisdom depended on a prior history of terror, the establishment and maintenance of settler dominance.

Almost fifty years after Ishi's death, *Ishi In Two Worlds* adapts the structure of terror and healing for a liberal audience. Theodora Kroeber addresses readers familiar with the relativist Boasian anthropology made popular by writers such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. Her account of the terror preserves Ishi's "wildness" seen positively as isolation from civilization and rapport with nature, while transferring "barbarism" to the Indian killers of the late nineteenth century. She portrays Ishi as marvelously benign--his patience, good sense, humor, and generosity winning over all around him. She would later evoke the survivor's almost magical power in her 1979 preface to *Ishi the Last Yahi, A Documentary History*: "Howsoever one touches on Ishi, the touch rewards. It illuminates the way."

*

"The Terror" is gathered in Theodora Kroeber's Part One where we learn a considerable amount of California Indian history: ethnographic and linguistic details of the Yana, the Gold Rush invasion, the spread of ranches and farms, the rounding up and hunting down of Indian bands. This first part of *Ishi in Two Worlds* is a harrowing story. While recognizing some exceptions, it affixes clear responsibility for the genocide that was integral to California's Americanization during the last half of the nineteenth century. Recent research has made visible a more complex picture of frontier contacts (Starn 2003: 104-117). The "Mill Creeks" were probably a mixed group of refugees from several language groups who knew how to fight back--not exactly the culturally pure "tribelet" Alfred Kroeber called "Yahi." And the well-publicized self-image of the

white vigilantes (who bragged of shooting women and children and flaunted long strings of scalps) has tended to erase other accounts of frontier reciprocity, live-and-let-live. Some settlers were protective of Indians. Others, genuinely afraid, went along with the killing, against their better judgment. But this less Manichean, revisionary, frontier story cannot ultimately erase the brutal, cumulative facts of expropriation and extermination. The graphically documented events chronicled in Theodora Kroeber's Part One tear the fabric of California's civil peace, touching a wound that--at least for native peoples--has never been healed.

But Part Two of *Ishi in Two Worlds* almost makes us forget the terror. Its affectionate title (which sounds a bit condescending now) is "Mister Ishi."



***Figure 4 (Ishi with Sam Batwi and A. L. Kroeber)**

The newly discovered public figure poses with A. L. Kroeber and Sam Batwi the northern Yana-speaking translator who had worked with the linguist Edward Sapir. Batwi didn't get along with Ishi and was soon sent home. In the new edition of *Ishi in Two Worlds*, and in other publications,

this photo has been cropped to include only Kroeber and Ishi. The translator was seen by the scientists as an acculturated, impure Indian. No further effort was made to bring Ishi together with other Yana-speakers, and Sam Batwi quickly disappeared from Ishi's Story. Yet, viewed from 2012, he clearly prefigures the Indian people who would rebury Ishi a century later and remember him as their ancestor.



Figure 5 (Ishi demonstrating archery at the Anthropological Museum)

Ishi demonstrated archery, made arrowheads, and constructed a “Yahi house” at the Museum of Anthropology, Parnassus Heights, San Francisco. However none of the images in the first, and until recently most common edition, of *Ishi in Two Worlds* shows him doing Indian things while wearing Western clothes. Ishi is extensively pictured on the late research trip in Deer Creek, performing traditional activities or the camera, in a loincloth. With a few exceptions he refused to disrobe in his San Francisco life. Gerald Vizenor comments on one of these exceptions, when Ishi

bared his chest for a visiting photographer, Joseph Dixon who was documenting the “Vanishing Race” for his popular book of that title:

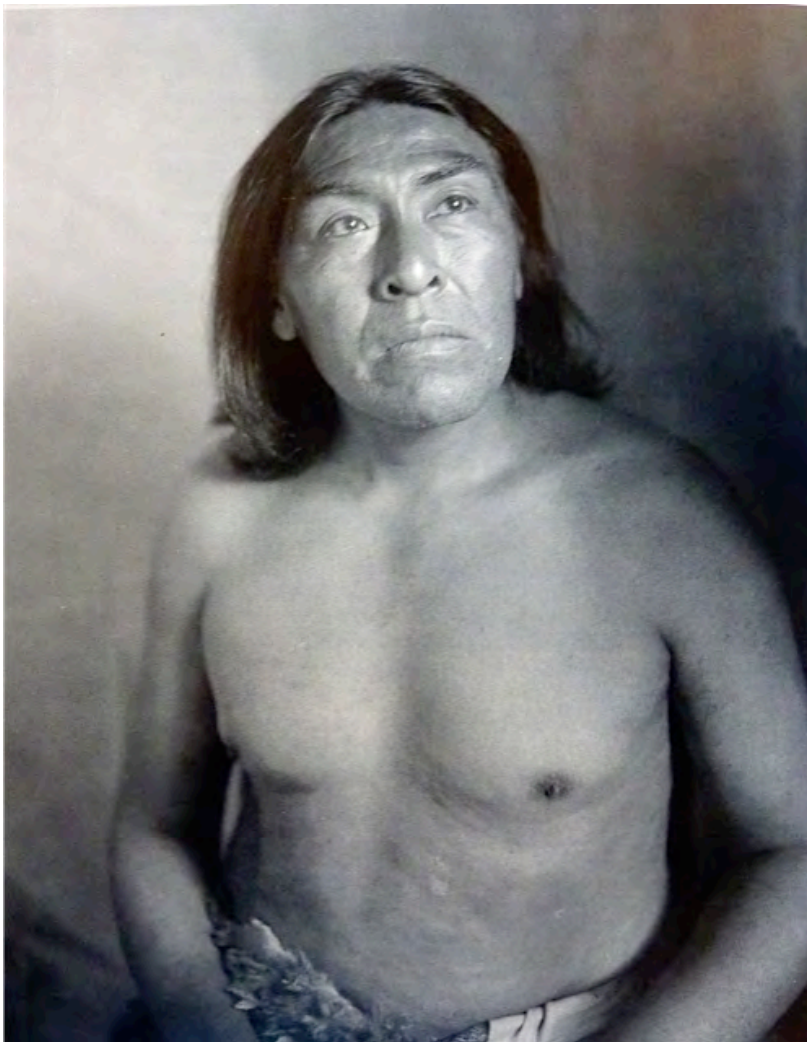


Figure 6 (Ishi photographed by Joseph Dixon, 1913)

Ishi was never his real name, and he is not the photographs of that tribal man captured three generations ago in a slaughterhouse in Northern California. He was thin and wore a canvas shirt then, a man of natural reason, a lonesome hunter, but never the stout postiche of a wild man lost and found in the museum. Two tribal men were captured, two pronouns in a museum, one obscure and the other endured in silence. Ishi the obscura is discovered with a

bare chest in photographs; the tribal man named in that simulation stared over the camera, into the distance.

--"Ishi Oscura" (Vizenor 1994: 126)

*

Part Two of *Ishi in Two Worlds* (The Healing) is told under the sign of affectionate understanding. The museum staff and anthropologists are consistently called "Ishi's friends." Three stand out: A.L. Kroeber (whom Ishi called "chiep," sometimes "big chiep") director of the new Museum on Parnassus Heights, San Francisco); T.T. Waterman ("Wattamany"), Kroeber's junior colleague in anthropology, who was very attached to Ishi and who regularly entertained him at home; and Saxton Pope a surgeon at the adjoining research hospital. "Popey" was Ishi's personal physician, and an archery buff-- a passion he shared with Ishi on many outings together. Much could be said about these rather different friendships, their asymmetrical investments, and (visible at times in Theodora's gentle gaze) their masculinity--scientific reserve alternating with boyish camaraderie. This perspective seems particularly relevant to Pope's rapport with Ishi which was based on hunting with bow and arrow, and it infuses the restorative enjoyment felt by Alfred Kroeber, Waterman, Pope and his teenage son Saxton Jr. on the camping trip to Mill Creek during the last healthy summer of Ishi's life.

Ishi resisted this return to his homeland. It was not a place of happy memories, and he was anxious about encountering the wandering spirits of his dead relatives. But the enthusiasm of the others and the "chiep's" authority, wore him down. Once in Deer Creek, having satisfied himself that his family members had found their way along the trail of the dead, he relaxed. The month that followed was apparently an agreeable mix of ethnographic show and tell, photo opportunities, and good clean fun: joking, swimming and hunting. No doubt the anthropologists'

interest in recreating the old days helped sustain a nostalgic atmosphere that avoided reliving the times of hardship and killing. Ishi wore a loincloth for Kroeber's camera (and declined to skinny-dip like the others). The ethnographic data produced was deep: a map of the two valleys where the Yahi roamed contained more than two hundred place-names; notebooks were filled with hundreds of plants and herbs. In Theodora Kroeber's narrative, this return trip, in space and time, was the highlight of Ishi's "brightest year."

Going back to the old heartland in the company of the three living people who meant most to him would seem to have been an adventure akin to psychoanalysis. At first reluctant to retrace the covered tracks of childhood and painful adult experience, Ishi gave himself over to the adventure, at last wholly, and in the sharing of places and recollections succeeded in closing the gap between his former world and the present one. (p. 216)

The healing mix of ethnography, psychology, and human bonding is made explicit. A cruel history of violence seems to be forgotten. And this no doubt reflects the experiential reflections of Ishi's companions who loved the camping trip and were, as Theodora Kroeber records, reluctant to return to "civilization." Theirs was a ludic regression that might well find a place in Philip Deloria's important study, *Playing Indian* (1999), as well as in Eve Sedgwick's well-known work on homosociality (1985). The Yahi survivor must have felt more ambivalence: "Happy as were these days, he became suddenly eager to be back in the museum, to be *home*" (p. 216). He rushed to break camp and was first on the train. Would he have been eager, like his companions, to return at the end of the summer for acorn harvesting? We will never know. It was June 1914. In August the outbreak of war changed everything. "The four friends could not know that never again would they be together in this carefree way: that for Ishi there was ahead but a scant year of enjoyment of his present radiant health." (p. 217) Ethnographic pastoral is abruptly overwhelmed

by history—the fate of all such nostalgias. But in Theodora Kroeber’s narration, Ishi seems to have been healed, his two worlds brought together. And he shares the cure with his museum comrades.

*

Juan Dolores was a different kind of friend from the museum. While only a page or two are devoted to him in Theodora Kroeber’s book, he is one of the more intriguing loose threads in Ishi’s story.



Figure 7 (Juan Dolores, photo from *Ishi in Two Worlds*)

Dolores was a Papago (today called Tohono O'Odham) from Arizona who earned his living as a teamster, managing horses on construction projects in several Western states. When he could, he worked as a linguistic informant under Alfred Kroeber's sponsorship. Dolores corresponded with Kroeber from his construction jobs, raising questions about translation and the grammatical intricacies of Papago, while pressing politely for a higher rate of payment for the texts he was preparing. In one letter he expressed a yearning for his homeland. A government allotting agent had been pressing him to return home, Dolores wrote with characteristic irony: “he wants me to get married, grow corn. But how can I afford to do that ... Anyway I’m a tramp, too attached to my freedom” (Dolores 1911). Indians routinely came and went in the San Francisco museum, and Dolores was a regular there, sometimes combining work as a museum guard with his linguistics. For a time he was Ishi's roommate, and the two developed a warm relationship, based—according to Theodora Kroeber (1961:159)—on a shared notion of what it meant to be a “proper Indian, a person of manners, sensibility, and dignity.” They made an interesting pair: Ishi, who had lived most of his life in hiding; Dolores, a multilingual traveler, something of a skeptic about everything, but with strong attachments to Papago language and tradition.

A letter in the U.C. Berkeley archives (Dolores 1911) ends with a characteristic observation.

Dolores to Kroeber, September 10, 1911

I see by the paper that Professor Waterman has been to see the strange Indian which has been captured somewhere in Butte Co. I suppose you are so busy that you have no time to go and see this wild Indian.

I think I have to run away and hide some place in the mountains of Arizona and when you find me tell [President] Taft or somebody that they have to make a treaty with me. I think that will be the only way I can get some good place to stay the rest of my life.

Good by,

Your friend, Juan Dolores (Kroeber 1961: 159)

Dolores and Ishi wandered around San Francisco — its parks, restaurants, cinemas — where they came into contact with other Indians, with Mexicanos, with Chinese, with people of all classes. As Theodora Kroeber observes, this offered a more cosmopolitan experience than is suggested by the familiar image of Ishi the “wild Indian” taking refuge at the museum. (On Ishi’s walks in the city see also Sackman 2010, Chapter Six.) Theodora Kroeber speculates, too, that the worldly Papago may have counseled the Yahi against sexual entanglements with white women. (1961: 160, 221) (She knew Juan Dolores well—and guessed that he would have been speaking from experience.) In the universe of *Ishi in Two Worlds*, the friendship with Dolores opens a small window on the complexities of a changing California Indian life, in and out of cities (Sarris 1994a, Ramirez 2007). Today, Dolores serves as a kind of placeholder for unanswered questions of how Ishi’s Indian contemporaries — emphatically not dying primitives — might relate to his predicament.

*



Figure 8. (Ishi on Deer Creek Expedition)

Theodora Kroeber's account has a deft human touch. We understand Ishi's dignity and restraint, his good humor and sociability. There are views of his fastidious habits and curious perceptions (his utter fascination with a spring-loaded window-shade), and his smile, so rare in the public iconography of "Indians." We also learn of Ishi's work with his scientist friends on linguistic elicitation and translation. Apparently he recognized the value of recording his language, stories, and technical skills. In these domains he was a willing "informant." (Jacknis 2003) In others—the history of his confinement and his family—he kept silent. On his arrival in San Francisco the

refugee was asked about his time in hiding. He responded with a long, incomprehensible performance, the “Wood Duck Story.” The recitation, later repeated over more than two hours for recording on wax cylinders, has never been adequately translated.

Believed by the general public and scholars alike to be an emissary from the Stone Age, Ishi was a treasured ethnographic source. Communication with Kroeber and Waterman worked best in those areas of culture where physical demonstration was possible. Understanding complex beliefs or extended narratives posed major obstacles. This is not to say that communication was insubstantial. A good deal can be expressed and understood with relatively few words if there is patience and good will. But many personal ideas and feelings, as well as cultural subtleties, were inevitably lost in a shared discourse that Edward Sapir, who worked intensively with Ishi and was the interlocutor most familiar with other dialects of Yana, described as “a crude jargon composed of English, quasi-English and Yahi.” (Sapir 1916: 329) Sapir’s painstaking work with Ishi is the primary basis for contemporary efforts to understand his texts. Victor Golla (2003) provides an authoritative account of Ishi as a linguistic informant and of what can, with many gaps, be known of his language today.

Waterman bitterly reproached himself for allowing Sapir to overwork his charge during the summer of 1915, when the fatal tuberculosis was taking hold. An illness the preceding December, not confirmed as TB, had worried Kroeber and Waterman, intensifying their feeling that the time for productive research might be running out. Whether or not the intense summer work hastened Ishi’s demise, there was certainly no element of coercion. By all accounts Ishi was an enthusiastic participant in what turned out to be the last chance to make adequate transcriptions and translations of his Yahi words. Sapir possessed a particularly good ear for Yana phonology. In their collaboration, as in the sound recordings, the informant had to be reined in. Difficult transcriptions and subtle meanings needed to be methodically checked. There was clearly

something Ishi wanted to say, to give... To whom? To posterity? (Whose?) To science? (To his museum friends?) Perhaps, after so many years of isolation, it was simply a pleasure to be speaking Yahi for someone who, while not understanding very well, at least cared. Traditional stories were usually told during the winter, a slow season of communal gatherings. Was the museum a kind of extended winter for Ishi, a place of relative immobility, social intensity and performance?

Ishi was, it seems, not unhappy in his new home. The Berkeley anthropologists were, of course, eager to learn whatever they could about an aboriginal culture they believed to be unaffected by the modern world. They also gave material support and genuine affection to their charge. He reciprocated, with loyalty and research cooperation. This, in any event, is how they remembered him. As one reads the surviving records from these years (of contentment? of resignation?) one can't help feeling Ishi's acceptance of his fate, and a kind of forgiveness. Early on, when offered the possibility of moving to an Indian reservation, he says he wants to stay: "I will grow old in this house, and it is here I will die." (218)

Perhaps he understood his museum years as a kind of after-life. He could not have expected to survive the encounter with whites in Oroville, people he had only known as murderous. Was he embarked on a trip to "the edge of the world"—as later fictional retellings by Theodora Kroeber and James Freeman would have it? Or by following the railroad line to the city by the sea, was he already walking the trail of the dead—as imagined by the documentary film, *Ishi, the Last Yahi*? Or was he on a mission to bring Indian wisdom to the white world, as many have implied, and sometimes explicitly asserted? Did he possess "trickster" capacities for survival and adaptation in new circumstances, drawn from traditional coyote myths (a speculation in the documentary, and a theme in various Indian retellings). But maybe he was just glad to be safe at last, warm and well-fed.

In 1961 Theodora Kroeber offered a bittersweet, almost happy ending--at least a plausible best outcome for a tragic story--given the memory of terror, and the sense of an inevitable death hovering over Ishi, and his people.

The man called Ishi's reported last words end the book: "You stay. I go." It was a common Yahi leave-taking. But in this context the phrase inevitably carried a broader allegorical significance: a vision of resignation, and of indigenous disappearance in California: "You stay. We go."

Readers, at least those that did not know of the persistence, ongoing struggles, and renewal of California Indian societies, could be content with this apparent closure: Ishi accepting the inevitable: death in the house of cultural understanding, looked after by his white friends.



Figure 9 Portrait, probably by A.L. Kroeber.

This image sums up for me the message of dignified resignation. (One sees something similar in many of Edward Curtis's famous Indian portraits from the same period.) It's the final image in Theodora Kroeber and Robert Heizer's Sierra Club book of Native Californians, *Almost Ancestors*.

Alfred Kroeber, asked by his wife forty years later, to characterize Ishi, gives resignation a slightly different twist: “He was the most patient man I ever knew. I mean he had mastered the philosophy of patience, without trace either of self-pity or bitterness to dull the purity of his cheerful enduringness.” (p. 229) “Patience” is etymologically rooted in suffering and the endurance of pain. (Ambrose Bierce, in his *Devil’s Dictionary*, defined it as “A minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue.”) But whatever pain Ishi endured tends to be lost in evocations of his “cheerfulness.” Theodora Kroeber’s gloss on her husband’s comment twice returns to this word, concluding: “His way was the way of contentment—the Middle Way, to be pursued quietly, working a little, playing a little, and surrounded by friends.” (229)

Ishi in Two Worlds is not a simple book: its author worries, now and again, about its gaps and the tendency of a biography to artificially round out a life. In a prologue she compares her task to stringing scattered and disparate beads on a thread: “Surprisingly, the circle of [Ishi’s] life’s necklace appears whole despite its many incompleteness” (p. 0). Believing that a biographer has a duty to sum up the meaning of a life, she places Ishi on a Taoist path of moderation, the Middle Way. Yet just as she fulfills the biographer’s duty, she hesitates: “The figure of Ishi stands, part of it in the sun, varicolored and idiosyncratic and achieved; part in deep shadow, darkened by the extent of our own ignorance and by its own disadvantages. A biography should include something at least of the nature of these shadows, the unrealized potential, the promise unfulfilled...” (p. 229). And she notes the violence of being reduced to a single name rather than using several as he would have in traditional social settings; she mentions Ishi’s linguistic isolation, his marital and sexual deprivation, his exposure to lethal diseases.

But the shadows evoked in this paragraph quickly dissipate in a luminous conclusion.

Anthropological humanism, the assumption of a “broad base...of pan-humanity,” (p. 230) is

vindicated by this man's unique, but universal, life experience. Whether he is seen as a last emissary from the Stone Age or as someone adapting, inventively, in new circumstances, Ishi was simply, and essentially a human being, a man capable of growth, and—like everyone, within limits—of freedom. Theodora Kroeber concludes that Ishi “chose” life with his white friends; he “chose” a salary and independence rather than government wardship; “and when ‘civilization’ bestowed upon him the gift of tuberculosis he chose to fight it according to Popey’s instructions and to accept defeat with grace, his concern being to make himself as little a burden as might be to those who cared for him.” (p. 230)

In the years since his death, California Indians have not found Ishi's “choices,” as narrated here, particularly edifying. The resigned death among anthropologists, going gently into that good night--this Ishi wasn't very heroic. He was a bit too much the white man's Indian at the end: And the "last of his people" image left scant room for all the real struggles for survival. The man's supposed cultural purity made other Indians seem inauthentic. As we will see, in recent decades this view of Ishi has changed.

For its primary, non-Indian, readership, the denouement of *Ishi in Two Worlds* works to heal the terror, sewing up the wound opened in Part One. The story closes with a vision of humanely scientific friendships, an affectionate respect for this engaging, wise, giving, and ultimately forgiving Indian. We need not question this portrayal as it represents the individual feelings and motivations of Kroeber, Waterman, and Pope--though the mixture of personal affection with professional interest in a unique specimen now appears more ambiguous than Theodora Kroeber allows. There are many reasons, however, to question the way the book provides narrative closure to Ishi's story: an ending where human decency prevails: a good man dies well among good people.

A quite different final comment on Ishi's life breaks the spell. This alternate summation concludes a later collection of documents pertaining to Ishi published by Robert Heizer and Theodora Kroeber (1979: 242) A notice from the *Chico Record* newspaper, published in 1916:

"Ishi," the man primeval, is dead. He could not stand the rigors of civilization; and tuberculosis, that arch-enemy of those who live in the simplicity of nature and then abandon that life, claimed him. Ishi was supposed to be the last of a tribe that flourished in California long before the white man reached these shores. He could make a fire with sticks, fashion arrowheads out of flint, and was familiar with other arts long lost to civilization. He furnished amusement and study to the savants at the University of California for a number of years, and doubtless much of ancient Indian lore was learned from him, but we do not believe he was the marvel that the professors would have the public believe. He was just a starved-out Indian from the wilds of Deer Creek who, by hiding in its fastnesses, was able to long escape the white man's pursuit. And the white man with his food and clothing and shelter finally killed the Indian just as effectually as he would have killed him with a rifle.

Ishi's story does no healing here. There's nothing to redeem a pathetic life, nothing to soften the fundamental violence of Ishi's fate. And as for the good years at the museum, the *Chico Record* makes short shrift of Ishi's friends' scientific humanism.

In a new introduction to *Ishi in Two Worlds* Karl Kroeber quotes this text and notes its strategic location. He describes his mother's effort in the *Documentary History* to include "a diversity of perspectives she had judged inappropriate to her first book" (2004: xix). It may be worth pressing a bit further in historicizing the shifting emphasis. One suspects that the willingness of Robert Heizer and Theodora Kroeber to give the last word to so caustic a realism reflects the late

nineteen seventies, Wounded Knee (II), the Alcatraz occupation, and a renewed sense of deep and continuing Indian-white antagonisms. Perhaps also a certain distance is taken here from Alfred Kroeber himself, a ghostly co-author during the writing of *Ishi in Two Worlds* two decades before. Robert Heizer, Kroeber's friend and successor at Berkeley, differed from his mentor by focusing squarely on the history of violent contacts and cultural destruction in California. By 1979, resurgent tribal movements across the country had forced attention from the healing back to the terror, and to the continuing reality of inequality and racism. But it was still too early to include native voices in a "documentary history" of Ishi. Oral traditions remain mostly unheard, and native revisionism had not yet gone public. Heizer and Kroeber's collection would look different today.

*

There was a sour note in the humanist harmony that concludes *Ishi in Two Worlds*. Ishi fell ill with tuberculosis when Alfred Kroeber was away on sabbatical leave in Europe and New York. Kroeber stayed in close touch with the progress of the illness, and when the end suddenly loomed, he fired off a letter to E. W. Gifford, Assistant Director of the museum, instructing Gifford that there must in no circumstances be an autopsy or any dissection of Ishi's body. (At the research hospital, autopsies were routine.) Kroeber saw no scientific interest in the procedure, since the cause of death was perfectly clear and, he noted, there were plenty of unstudied skeletons in the museum. In a much-quoted passage he insisted: "If there is any talk about the interests of science, say for me that science can go to hell. We propose to stand by our friends." (Very strong words for a restrained man like Kroeber, a man of science...) He knew, as did the others at the hospital, that Ishi was deeply shocked by the dismemberment and preservation of corpses, which he believed should be cremated and sent on their way to the land of the dead.

Kroeber's letter arrived too late. Gifford, the junior member of the team, was unable to resist pressure (led it seems by Ishi's fellow archery enthusiast, the surgeon Saxton Pope) for what would be called a "simple autopsy." Ishi's remains were then cremated, sealed in a ceramic jar, and reverently (by Christian standards) laid to rest, along with various Yahi accoutrements. The improvised collection occupied a niche at Mt. Olivet Cemetery in San Francisco for eighty years.

But it had not quite been a "simple autopsy." Buried in Gifford's apologetic report to his absent superior, as quoted by Theodora Kroeber, was the phrase "the brain was preserved." Removing brains for further study was not standard practice at the hospital, and the phrase raised a question about whether all of Ishi had been cremated. For most readers, the autopsy left a slight bad taste at the end of *Ishi in Two Worlds*. But it was largely overcome by the surrounding account of Ishi's stoicism, the genuine grief of his friends, Kroeber's impassioned letter, and the sincere, if awkward, attempt at a proper burial.

What had happened to the brain? For eight decades, no one cared. Then, in the late 1990s a group of Ishi's southern neighbors, began asking questions and agitating for repatriation and reburial of his physical remains. For the first time, the anthropologists' entitlement to look after Ishi and his remains was publicly challenged. For the Butte County Native American Cultural Committee and its chairman, Art Angle, repatriation of Indian bones was, and remains, a moral responsibility. As a boy, Angle had witnessed boxes of his own family's ancestral remains carted off by state authorities during earth moving for the immense Oroville Dam that flooded large sections of Concow Maidu land along forks of the Feather River. Ishi's exile from his homeland stood for many other stories of forced removal. The exile could be made whole, Angle insisted, by returning him "where he belongs." "Ishi was a captive," he told the *Oroville Opportunity Bulletin*, "from the time he was born until his death, by a society that surrounded him. The whole

Yahi tribe is still in limbo and will be until Ishi's remains are repatriated to the Indian people for proper burial. “ (Feb. 18, 1999: p. 4) Repatriation was a form of collective healing for all Indian people in California--a remedy for histories of violence, disrespect, and dispossession.

The pressure applied by the Maidu group, making use of the local press and the Los Angeles Times, set in motion inquiries by Nancy Rockafellar a researcher at the University of California, San Francisco and Orin Starn, an anthropologist at Duke. The search is described in *Ishi's Brain*. Starn turned up letters in Berkeley's Bancroft Library recording A. L. Kroeber's decision, after his return from sabbatical, to donate Ishi's brain to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., where the preeminent physical anthropologist of the day, Ales Hrdlicka, was amassing an important collection. (It included, we might add, not just the brains of native people from all over the world. John Wesley Powell, founder of the Bureau of American Ethnology, donated his.) Once prestigious, Hrdlicka's comparative racial science was, by the time of Ishi's death, already becoming discredited. Nothing was ever done with Kroeber's collegial gift, which ended up, carefully labeled, floating in a Delaware holding tank.

in an important book, *Grave Matters* (2011), Tony Platt shows how Indian bones were collected in large numbers for over a century, by amateurs and professional academics. The desecration of burial sites was—and continues to be--a common practice, abhorred and protested, by native communities. Leading figures like Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber justified the grave robbing that they occasionally found distasteful but nonetheless pursued methodically in the name of science. Native tellers of Ishi's story have found Alfred Kroeber's decision to send the brain to the Smithsonian incomprehensible and deeply shocking. Privately and at public meetings pressing for repatriation, they asked, over and over: how could this “friend” do so barbarous a thing? And indigenous people are not the only ones to pose the question. Why didn't Kroeber, who opposed the autopsy so vehemently, at least reunite Ishi's remains? How could “Popey,” probably as close

to Ishi as anyone in his new home, have advocated an invasive procedure that he knew his friend found repellent? (A "simple autopsy"--as recorded in Pope's meticulous published report--involves the removal, measurement, and weighing of every single internal organ, all of which are stuffed back into the cadaver and sewed up. For a non-medical reader, the clinical detail is shocking.) Science simply had to know everything about this unique, admirable specimen of humanity.

In the last weeks of Ishi's life his physician arranged for a photograph to be taken of the two archers. Pope stands tall, dramatically drawing his bow, full of life. Ishi crouches below him, cruelly emaciated. When the surgeon saw the developed image he regretted having coaxed his exhausted patient out of bed. Nonetheless, he included the picture in his medical summary. Alfred Kroeber, editing the report for publication removed it. One sees why. The image is hard to look at, and it has never appeared among the many views of Ishi that have made their way into print. It stands to remind us of what could not be included in *Ishi in Two Worlds* without seriously disrupting the book's concluding mood.

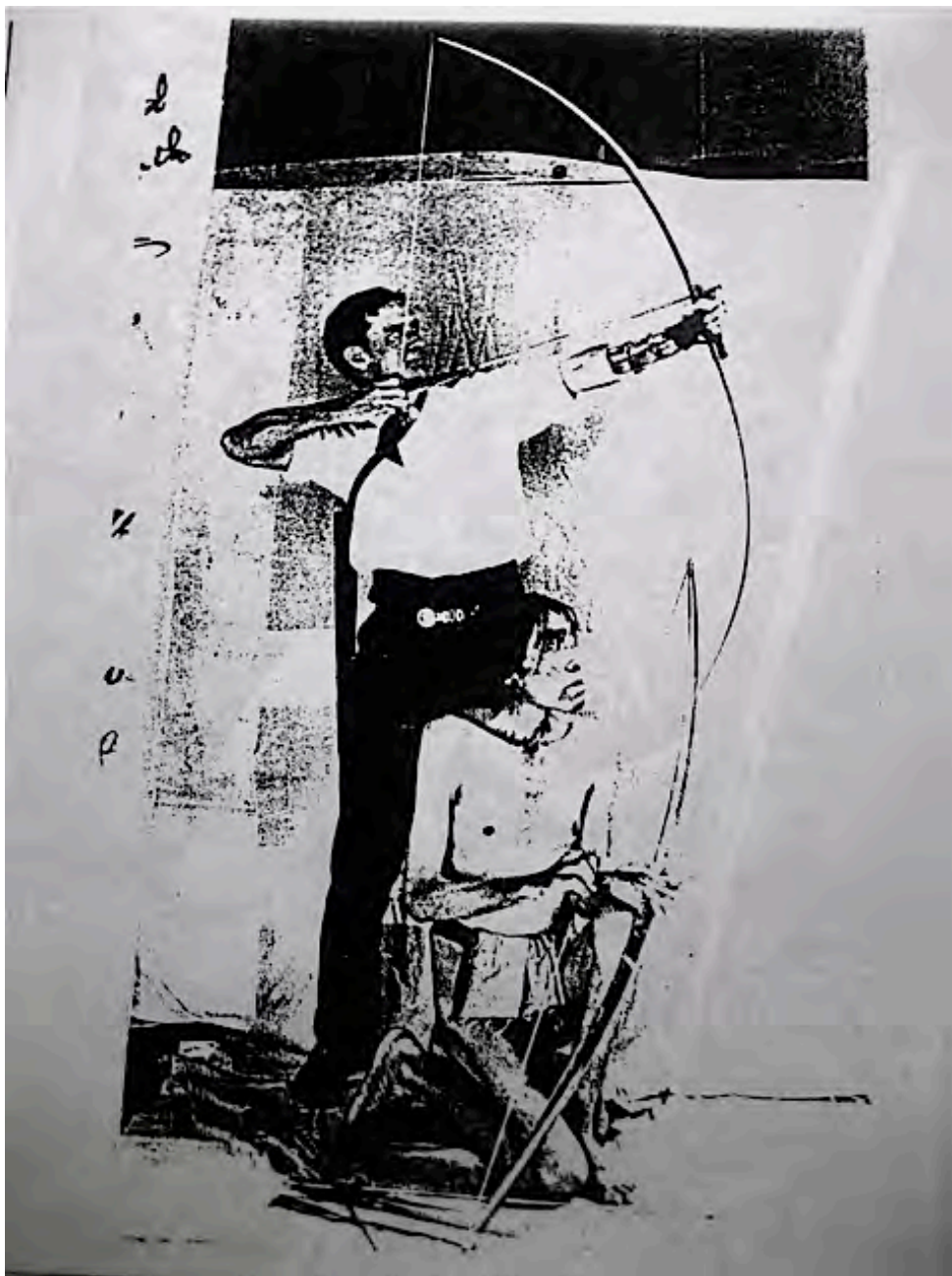


Figure 10. (Saxton Pope with Ishi in the last days of his life)

His temperament was philosophical, analytical, reserved, and cheerful. He probably looked upon us as extremely smart. While we knew many things, we had no knowledge of nature, no reserve; we were all busy-bodies. We were, in fact, sophisticated children.

---Saxton Pope. "The Medical History of Ishi" p. 187.

To have a bow break in the hand while shooting, Ishi considered a very serious omen and a portent of sickness.... He himself had two bows shatter in his grasp, and doubtless this and several other malign influences of our civilization, in his mind, contributed as causes of his own last illness. During the declining days of his life, the one thing that brought that happy smile to his face which characterized him, was the subject of archery. A little work, feathering arrows or binding points on with sinew, gave him more pleasure than any diversion we could offer. Even when too weak to work, he liked to show me some little trick or method in making a shaft or backing a bow. To the last his heart was in the game.

--Saxton Pope, "Yahi Archery," p. 131.

Various places had odors suggestive of certain animals. Ishi said that white men smelled bad, like a horse.

--Saxton Pope, "Yahi Archery," p. 130.

*

Scientific interest, paternalism, admiration, and affection coincided in the scientists' relations with Ishi. They didn't see the contradictions that now scream at us. On balance, with a strong dose of historical relativity, I can understand Kroeber's actions with respect to Ishi's brain. It's hard to see them as barbarous, in the context of the prevailing racial and cultural assumptions of his time, and if one gives due value to a form of scientific research which he believed to be progressive and anti-racist. (His mentor, Franz Boas, famously disproved bad racial science using skull measurements.) Although Kroeber and Boas saw their own cultural research as historical and interpretive, they respected scientific projects such as Hrdlicka's. Kroeber no doubt thought that,

if he sent Ishi's brain to the Smithsonian, something good, some contribution to knowledge, might come of the unfortunate autopsy. Personally distraught by Ishi's end (which came in the wake of his first wife's death, also from tuberculosis, and on the eve of his own mid-life breakdown and temporary departure from anthropology) Kroeber may have felt there was no way, any more, to do the right thing for his friend.

Kroeber, Waterman, Pope and Gifford, did their best for Ishi, acting with generosity, given the ideological horizons of their time, But this sort of historically contextualized understanding cannot be the final word. The humanist story of friendship and good intentions, so memorably told by *Ishi in Two Worlds*, has unraveled under pressure.

2. Ishi Redux

The survival of California Indians--part of a widespread indigenous resurgence at local, state, regional, and international levels—gives new meanings and critical twists to Ishi's story. At least three overlapping discourses are at work, reflecting a variety of native responses in changing times. The following labels are rough approximations: Ishi the emissary of Indian values, Ishi the trickster-survivor, Ishi the healer.

The Emissary. Ishi, like the famous Lakota shaman Black Elk, is an emissary from a natural/spiritual/cultural world, carrying a precious message. He brings wisdom, in different ways, to new generations of Indian and non-Indians.

"This is the incredible story of the last hero of the Yahi tribe and how he brought to 'civilization' all the courage, faith and strength of the Yahi Way of Life." Theodora Kroeber wrote a

fictionalized youth version of the Ishi story that was for many years required fourth grade reading in California's public schools. The sentence quoted above appears on its back cover, while the front shows a gentle young brave kneeling, bow and arrows laid aside, with his outstretched palms being sniffed by a rabbit. I heard a version of this Indian hero bringing a message to the white world in a different context: a commemoration ceremony near the summit of Mt. Lassen organized by the Pit River Tribe and Redding Rancheria to celebrate the return of Ishi's remains for burial somewhere in the area. (Starn 2004, 267-85, gives a full account.) Mt. Lassen has for centuries been a meeting place for aboriginal groups, including Ishi's Mill Creek band. This ceremony — which included a talk-circle, a generous salmon dinner and evening bear dance — was open to all, paid for by tribal funds. Starn (p. 270) wonders whether the source of these funds, in casino revenues, might have pleased Ishi, given the competitive gambling games so popular among the California bands of his time.

In an upland meadow a circle of speakers testified to Ishi's meanings today: authorities from the Redding and Pit River tribes, Mickey Gemmil, Tommy George, Barbara Murphy; elders, young people and, toward the end, Orin Starn, Nancy Rockafellar, and the Smithsonian's Thomas Killian, non-Indians who had played important roles in the repatriation. The participants brought their own needs and desires to the ceremony, their hopes for some kind of reconciliation. Many expressed a profound sense of kinship with the Yahi, returning at last to the land and to his own people. Among the speakers was a teenager, struggling for words to say why Ishi was important to him. The answer didn't come easy. He recalled once seeing old photos of Ishi demonstrating crafts. "That was awesome." But at times he seemed to be grappling with his anger at continuing injustices. "All those bones still unburied..." And how to identify with this man's experience, his death in a museum? It had not been easy. The young man said he had come, finally, to understand Ishi's purpose: "He went to those people to teach them how to live off the land."

A striking poster distributed to everyone present summed up the ceremony's meaning. "Welcome Home Our Relative, Ishi. May We Never Forget Our Ancestors." Ishi's exile was finally over. A large portrait of Ishi in three-quarters profile filled the poster. It was an adaptation of Figure 8, above, the image I had associated with Edward Curtis's vision of American Indian defeat and resignation. On the poster it was slightly changed, with the addition of a feather alongside Ishi's face. At first I thought the feather contributed to a more generic, "Plains-Indian" profile. I later learned that eagles and eagle feathers are sacred to Indian tribes in California and beyond. The feather thus expressed a spiritual connection, and Kroeber's evocative portrait had been transformed. It was now an image of homecoming, a return to the land and to a widening network of relations.

In another renewal of Ishi's legacy, the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center in Santa Rosa recently organized a special exhibition to coincide with the centennial of his appearance in Oroville. "Ishi: A Story of Dignity, Hope and Courage," along with a video of the same name, stressed the positive meaning of Ishi's experience for today's Native Californians. At a related conference, co-organized with the Hearst Museum at Berkeley, Earl Neconie, a Kiowa tribal activist, gave the blessing and called Ishi a "hero" (also, with a smile: "the first Native American employee of U.C."). Joseph Meyers, the Pomo activist, legal scholar, and founder of the Santa Rosa museum, (invoking, perhaps, the language of tribal sovereignty politics) described Ishi as a "diplomat." The museum video's accompanying text sums up the message: "To a world of violence and destruction Ishi brought peace and kindness."

At the Santa Rosa Museum, Ishi is an emissary to future generations of Indians. The exhibit, lucid and effective, was curated by Executive Director Nicole Meyers-Lim. Of interest to all ages, it is primarily directed toward school groups. Two panels filled with photographic images and explanatory texts greet the visitor: "What is Civilization" and "Return to Deer Creek." The

former portrays Ishi as a sojourner in San Francisco, wary but engaged, and it stresses his “Yahi view of civilization.” The latter is composed of Kroeber’s photographs of Ishi in a loincloth enacting pre-contact life on the camping trip in his homeland. Visitors are confronted with two visions: one a critical, Indian experience of modernity, the other a memory of traditional life. Nearby, two Plexiglas cases hold artifacts on loan from the Hearst Museum. They express the same double historical vision. Three classic Pomo baskets from around 1900 occupy one case. In the other: a metal saw from Ishi’s “stone-age” hiding place along with arrowheads made from glass bottles and a beautiful fishhook, all crafted in San Francisco. One can well imagine the questions about tradition and change that could be elicited from school children using these objects and images.

“The museum’s third display area focuses on “Values.” Here Ishi’s voice, recorded a century ago, is heard faintly—unintelligible but somehow present. Visitors are invited to open small, hinged doors, each bearing a close-up portrait of Ishi and labeled with a particular Indian value. Inside: a brief definition. I quote four, from the museum’s study guide.

Courage—This value is defined by the quality of mind or spirit that allows a person to face difficult circumstances, danger or pain. Ishi demonstrated courage in many ways. He faced many difficult events, massacres, the loss of his family members, being moved from his homeland to San Francisco just to name a few.

Generosity--This value is defined by the quality of giving to others. Ishi practiced reciprocity, he shared many things with the anthropologists and others he met while living in San Francisco. He shared knowledge about his traditional skills, he shared time teaching others about his culture and he shared items he made with visitors that came to the museum.

Respect--This value is defined by a person's ability to not interfere with the rights/beliefs of others or to show consideration for the rights/beliefs of others. Ishi respected the cultural beliefs of his tribe. When sharing information with the anthropologists he kept much of his cultural and spiritual beliefs private.

Dignity--This value is defined by a person who exhibits self-respect, or shows an elevated quality of character. While living in San Francisco Ishi interpreted the world around him according to a Yahi worldview. He looked at San Francisco society in terms of what would be useful to a Yahi person. For example he was once taken to an air-show in San Francisco and asked what he thought of the planes, his response was that "hawks fly better".

In the juxtaposition of "Generosity" and "Respect" the museum explains how Ishi could cooperate willingly with anthropologists while never losing his sense of who he was as a Yahi, never fully accepting their "civilization." His life, for all its extraordinary suffering, is understood to carry a crucial message for future generations seeking ways to live as Indians in a settler colonial, capitalist modernity.

*

The trickster-survivor. Perhaps more than most, Indian identities are command performances. A different strand of native revisionism recognizes that Ishi's various images, pathetic, soulful, heroic are co-constructed in relations of power. Ishi's evident interest in selected aspects of urban, technological society, along with Black Elk's long career as a Catholic catechist, fit uneasily with the role of traditional spokesman, emissary of indigenous or natural values. Ironic comments on

Ishi's story by Indians undermine the automatic authenticity, the spiritual and human value that he has been made to incarnate--both for a dominant society, and for a resurgent tribalism caught up in the strategic mobilizations of identity politics. These turnings of the tale are reminders that no single Indian identity exists: no unified "native point of view," as the anthropologists used to call it.

Ishi enjoyed a good cigar.

Gerald Vizenor, the Anishanaabe novelist, has turned repeatedly to Ishi in his cultural criticism and drama. As Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, he kept the Yahi's memory alive—a persistent irritant in the University's long relationship with the state's original inhabitants. Vizenor led a movement to rename the building that housed Ethnic Studies "Ishi Hall." He had to settle for an "Ishi Courtyard," while pointing out that this, like all names recognizing native peoples, was a substitute for other names that remain in the shadows. But, he said at the Ishi Court dedication, "the shadows of tribal names and stories persist, and the shadows are our natural survivance". (Quoted by Owen 2003: 379)

"Survivance" (a rare usage meaning "survivorship") is Vizenor's term for a process of existing in and out of shadows, in and out of the visibility of imposed and adopted simulations required to be legible by power, to exist within a hegemonic settler-colonial sense of the real. The ways that "Ishi" played and subverted the roles expected of him as "authentic Indian," make him an adept and enigmatic, hero of "post-Indian survivance" (Vizenor 1993). This is not exactly survival, the latter connoting a process of hanging on, of transmitting past life. Survivance, in Vizenor's sense, is more dynamic: the old stories and names underwrite transgressive engagements with power and with the new. Ishi in this view is a trickster who takes on the roles of simulated authenticity offered to him by his museum friends while holding other aspects of himself apart. Ishi shows up

while hiding; he speaks while keeping silent. What's at stake is not a duplicitous "playing along" but an ironic acceptance of the performativity of living in an unequal, power-saturated environment. (Louis Owen, 2003, offers a lucid exegesis.) Vizenor finds something of his own trickster identity, his storyteller's way of messing with reality, in a subversive, almost postmodern Ishi. Like everyone else, Vizenor makes free with "Ishi Obscura." And unlike most of the others, he knows what he is up to.

Ishi is in our visions, and he persists by that [museum nickname] in our memory. We hear his exile as our own, and by his tease and natural reason we create new stories of native irony, survivance, and liberty. My stories are an expiation of our common exile in this culture of tricky giveaways. (Vizenor 2003: 372)

For much of Ishi's existence in white civilization he no doubt acquiesced in a command performance, under an assumed name. His new identity was a way to relate with others, to be recognized. Vizenor (1994: 134) invokes a strange, poignant anecdote recorded by Saxton Pope, here in Theodora Kroeber's words (pp. 228-29):

A Sioux Indian once passed judgment on Ishi. It happened this way. Pope and Ishi were attending a Buffalo Bill Wild West Show, of which they both were fond. There were a number of Plains Indians in the show. One of them, a tall, dignified man decked out in paint and feather war bonnet, came up to Pope and Ishi. The two Indians looked at each other in silence for several moments. The Sioux then asked in perfect English "What tribe of Indian is this?" Pope answered, "Yana, from Northern California." The Sioux then gently picked up a bit of Ishi's hair, rolled it between his fingers, looked critically into his face, and said, "He is a very high grade of Indian." When he had gone, Pope asked Ishi what he thought of the Sioux. "Him's big chiep," was Ishi's enthusiastic reply.

Whatever this authentication performance meant to the Sioux and the Yahi then, and whatever elements of Indian humor may have been lost on the earnest romantic, Saxton Pope, the anecdote has an inescapably satiric effect in Vizenor's universe. Ishi and the Sioux are both “simulated Indians.”

Uncovering the real “Ishi” cannot be a matter of removing a fake mask, or discovering a shared humanity. The man exists for us under an assumed name, invented by others. His “survivance,” Vizenor writes, “is heard in a word that means ‘one of the people,’ and that word became his name.”

So much the better, and he never told the anthropologists, reporters, and curious practitioners his sacred tribal name, not even his nicknames. The other tribal pronoun endured in silence, He might have said, “the ghosts were generous in the silence of the museum, and now these men pretend to know me in their name.” Trickster hermeneutics is the silence of his nicknames. ‘Ishi is the absence,’ he might have said. (p. 128)

Ishi’s “silence” holds a place for realities that exceed the dominant order of truth, beyond the reach of cultural relativism and anthropological translation projects. And Vizenor also invokes “tribal stories” that mediate different realities: resourceful ways to connect and disconnect separate worlds. He celebrates Ishi’s inability to learn how to slow down when reciting his stories for the scholars. The “informant” speaks past his listeners, his very volubility a kind of silence. Silence is stories that don’t translate. And it is the very name, or nickname, “Ishi,” papering over an absence of other names. It is an expression of what can’t be heard. Not now, not in this history. A trace of what “he might have said...”

Gerald Vizenor is certainly not alone in his awareness of the inescapable ironies of tribal survivance in and through simulations--performances both coerced and playful.

*

Many photographs were taken of Ishi. The images are haunting: the man seems somehow present and absent. *Partial Recall* (Lippard, ed. 1992) collects essays by Native American artists and writers exploring the predicament of Indian histories and identities entangled with images. Almost any one of the trenchant, poignant texts brought together by Lucy Lippard could provide commentary on Ishi's story,

For example, Rayna Green is "transfixed" by an old photo: the confident, unflinching gazes of two Indian girls in white dresses reclining on a Victorian couch.

There they were, these girls surrounded by Curtis boys dripping dentalia and fur—the sepia kings, shot through spit and petroleum jelly. Lords of the plains, Potentates of the Potlatch, the Last-Ofs. I take out my immediate distaste on them, but it's Curtis and the other pin-hole illusionists I'm after. Get a *life*, I want to say to them. Quit taking out your fantasies on us. Just give me one in overalls and a cowboy hat. Then we can get serious about what was happening to these people. (p. 47)

Or Paul Chaat-Smith:

They said that Ishi was the last North American Indian untouched by civilization. I don't know about that, but it's clear he was really country and seriously out of touch with recent developments. We're talking major hayseed here, at least...

One day they took Ishi on a field trip to Golden Gate Park. An early aviator named Henry Fowler was attempting a cross-country flight. You can imagine the delicious anticipation of the anthropologists. The Ishi Man vs. the Flying Machine. What would he make of this miracle...?

Ishi looked up at the plane overhead. He spoke in a tone the biographers would describe as one of “mild interest.” “White man up there?”

Twenty years later my grandfather would become the first Comanche frequent flyer. (p. 95)

Jimmie Durham:

Geronimo, as an Indian “photographic subject,” blew out the windows. On his own, he reinvented the concept of photographs of American Indians. At least he did so as far as he could, concerning pictures of himself, which are so ubiquitous that he must have sought “photo opportunities” as eagerly as the photographers. Yet even when he was “posed” by the man behind the camera, he seems to have destroyed the pose and created his own stance. In every image he looks through the camera at the viewer, seriously, intently, with a specific message. Geronimo uses the photograph to “get at” those people who imagine themselves as the “audience” of his struggles. He seems to be trying to see us. He is demanding to be seen, on his own terms. (p. 56)

Ishi was often photographed by visitors to the Anthropology Museum and, according to Theodora Kroeber, soon became expert in matters of pose and lighting.

Jolene Rickard: "We survived by watching, listening and experiencing life. A photograph is not going to give that firsthand experience, but it may haunt your memory into seeking life." (p. 110)



Figure 11. (James Luna, "The Artifact Piece")

James Luna, a Luiseño/Diegueño artist from southern California, became famous with a display of himself wrapped in a towel lying in a museum. "The Artifact Piece" (1987), a direct reference to Ishi the living exhibit, is also a general comment on salvage-collecting, spectatorship and the performance of authenticity. In a room devoted to American Indians at the Museum of Man, San Diego, Luna lay motionless on a bed of sand. Nothing prepared casual visitors for this artifact, somehow both living and dead. Official-looking labels were placed alongside the body, providing its personal name and explaining scars caused by specific incidents of drinking or fighting.

Luna's personal belongings from the reservation were displayed in nearby cases—including music (country and western, jazz, Mexican, Sex Pistols...), Alan Ginsburg's *Howl*, etc. A particular life evoked... And this Indian artifact was listening in on the surrounding conversations.



Figure 12. (Ishi making a bow, Deer Creek)

An Indian in a loincloth--the performance of authenticity both Luna and Vizenor satirize. This photo from *Ishi in Two Worlds* was taken on the museum-dweller's camping trip to Deer Creek. In the book's first edition, virtually all the images of Ishi were of this kind: re-enactments of a former "pre-contact" life. If they represent a "simulated Indian," how should the real Ishi be portrayed? Perhaps "fully" clothed? That was, after all, his chosen style of self-presentation as soon as the cameras began to be pointed his way. Yet he consented to the camping trip's "cultural striptease," as Vizenor calls it. He even enjoyed playing Indian and apparently thought the documentation of his traditional life-ways worth doing. Some of it, however, he kept secret. His survivance, his way of living as an "Indian" in "Civilization," was evidently a matter of selectively taking up new ways while refusing others, giving and holding back. Ishi was never comfortable shaking hands, avoiding this form of contact whenever possible. But he particularly appreciated pockets—which soon filled up with what Theodore Kroeber tactfully called "the usual male miscellany."

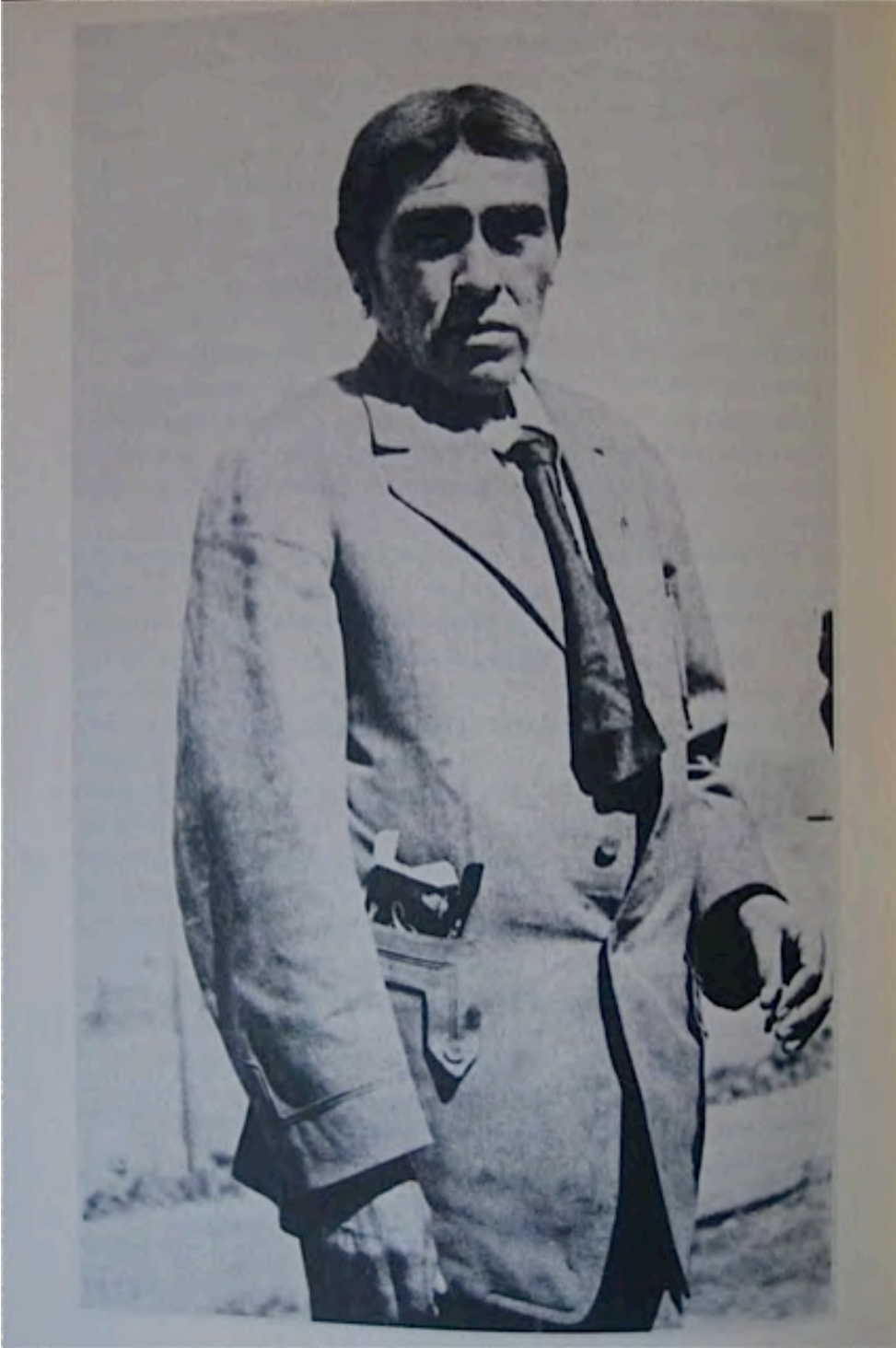


Figure 13. Ishi at the University

Which image represents the real Ishi? James Luna's performance piece (1991-2) "Take a Picture with A Real Indian" commented on this unanswerable question. Audience members were invited to choose among three possibilities: Luna feathered in plains Indian regalia; Luna in a polo shirt and slacks; Luna naked in a loincloth. Two of the options were life-sized cutout photos, one was three dimensional and alive. However, instead of being troubled by a choice between reductive authenticities, audiences tended to get into the fun. Andrea Liss reports that "In recent stagings of this piece, Luna has only been able to calm or numb the crowds by saying, "OK, next you can take your picture with a real nigger." (p. 13)

In 2002, I was asked to speak at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco. I suggested that James Luna be invited at the same time to stage a conversation. As I stood at a lectern presenting an early version of the present essay--with projected slides of Ishi on a screen behind--Luna impersonated a janitor and silently swept the stage around me.

In the discussion that followed he observed: "I am not a coyote. Coyote was not a nice guy. I am a clown." He also said: "I wasn't born in a teepee. I was born in TV." ... "I am an contemporary American Indian artist." And Luna recalled his father: "passing on the tradition of alcohol."

As an artist, he has publicly performed the most disturbing, least noble aspects of tribal life--experiences of alcoholism and intra-tribal violence. Luna has also explored "Indian humor used as a form of knowledge." In 1992 he created an installation, "The Sacred Colors," which uses the four directions of pan-Indian cosmology to create a serene group portrait of himself with three friends, men and women representing black, white, red, and yellow races of humanity. In the catalogue he offers this vision of reconciliation: "I must tell you that I am sometimes left in awe of many of our tribal ways: [their] complexity, yet profound simplicity. I was thinking about this

when I thought of the sacred colors. Like the four directions, we use the colors to distinguish and balance our world.” (quoted by Liss 1992:19)

Luna considers himself a “cultural warrior,” a voice for his people. But his success as a performance artist and his crossover skills have earned him criticisms from the “culture police,” accusations of having gone over to the oppressors. On an airplane flight to participate in the 2005 Venice Biennale, he reflects on his predecessors: the Luiseño Catholic Pablo Tac, who made the trip to Italy in 1832, his elders who brought literacy skills home from the boarding schools and who were seen to have changed. And Ishi, the so-called last wild California Indian, “a pretty smart guy,” who thought that the match was the best creation of Western culture. “Mr. Ishi,” the anthropological specimen and cross-cultural observer joins James Luna and Pablo Tac in the “stratosphere” (Luna 2012, pp. 42, 44-45).

Identity and authenticity remain open questions in the work of James Luna, Gerald Vizenor, and the others I have just quoted. Their differently ironic sensibilities are intimately concerned with social and political processes of survival through resistance, engagement, and transformation. Irony and satire are not primarily modes of distance or critique but expressions of what Louis Owen (2003: 376) calls “utopian desires that lie at the paradoxical heart of trickster stories.” Thus Indian identity, tradition, even authenticity, are not “essentialisms” to be criticized or abandoned but rather sites of ongoing interrogation where real historical relations, both ludic and deadly serious, are improvised.

Ishi, by all accounts, loved jokes.

The healer.

According to Theodora Kroeber and her sources, Ishi was “religious...”

He believed according to Yana formula in the making and peopling of the world by gods and demigods, and in the *taboos* laid down by the Old Ones. He also believed in a Land of the Dead where the souls of Yana live out their shadow community existence.

Christian doctrine interested him, and seemed to him for the most part reasonable and understandable. He held to the conviction that the White God would not care to have Indians in His home, for all Loudy told him to the contrary. [“Loudy,” Llewellyn Loud, was a museum employee given to Christian sermonizing.] It may have occurred to him that the souls of white men would fit poorly into a round dance of Yana dead. If so, he was too polite to say so. (pp. 224-5)

How these attitudes came to be known is not said. In any event, they express a plausible, characteristic restraint--holding onto core Yana beliefs and attachments, even while experimenting with new situations, relationships, tools and customs. Ishi’s basic attitude seems to have been a tolerant curiosity about other life-ways –an engagement that did not require abandoning his own values. This was how the anthropologists, imbued with Boasian cultural relativism, saw their charge.

His manner in and around the museum made people feel optimistic about human conviviality and the possibility of bridging deep cultural differences. His smile made them feel better about themselves. Moreover he embodied something innocent and wise: more a “wild child” than a “wild man.” Like Kaspar Hauser, or the hero of Jerzy Kosinski’s *Being There*, his simple gesture or word could seem deeply meaningful.



Figure 14. (“Indian.” Drawing by L. Frank.)

Ishi’s quiet, magical power turns up in Theodora Kroeber’s biography of her husband, *Alfred Kroeber: A Personal Configuration*: an anecdote based, no doubt, on something recalled by her subject. It is 1913, and the biographer has delayed any mention of Ishi until this special moment. Henriette, Alfred Kroeber’s first wife, has just died of tuberculosis. He sits frozen at his office desk, “his mind blank.”

There came to him as he sat there the silken sound of tiny particles of falling flakes of glass from the next room where someone was at work—Ishi. Kroeber went next door. A barefoot but otherwise ordinarily dressed Indian sat on a piece of canvas tarpaulin, expertly fashioning an obsidian arrowhead with a chipper made of the antler of a deer. Ishi smiled a greeting but did not stop the rapid flaking stroke; he was used to having this friend of his sit beside him, watching him at work. (p. 80)

Flashbacks recall Ishi's arrival at the museum, the tragedy of his people, and his new relations with the anthropologists. Theodora Kroeber recalls that the devastated survivor almost immediately began to fashion artifacts "for the museum so that outside worlds would know something of his own Yana world."

Through the few words they exchanged, through the comfortable silences between the words, [Kroeber] felt Ishi trying to help him in his own loss, to comfort him, to transmit to him something of his own Yana faith. There was much unfinished work for him and Ishi to do. There was other unfinished work in the full notebooks next door. (p. 84)

Kroeber returns to his office to focus on Yurok grammar. Ishi had taught him the healing power of work—a Yana virtue perhaps, but also a thoroughly Christian and Victorian value. Ishi's patient ability to persevere was an inspiration to Alfred Kroeber. Whether this particular anecdote is his or his wife's extrapolation, Ishi's fundamental purpose in the narrative is clear.

Healing may be Ishi's most potent, and continuing role. And in recent decades, California Indians have been turning the theme in new directions. Rather than representing a rupture with the past ("the last" pure Indian), an enigmatic survivor or a trickster escape artist, Ishi's story becomes an

epitome of exile and return, loss and reconnection. For Art Angle and those involved in Ishi's repatriation, his story is unfinished; his return to his homeland will be a completion, a healing experience, not just for those with close historical connections to the Yahi but for all California Indians. Ishi's story makes new meanings, now, in diverse tribal ways.

Liz Dominguez (Chumash) writing for *News from Native California* (Fall 1998) tells of being inspired by hearing Ishi's voice--tapes of his recorded songs and stories. Though she can't understand his words, there's something very powerful in the presence of his voice. She searches out similar records in the "salvage anthropology" of her own people, finding old tapes of her great-great-grandmother, collected by salvage linguists like J. P. Harrington. The heritage quest will lead her into active Chumash language learning and singing. Liz Dominguez ends her essay: "Thank you, Ishi, your message came through."

More of Ishi's recordings are currently being translated by the linguist Leanne Hinton and her collaborators at Berkeley. The task is a formidable one, for there are no other records of Ishi's dialect than those he left--no dictionaries, grammars, fully-translated texts. But when the latest transcriptions and (partial) translations are complete, the audience will certainly be more than academic. The collections of linguistic and oral tradition made in this century by "salvage anthropologists" such as Kroeber and his followers are finding new audiences and uses--repatriated by Indian activists, writers, scholars and artists.



Figure 15. (Ishi and Companion at Lamin Mool," painting by Frank Day)

Comparing Ishi's face in this extraordinary painting with its likely source, the lost soul photographed at the Oroville jail (Figure 3), we see how the image has been recoded: from despair to power, from terror to healing. And it is no longer a question of bonding with white friends in the museum. Ishi's healing power is re-imagined in a context of tribal survival and empowerment.

"Ishi and Companion at Iamin Mool" was painted in 1973 by Frank Day, a Maidu artist whose magical realist renditions of pre-contact places, events and myths have been influential in the emergence of California Indian art. (Dobkins 1997) Day was born in 1902, the son of an important headman and a native speaker of Maidu. After years in a government boarding school and decades of travel throughout North American Indian Country, he returned to Northern California and took up painting. His "auto-ethnographic" (Pratt 1992) versions of Concow Maidu

tradition are mixtures of documentary realism and imaginative invention. Dramatic canvasses depict historical events and spiritual happenings, often together in a composite image. Day also recorded many hours of taped commentary, story-telling, and memories. In this way, and as the organizer (along with Wintu artist Frank LaPeña) of a traditional dance group, Frank Day has become part of the inventive continuity of Maidu culture. While some of his renditions and memories are contested, and while Christianity is very much part of the process, Day's energetic production of image, word and dance has been seminal. He died in 1976.

The painting depicts Ishi a few weeks before his capture, in the act of healing a fellow Indian from a gunshot wound. Day recalled that he and his father stumbled on this very scene in early August 1911, at a place not far from Oroville where different Indian bands traditionally gathered. Ishi is not the emaciated refugee who would be captured a month later, but rather a powerful shamanic figure. He works with an elaborate contraption for heating water without any telltale smoke: sunlight focused by a reflecting shell. The stones are heated in the water and applied to the wound. Day's is a unique image. There is no other surviving California evidence of such a doctoring technique.

While it is impossible independently verify Frank Day's recollection, there's no doubt about the current significance of his retelling. The encounter he reports is part of Maidu oral tradition, which includes other close encounters with a furtive kinsman/neighbor. Starn (2004:292) recounts one such story and Richard Burrell documents other recollections. In Frank Day's image of healing, Ishi's story is detached from the dominant history to play an inspirational role in the politics of Indian resurgence. This includes a restored connection between the Maidu and Yahi. Frank Day's memory of Ishi would be cited as evidence by the Butte County Native American Cultural Committee asserting their right to repatriate Ishi's remains.

*

There is a darker, side to Ishi's healing touch that, as Theodora Kroeber wrote, "illuminates the way."

In a provocative "Epilogue" to his long quest for Ishi, Orin Starn drives up into the mountains to the tiny town of Taylorsville, site of Greenville Rancheria where some eighty Mountain Maidu reside. He is bringing a cassette tape containing four of the songs Ishi recorded on wax cylinders, these four sung in Maidu rather than Yahi. The dialect is, however, different from that understood by the handful of remaining Maidu speakers around Oroville. One of these suggested the songs might be in the mountain dialect, so Starn arranged for several of the remaining native speakers in Taylorsville to listen for their language in the faint, scratchy voice from almost a century ago. Imagining they would be pleased to hear the old words, even spoken by a Yahi neighbor, Starn was surprised by the reactions...

There was a long silence once I turned off the tape. At last, Wihelmina [Ives] said: "He shouldn't have sung those songs." It turned out that she and the others had no objection to [the first two samples] gambling songs, which they recognized as ones they'd heard as children. These were songs made up of vocables instead of real words, a kind of Indian scattling intended for the raucous fun of a gambling tournament. What bothered the five elders were the other two songs, which were doctoring songs. "He shouldn't have sung those songs," Wihelmina repeated. "They were given by the spirit to the medicine man." Could they have been Ishi's own songs? If Ishi was a healer, as some believe, then he would have had his own songs. Wihelmina didn't reply. It was as if she knew that the songs belonged to some mountain Maidu doctor, and yet was reluctant to say so straight out. As I had already learned, contrary to the more benign New Age view of 'Indian

healing,” the secret casting of jealous spells was part of the doctoring of the old days. I could only guess that Wihelmina didn’t want to enter into the tense, even dangerous subject of the medecine men and their power for good and evil, especially with an outsider.

After some speculation by the elders about why Ishi sang the songs—was he “hunting for his own death,” or had he realized that “everything was over, there wasn’t anyone else left?”—the conversation flagged.

Was there more to the story? Unshared secrets about the meaning of the songs? It would have been rude to press further. I stayed only a bit longer before heading back down the highway.” (p. 300)

The discomfort with Ishi’s doctoring songs reminded Starn of a story that had briefly surfaced in 1997: the last Yahi was really a “malevolent shaman” expelled by his group. Maybe the elders were holding something back. Or perhaps they had simply said all they knew and declined to speculate. Starn’s ambiguous *denouement* among the mountain Maidu pointedly returns us to Theodora Kroeber’s “deep shadow” surrounding the man called Ishi.

But the resonant figure still works its magic. Starn’s weaves a personal quest into his multi-stranded history. Among the “ranks of unfulfilled strivers and wannabes” (the many Ishi aficionados in search of something essential that he encountered during his research) “I counted myself—a white man who likes Indian company, a Californian stranded in North Carolina, a writer who hates to write.” (294) The anthropologist, making a life, but still feeling exiled in North Carolina, finds a renewed connection with the region of his upbringing. Activist scholarship brings a new sense of involvement with Northern California’s tragic, transforming

history. And the trail of Ishi's story finally leads to a 100-year-old Maidu matriarch, Vera Clark McKeen, whose powerful bear hug will be "life itself" (p. 296). In *Ishi's Brain*, Starn is "always coming home", to borrow the title of Ursula Le Guin's utopian ethnography of a future California which will be discussed at the end of this essay. Always coming home — the phrase seems to sum up the redemptive promise of Ishi's story.

*

Sacrificial healing makes particular sense in cultures infused with Christian values. This includes Native California where today mixed forms of Christianity and indigenous messianism, healing visions and world-renewal cycles, are active in transformed traditions. Ishi's story lives in an unfinished history composed of braided and tangled strands, Indian and White, old and new, intimate and public. For native people, the healing potential in Ishi's story has been affirmed throughout the recent repatriation process. "Bringing Ishi home" by gathering and burying his physical remains helps close a wound... at least for a time. And while repatriation, this time, was relatively smooth, it unfolded within the tensions, ruptures, and re-articulations of Northern California Indian societies since 1917. When Ishi came home to his people in 2000, it was to a radically altered social landscape.

When the brain was finally located at the Smithsonian, a consensus quickly formed that Ishi's dispersed remains should be returned, as Art Angle put it, "where he belongs." Museum staff, California State officials, academic scholars and California tribes were mobilized in the process, which moved--by repatriation standards—quickly. But where, exactly, did Ishi belong? Thorny historical and political problems were raised by the need to give Ishi's remains back to his people. Who were the proper recipients? There were no "Yahi" (or Mill Creek Indians) left. The Butte County Maidu group (southern neighbors, and sometime rivals of the Mill Creeks) had initiated

and led the movement for reburial. They traveled to Washington DC, where they performed ceremonies for the brain and began negotiations for its return. Having taken responsibility for Ishi were they the appropriate relations?

Everyone agreed that there should be a reburial by California Indians, without interference and in accordance with their traditions. But this had also to be accomplished in accordance with repatriation laws requiring that if no immediate family can be determined then "cultural affiliation" should be the relevant criterion. A historical can of worms opens. When so much has changed, what are the crucial elements of "cultural" identity? If groups have moved and recombined what are the appropriate threads of "affiliation?" In Ishi's case, the "Yahi" were gone. Yet they were socially and historically connected to several neighboring groups, now reconstituted as "tribes." In Ishi's day, socio-political notions like "tribe" or "nation" did not exist: there were no reservations in California of the sort established elsewhere, no legally recognized "Indian Country." Since Ishi spoke a dialect of Yana, and since there were now people of mixed Yana blood (having lost the language for generations) in the Redding and Pit River communities to the north, perhaps these were the most appropriate groups to receive the remains. Having contacted Redding and Pit River people who remembered and valued Yana ancestry, among their other roots, the Smithsonian recognized their right of repatriation— thus anchoring "cultural affiliation" in language.

It was a cogently argued and defensible decision (Speaker 2003). But as a consequence, the Smithsonian rejected a Maidu petition based on oral traditions asserting kinship relations with the Yahi. Art Angle had publicly stated, on more than one occasion, that "Ishi was at least half Maidu." The Butte County Committee's argument also pointed to physical proximity, a local history of contacts, linguistic and archaeological evidence of mutual trade and influence (Ishi's Maidu vocabulary). Oral tradition is, of course, adaptive, often politically realigned in present

circumstances. Was Frank Day's memory of the encounter at Iamin Mool part of oral tradition before it took shape in his painting sixty years after the fact? What about the improbable elements it contains? Ishi's physical strength just weeks before he was found in a state of exhausted emaciation? The unique healing contraption? His wounded companion, nowhere else in the documentary record? A certain skepticism is inescapable. But so is the fact that oral traditions often contain historical truths invisible to the (always selective) surviving record. Ishi wouldn't speak about his deceased family or say much about their life in hiding. How would the anthropologists at the museum know whether his mother was or was not Maidu? If she was captured at a young age, she might not have spoken Maidu to her son. And given recent archaeological evidence that the "Yahi" were a more mixed band than previously thought and were in contact with those around them, Maidu stories of relations with their neighbors to the north, of leaving food for the wild ones out in the hills, of being ready to welcome Ishi in 1911, become more plausible. They can no longer be dismissed on purportedly objective or scientific grounds.

It is arguable that the whole search for Ishi's people was a kind of anachronism or misplaced concreteness. The "cultural affiliation" required by repatriation law simply cannot be traced in a single direction, given the historical re-articulation of local identities, and the emergence of new scales of identification. A larger Pan-California, or Northern California Indian, interest in Ishi was, at times, invoked by Art Angle, and new inter-tribal networks of identification have emerged in the identity politics of Northern California. Individuals often list two or more tribes when identifying themselves as Indians. Many of these people, with no direct Yana connections, have felt the return of Ishi's remains to be a part of a shared history. Yet, older, more local processes of kinship also remain strong. In a confused, multi-scaled intertribal landscape, the Smithsonian was unwilling to acknowledge broader pan-Californian "cultural affiliations" with the last Yahi. As defined in their protocols, "culture" remained local, tied to blood and language, rather than

emergent, multiplex or coalitional. The tribes of California, identified in Kroeber's time (Maidu, Yana, Wintun, etc.) had crystallized, definitively in the law and more ambiguously in native opinion. Thus repatriation by Ishi's northern kin meant, in practice, exclusion of his southern relations: trading partners, rivals, and perhaps family.

The Redding and Pit River people, though latecomers to the repatriation process, felt a renewed connection to their braided Yana roots and a responsibility to do the right thing for a lost ancestor. At the September 2000 ceremony in Lassen National Park, they expressed a profound commitment to the process of bringing Ishi home. There were moving testimonials, from young and old, and a powerful Bear Dance (a trance-dance for healing). I sensed here (and also in the earlier Maidu-organized events around Oroville) a strong feeling of reconnection with a lost relative, righting a profound and still painful wrong.

There were raw feelings from the arguments over who should receive Ishi's remains, especially among the Maidu who did so much to lead the process and were, finally, excluded from the burial. (Art Angle chose not to attend the Mt. Lassen celebration.) But there was also a widespread understanding that this was not a time for disunity. During the meetings I attended, at least, contrary claims about Ishi's affiliation were registered and left un-contradicted. The tribal actors in the process evinced mutual respect, if not close cooperation. In a real sense, the man from a tiny group of refugees in Mill and Deer Creeks had become a common ancestor. If he once symbolized the death of indigenous Californians, his return now demonstrated their vitality. Thus, Ishi's repatriation brings into view a transformative history of re-alignments: people forced off traditional lands, regrouping in new/old configurations: Christianities, neo-traditionalisms, heritage productions, casinos, tribal development projects.

The “tribes” of California took shape in the early years of the twentieth century. Aboriginal California had been intensely local, and one of the most linguistically rich regions of the planet. Alfred Kroeber and his colleagues set out to document this extraordinary diversity, which they felt to be disappearing. The result was a map of California Indian languages: a prodigious research effort. Like all maps, it projected a specific reality. Its sharp outlines marked off languages and dialects that did not exactly match socio-cultural units. Local societies were in practice socially porous, crossed by trade, kinship, multilingualism, intertribal gatherings. (Field 2008: 75) Moreover, within the territories defined by language there could be multiple dialects, some largely unintelligible to each other. In Ishi’s time, people distinguished their community using the name of a local site or of a headman, rather than saying “we are Yana,” or “we are “Karak.” A common habit of equating language with culture oversimplifies more complex affiliations. The makers of the linguistic map knew this, and did not assume that "Yana" designated a tribe in today's cultural/political sense. The same can be said for "Maidu," or "Wintun." Since the map was completed, however, these rather fluid groupings have hardened and become institutionalized under strong pressures to function in a government-imposed politics of “tribal” recognition.

Ishi’s people, the "Mill Creeks" (referring to a particular stream bed and steep valley) were certainly not a tribe. "Yahi" was a dialect name recorded by Edward Sapir. How discrete was the group’s existence, even in hiding from the Indian-killers? As we've seen, past and present intertribal relations in California suggest the existence of multiple affiliations. And recent research by the archaeologists Jerald Johnson and Jim Johnston has underlined the relativity of Ishi's isolation. "Grizzly Bear's Hiding Place" the last Deer Creek refuge was filled with pilfered commodities from the white-man’s world. The Yahi language recorded by Kroeber and his colleagues included Spanish loan words, as well as bits from Wintu, Atsugewi, and Maidu (Starn 2003). Richard Burrell’s oral histories offer further suggestions of interaction (2012). Thus

current retellings of Ishi's story, both by natives and by scholars, question his ahistorical isolation and "wildness," the "stone-age" purity so valued by his scientific friends at the anthropological museum.

It is at least arguable that the Mill Creeks, or Yahi, were a liminal group occupying a borderland. And if contemporary discourse requires they be given a discrete "tribal" identity, it is not obvious that this should be primarily articulated with the groups speaking Central and Northern Yana. (I bracket, for the moment, evidence for connections West with Wintu and East with Atsugewi, since these affiliations were not at issue in the repatriation process.) The sketch map drawn by Ishi on the camping trip and reproduced by Theodora Kroeber (p. 215) shows active trails beyond Yahi country leading both north and south.

The tension between Redding/Pit River and Maidu participants in the return of Ishi's remains was to some degree increased by the either-or test of tribal identity imposed by repatriation law and the Smithsonian's decision. Older rivalries and histories of localism may also have played a part. In public, however, the participants, exercising diplomatic restraint, left opposed opinions uncontested. A clear consensus prevailed: the Yahi's return was a time for tribal unity and a time for wide participation in the healing process. Ishi's return, like many on-going repatriations of native bodies in North America and elsewhere, has had a cathartic effect. I felt this at the meetings and ceremonies I attended. Space was made there for non-Indians: allies and participants in the repatriation process. Many people were moved (differently) by Ishi's return.

3. Ishi variations

Ishi's story has been taken back, retold, by California Indians and by other native writers and artists. It bears repeating that what I know of these changing worlds, based only on public expressions and not the many, more intimate, private exchanges, is not the whole picture. Revisionism, dialogue, and contestation are ongoing in a tangle of California histories, native and non-native. Ishi's story continues to be a productive site for rethinking these histories. The last sections of this essay explore other retellings as signs of the changing times. I discuss two major films about Ishi, Theodora Kroeber's book for school children, debates within the Berkeley Anthropology department, and the science-fiction/utopias of Ursula K. Le Guin. I see these revisions as part of a dialogical process that reopens imagined pasts and projects possible futures. The retellings address distinct audiences and changing frontiers of difference within the ever-receding horizon of a post-colonial society.

The term "post-colonial" is controversial. I use it with hesitation, lacking a better name for the equitable resolution of conquest's unfinished business. In the sense developed by Stuart Hall (1996) "post" cannot mean "after"--not in the sense of something beyond, or transcending colonialism. "Post" is always shadowed by "neo." As a periodizing term, it evokes an unfinished transition not an end point, an uneven work in progress. To the extent that "post-colonial" developments seem to be subverting or moving away from long-established, hierarchical, binary structures (both of material power and of thought) it can be called utopic. But this utopia, as will appear below, needs to be thought of as a process not an outcome. Utopia is as likely to be found veering off sideways as leaping forward through time. Le Guin:

Copernicus told us that the earth was not the center. Darwin told us that man is not the center. If we listened to the anthropologists we might hear them telling us, with

appropriate indirectness, that the White West is not the center. The center of the world is a bluff on the Klamath River, a rock in Mecca, a hole in the ground in Greece, nowhere, its circumference everywhere.

Perhaps the utopist should heed this unsettling news at last. Perhaps the utopist would do well to lose the plan, throw away the map, get off the motorcycle, put on a very strange-looking hat, bark sharply three times, and trot off looking thin, yellow, and dingy across the desert and up into the digger pines. (1989: 98)

*

In 1992, two years after the blockbuster Hollywood film “Dancing With Wolves,” Ishi reached television in a 4.2 million dollar HBO production. “The Last of His Tribe” is a full-length movie starring John Voigt (“Midnight Cowboy”) as Kroeber, Graham Green (“Dances With Wolves”) as Ishi, Ann Archer (“Fatal Attraction”) as Kroeber’s first wife, Henrietta, and David Ogden Stiers (“MASH”) as Saxton Pope. A publicity tagline reads: “The spirit of a great warrior can never die.” This is almost certainly the first time Ishi has been called a “warrior,” except perhaps in Vizenor’s ironic sense: “A post-Indian warrior of survivance.” Publicity images show mounted men who look suspiciously like the US Cavalry from battles on the Great Plains riding down Ishi and his fleeing family. (It’s interesting to imagine a cavalry charge in the brush-filled ravines of Deer Creek.) This packaging is, of course, designed to make recognizably “Indian” the story of a quiet Californian in a suit and tie.

Unlike its publicity, the film takes pains to provide verisimilitude in its period settings and costumes. A distinguished linguist, the Maidu specialist William Shipley, was engaged to provide plausible-sounding Yahi sentences for subtitled conversations between Kroeber and Ishi. Many

situations from *Ishi in Two Worlds* are recognizable; others are invented. The script, by novelist Stephen Harrington, does not hesitate to make free with known facts in the service of a more gripping drama. Romanticism is fused with psychology: science confronts sentiment, repression yields to catharsis in a work best called, perhaps, “The Healing of A.L. Kroeber.”

Among the HBO film’s liberties, the most blatant, perhaps, is its portrayal of the anthropologist’s fluency in Yahi. Everything important is translatable. At dinner with the Kroebers very soon after his arrival in San Francisco, Ishi responds to Henrietta Kroeber’s request for an account of his travails and the fate of his family with a full, completely intelligible, recitation. Of course, he had always declined to discuss these matters. There are no obscure “Wood Duck” stories. Everything in the film turns on Kroeber’s relationships with Ishi and with his wife. Henrietta is dying of tuberculosis, but her husband, in deep denial, refuses to confront reality. He lectures to her about her condition, and when the emotional going gets tough, he freezes. Henrietta alternately pleads with her husband for help and treats him with knowing, womanly tolerance. Voigt’s Kroeber is well-meaning, boyishly arrogant, and emotionally blocked. With Ishi he adopts an authoritarian, parental tone. The wild man is his charge and his prize. He brags that he will make Ishi and his people live forever, in a book. “Big Chiep” knows best.

He will learn otherwise. After Henrietta’s death, Ishi takes over the humanizing project. At her funeral, he observes that there is no singing: “How can she find her way to the land of the dead unless you sing for her?” Kroeber will not, cannot, sing. When Ishi insists, Kroeber loses his temper. Later, in a melodramatic climax to the Deer Creek expedition, Ishi comes on the spot where (seen in a chilling flashback) his sister was coldly executed. He collapses to his knees, and induces Kroeber to do the same. “Do you feel her breathing...Do you hear her singing?What she sing?....sing it!” Kroeber: “I can’t.” Ishi, falling apart, sobs: “Ishi...last...Yahi!”

Back in San Francisco, Ishi wanders into a dissection room at the hospital and discovers cadavers being cut up. He is outraged, angrily demanding that Kroeber put a stop to the barbarity. Dead people must remain whole and find their way to the ancestors. Kroeber refuses, stubbornly clinging to his authority. Then in an amusing, historically dubious episode Saxton Pope hires a prostitute to sleep with the lone bachelor. In the morning Ishi is found humming happily as he polishes display cases. When Kroeber explodes in anger, Ishi wonders: “Saldu [white people] not do this thing?” Kroeber, ever more prudish and parental, confronts the author of the crime. Pope acidly retorts: “For whom are you keeping Ishi pure?” As relations with Ishi sour, the dialogue becomes even more heavy-handed. A confused Kroeber finally asks Ishi why he is upset. Pointing to the anthropologist’s notebook, the Indian gravely replies: “You put Ishi here. Not [pointing to his heart] here.”

The denouement is predictable. Kroeber flees to a sabbatical in New York, and Ishi sickens. Anxiously following his friend’s deteriorating condition from a distance, Kroeber discovers storage drawers filled with Indian skulls at the American Museum of Natural History. He rushes to send a telegram: “No Autopsy. Science can go to hell.” There follows a genuinely disturbing shot of masked surgeons (“with great reverence in a spirit of scientific inquiry”) cutting up Graham Green. Kroeber returns to San Francisco, mute with pent up grief. Alone in Ishi’s room, holding a death mask made by Pope, he finally sings—first softly, then louder and louder, weeping and singing, in Yahi.

We cut to a final vision of Ishi, now in his homeland, striding easily along the trail of the dead. He looks strong, a heroic Indian at last, clad in skins, with bow and arrows. Ishi speaks to the camera: “I heard you singing.” We see Kroeber standing just behind, relaxed and at ease.

“Are you tired?” Ishi turns. “No I feel strong.”

“Your people are waiting for you?” “Yes.”

Ishi strides away toward the horizon. Kroeber: “Go to them.”

“Is everybody hoppy?” This was the Yahi’s favorite greeting on entering a room. Graham Green’s Ishi never smiles. If Kroeber and Pope are satirically exaggerated by Voigt and Stiers, Green underplays his part. A sideling glance or twitch of the eyebrow communicates bemusement, concern, puzzlement at the behavior of the white people. His mystical/emotional core emerges in the struggle with his anthropologist alter-ego. And aside from the outburst of weeping for his dead sister and lost tribe, Ishi is the impassive Indian of American stereotype. Strong in his attachment to his people and his values, he knows exactly who he is. With long hair, classic features, few words... And he looks good in a suit.

Ultimately *The Last of His Tribe*, despite some pointed, mostly comic, moments, comes down to stereotypes and a predictable catharsis. The anthropologist is the soulless white man. The emotionally-grounded child of nature puts up with Big Chiep’s boy-scientist excesses and clumsy good will, in the end teaching him how to feel. This gift to a white man who knows a lot, but understands little, appears to be Ishi’s real purpose on his detour through San Francisco on the way to a happy reunion with his lost family. *The Last of His Tribe* thus unites the “eco-hero” narrative with another version of the reconciliation story of cross-cultural “friendship,” psychologically repackaged as a romantic struggle of reason and feeling. What any of this has to do with real individuals is, of course, highly questionable.

As a fictional exercise, the film develops the familiar themes of heroism and healing. White people, particularly the men, are often misguided, sometimes silly. Ishi is never silly. Kroeber finally accepts what the Indian has to teach. And so the anthropologist’s somewhat plaintive early comment to the survivor of genocide that “Not all white men are alike,” turns out to be true.

Reconciliation after genocide is possible. The exile's return, virile and whole, rejoining his ancestors, can be read as an allegory of contemporary repatriation movements.

*

Fantasy, which creates a world, must be strictly coherent to its own terms, or it loses all plausibility. The rules that govern how things work in the imagined world cannot be changed during the story.

This is probably one of the reasons why fantasy is so acceptable to children, and even when frightening may give the reader reassurance: it has rules. It asserts a universe that, in some way, makes sense.

–Ursula K. Le Guin, “Plausibility in Fantasy” (posted
on her personal website)

It is revealing to compare the HBO film, a historical fiction, with Theodora Kroeber's retelling destined for school-children. Both versions dramatically reshape the documented story. *Ishi, Last of His Tribe* (1964) is a novella that might best be classified as “pedagogical fantasy.” It supplies a rich traditional life for the isolated Yahi, offering young readers a lesson in ethnographic cultural relativism. The new version also supplies a female companion for the young Ishi, thinking, perhaps, that girl readers would need someone to identify with. In San Francisco the adolescent Saxton Pope Jr., who went along on the Deer Creek field trip, emerges as Ishi's devoted companion and is a major source of narrative perspective. The tale's happy ending is complete: “Ishi lived for many moons, a museum man among museum men. Death came to him as he wished—with his friends in the museum-watgurwa.” (p. 208). Ishi is mourned and buried with reverence; everyone understands that he has rejoined his family. Tuberculosis and autopsies are not, it seems, appropriate for young readers. The whole story takes on an exotic, slightly dreamy feeling. San Francisco becomes “the edge of the world.” The use of Yahi names

throughout reinforces the effect. By adopting the perspective of a stranger in the white world Theodora Kroeber challenges her readers to step outside their everyday reality.

The youth version reads like much contemporary young adult fantasy. (It is hard not to feel the presence of Ursula Le Guin who, we know from interviews, discussed the project extensively with her mother and was, in the early 1960's, just coming into her own as a writer of fantastic fiction.) There are obvious "coming of age" aspects to the retelling: the young Ishi receives a troubling "power dream" that tells him he will go, one day, into the world of the Saldu, where he will discover that not all white people are bad, and where he will teach them. He resists his calling, but in the latter part of the book embraces the mission, confident that it is the will of coyote and of his family. We have already seen this idea of Ishi's mission to educate, even to save, the dominant society articulated in native contexts. Orin Starn (2004: 250-54) observes its critical, utopic potential. And in James Freeman's romantic novel, *Ishi's Journey* (1992: 124), the last Yahi dreams very explicit instructions: "Your family wishes you to teach the Saldu what our people have learned. We want the white ones to know what they have destroyed, so they will learn that to kill the animals and the land is to kill themselves."

Healer, teacher, missionary...Ishi's life must have had a coherent purpose. He cannot have been simply a piece of historical flotsam that washed up in a museum.

Ishi, Last of His Tribe, was an instant commercial success, becoming required reading in the California schools for decades. According to Karl Kroeber (xxxx), his mother struggled over the writing and always felt uncomfortable with the outcome. The project had, in effect been forced on her by publishers who threatened to produce their own youth version of Ishi's story if she declined the task. To avoid a travesty, Theodora Kroeber made a sustained and earnest effort to bring ethnographic wisdom and cross-cultural identification to young readers. When viewed as a

work of fantasy, readers like me can forgive the liberties taken in making Ishi's story more coherent and meaningful. But ultimately the tale is hard to read: sentimental with all the lucid, hard edges smoothed out. I have encountered people who, when I recommend *Ishi in Two Worlds*, think they have read it. But on further inquiry it seems they are dimly remembering something they encountered in fifth grade.

It may be worth observing that Ishi's special bond with young people is a motif recurring throughout his ramifying story. There was something irresistibly childlike about this man in his fifties: his apparent helplessness and simplicity, his hesitations and enthusiasms. Ishi was, it seems, popular with children at the museum, often giving them the arrowheads he made in public every Sunday. He sillingly "played Indian" with young boys (Sackman 2010: 94-5). This complicity is central to Theodora Kroeber's pedagogical version, where Ishi remains youthful throughout the story and where the Saxon Pope Jr. is a point of identification for young white readers. This adolescent boy was memorably photographed by Alfred Kroeber on the ethnographic camping trip, grasping Ishi's long hair in the rushing waters of Deer Creek. He also turns up as a key narrator in Freeman's novel. With Ishi as a guide, it's good to play Indian. A surviving tale from the time of Ishi's concealment, as relayed by Orin Starn, partakes of this desire (Starn 2004: 114; see also Burrill 2011: 83-87):

The Speegle homestead was located by Deer Creek, a mere two miles upstream from the last Indian hideout at Grizzly Bear's Hiding Place. Marse and Della Speegle and their six children did not intrude downstream, especially during the salmon run when the Indians might be by the water. For their part, the Indians limited their pilfering from the Speegle cabin to occasional basic supplies: they never broke dishes or otherwise ransacked the cabin as they sometimes did in their other forays. There are still Speegle descendants in

the Chico area, and one perhaps wishful family legend even has it that nine-year-old Clyde Speegle met, swam, and learned deer calls from Ishi about 1910.

*

Two years after the HBO production, an altogether different rendition of Ishi's story appeared, *Ishi: The Last Yahi* (1994). This full-length documentary by Jed Riffe and Pamela Roberts stays close to the historical record assembled by Robert Heizer and Theodora Kroeber. Adding some later historical and archaeological research, it inflects the narrative for the 1990s. The film's central theme is not Ishi's relation with Kroeber and the other "friends" in the museum, nor is it his ecological wisdom and spiritual message. Instead, it explores his resilience and inventiveness, his response to unhealed trauma, and his journey's deeply enigmatic meaning. The film reopens wounds.

Riffe and Roberts make use of period photos and film footage, newspaper clippings, vice-over narration, spoken quotes from historical figures, contemporary landscapes, "talking heads," and a recent expedition to re-discover the last Yahi refuge, "Bear's Hiding Place." The difficulty of communication with Ishi is always in view: the lack of fluency by either party in the dialogues at the museum, and his partially translated or untranslatable Yahi stories and songs. Ishi is literally brought up close in a series of shots that zoom in on photographs of his face. But any feeling of intimacy quickly gives way to the mystery of an illegible gaze. Throughout the film, serious attempts to render Ishi's experience and perspective bring us closer and also produce a sense of being lost in translation. Each increase in understanding opens new questions.

One of the film's most striking tactics is to combine Ishi's faint, crackling voice from the wax cylinder recordings with grainy images of land, sky, a railroad trip... plunging into a dark tunnel.

A voice recites translated passages from Ishi's story of the Yahi journey to the land of the dead, one of his more accessible recordings. "They climb up into the sky. They go up..." But giving voice to Ishi in this way does not make him more humanly present. Beneath the rather surreal visual sequences and the translated words we hear a faint, scratchy voice on the wax cylinders. The acoustic/visual collage recurs at intervals, making us aware of what we are missing in the Yahi's experience and cultures. As the documentary unfolds, its historical narrative takes on a mythic dimension. Ishi's life appears as a strange path through disrupted space and time, a route leading to the Yahi afterlife...perhaps. At his death, emaciated from TB, Ishi is anything but heroic. There is no happy ending, no family reunion or moral resolution.

Ishi: The Last Yahi keeps the history unresolved and the wound open. In contrast to *Ishi in Two Worlds*, the 1860s massacres (told in the words of the Indian hunters themselves) are moved toward the end of the narration. These chilling flashbacks make it harder to leave the violence safely in the past. The Cherokee scholar Rayna Green comments acidly on Ishi's status as an anthropological prize, an uncontaminated Indian. Museum visitors expect something savage and find instead "the nice man in overalls." Anthropologist Tim Buckley sees a "different sense of self and history" in Ishi's early response to personal questions: the six-hour, mostly incomprehensible, "Wood Duck Story." And Brian Bibby tells coyote stories around a campfire near Grizzly Bear's Hiding Place, speculating that such tales may have prepared Ishi for life in San Francisco. With Coyote, who is both foolish and wise, anything can happen: in the white world people drink cloudy liquids, they fly in airplanes...

The film's anti-colonial message comes through strongly in its historical portrayal of Manifest Destiny and in its lack of closure with respect to a violent, racist past. The tragic fate of the Yahi, and Ishi's deferred trip to the land of the dead, hang unresolved over the film. Ishi is given no special mission, no wisdom to deliver to the "modern world." *The Last Yahi* sustains ambiguity

(in its portrayal of anthropology and Kroeber, for example) and confronts its audience, primarily non-Indians, with an indigestible past. As for the future, it contents itself with what appears as an afterthought: a short final text acknowledging the survival of Native Californians. Produced in the early 1990s, the film would no doubt be different if it were made today, featuring more contemporary Indian voices (like Jed Riffe's subsequent documentaries on repatriation and Indian gaming). The political and cultural movements of the intervening decades have made this presence inescapable.

Ishi, the Last Yahi was screened at the conference hosted by Art Angle and the Maidu repatriation committee in Oroville, May 2000. It provoked strong emotions among many of the Indians present. An immediate reaction found the film "one-sided" and the language it contained "hurtful." One tribal leader said that the racism of the historical quotations describing Indians as hardly human, and the graphic images and accounts of extermination forced her to leave the room. She said she understood why the film was made, but it was very hard to take. Another woman confirmed the history's rawness: "This is close to our heart. It wasn't too long ago." And, she added, there is still an anti-Indian atmosphere in Butte County. A man from the Pitt River tribe said that the images of extermination reminded him of his own boarding school experience from the 1930s. He described beatings, humiliations, being forbidden to speak his language. And it's still happening, he added. People say things that hurt a lot of Indian children. Another woman expressed anger at the government's ongoing role in determining tribal recognition, its denial of Indian peoples' right to say who they are. (My notes, unfortunately, don't allow me to identify individual speakers with confidence, and my quotes and paraphrases are approximations.)

Jed Riffe, who had been filming the reactions, put his camera aside to say that this project "was more about us Anglos than about Ishi." And he added that for him it had been a way of "unlearning" his own Texas upbringing.

As the discussion developed, others suggested that the film needed to balance its bleak message, adding materials to show “progress,” “our government, our tribes, our intelligence...” There was widespread resistance to ending Ishi’s story in tragedy, his life a dead end. Summing up (and confirming, from a different perspective, Theodora Kroeber’s conclusion) a Maidu woman saw an opportunity for healing—for recognizing that “we are all human beings.” Native Americans need to understand, she said, that Whites are human, with particular upbringings and limits. There’s still a way to go. Racism persists. The wounds are still there. She recalled her grandfather’s ordeal on a notorious forced march from his homeland to the Round Valley reservation. She told of her current work on tribal history, getting to know dispersed cousins using genealogical tools she had learned on her travels to England. She applauded the film. “Just add something at the end. Show that it didn’t end there. The conference title has it right: ‘Ishi: Past, Present and Future.’”

In his closing remarks, Art Angle identified Ishi’s story with the history of all Indians in California. Ishi was brilliant, he said, with his amazing patience and grace, his ability to communicate, to go from one extreme to the other. Once we have completed his “reunification,” the healing process will have begun. Ishi was certainly at least part Maidu. Angle says he knows this from the elders. But repatriation is not about separate tribes, about Ishi belonging to this or that group. Angle expresses complete confidence in the Redding and Pit River people to do the right thing in reburying the remains. Through this homecoming “we can come together in healing.”

The event at Oroville made it clear that the simultaneous bleeding and healing in Ishi’s story would continue--that it was a kind of progress.

*



Figure 16: Rebecca Belmore “Fringe” (detail)

A powerfully evocative image expresses this bleeding and healing. “Fringe” was created in 2008 by the Canadian First Nations artist Rebecca Belmore. A billboard installed above the Montreal office of the Cree Grand Council, the 8’ x 24’ color photograph appears from a distance as simply a semi-nude reclining female figure. Nearer, one sees a roughly sutured wound, traversing the woman’s exposed back. It looks like dripping blood, but on closer inspection the “blood” is composed of red beads strung on white thread. A horrible gash has been closed using the traditional Anishinabe beadwork of Belmore’s tradition mixed with visible white material.

An ironic reference to “odalisque” traditions of European painting, “Fringe” interrupts an aesthetic gaze, or indeed any desire to make the body whole. The damage depicted here can never be completely repaired. A terrible scar remains. But the disfigurement has now become a kind of violent beauty. And the reclining figure--whose marked skin recalls James Luna’s scars in “Artifact Piece”--is very much alive. As Belmore has said (quoted in Ritter 2008: 65):

Some people look at this reclining figure and think that it is a cadaver, but I look at it and I don’t see that. I see it as a wound that is on the mend. It wasn’t self-inflicted, but nonetheless, it is bearable. She can sustain it. So it is a very simple scenario. She will get up and go on, but she will carry that mark with her.

*

Another roughly-sutured wound concerns the UC Berkeley Anthropology Department. During the Spring of 1999, as the repatriation process gathered steam, the Department debated a proposed public statement. They were forced to grapple seriously with the legacy of their founding ancestor, the “big chief.” (California Indian nicknames frequently poke fun, and the title was probably a mix of respect and humor.) Now this figure became an over-determined symbol: Kroeber the leader and protector; Kroeber the scientist; Kroeber the friend; Kroeber the man of his time; Kroeber the betrayer. A complex individual was made to stand for liberal colonialism, for an embattled anthropology, for post-colonial reconciliation, for tragic historical contradictions. Stepping back, we can see the critique, the defense, and the healing of Alfred Kroeber within a broad historical transformation. Under pressure from the politics of indigenous revival, anthropologists and archaeologists have been feeling their way to new visions of scholarship and ethical/political engagement. This involves confronting and working through a deeply ambivalent history.

The complicity of Anthropology with Western colonialism and with the apparently irreversible expansion of the global capitalist system has been frequently noted and debated. It is worth repeating a trenchant early statement by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist. Anthropology is the daughter of this era of violence: its capacity to assess more objectively the facts pertaining to the human condition reflects, on the epistemological level, a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treated the other as an object.” (1966: 126)

Lévi-Strauss names a set of material and epistemological structures that have, for at least the past three centuries, determined European and North American anthropological research and claims to objectivity. “Determined” is not meant in a mechanical sense, suggesting that anthropologists have always seen the people they study as objects, or that their work necessarily takes the side of dominion. Determination is a matter of pressures and limits, historical horizons within and against which people act with constrained freedom (Williams 1977). Anthropology’s changing, sometimes contradictory practices have always been historically aligned and structurally constrained. Alfred Kroeber’s contradictions and his complex legacy need to be understood in this materialist, but dialectical and open-ended way. As a founder of anthropological institutions in the state’s new public university he both resisted and perpetuated a dominant settler-colonial system.

Theodora Kroeber, writing as her husband's biographer, pictures him as he took up his vocation:

Kroeber stood on Parnassus with Boas, who pointed out to him the land below, its shadowed parts and its sunny places alike virgin to the ethnologist. Virgin but fleeting-- this was the urgency and the poetry of Boas' message. Everywhere over the land were virgin languages, brought to their polished and idiosyncratic perfection of grammar and syntax without benefit of a single recording scratch of stylus on papyrus or stone; living languages orally learned and transmitted and about to die with their last speakers. Everywhere there were to be discovered Ways of Life, many, many ways. There were gods and created worlds unlike other gods and worlds, with extended relationships and values and ideals and dreams unlike anything known or imagined elsewhere, all soon to be forever lost—part of the human condition, part of the beautiful heartbreaking history of man. The time was late; the dark forces of invasion had almost done their ignorant work of annihilation. To the field then! With notebook and pencil, record, record, record. Rescue from historylessness all languages still living, all cultures. (51)

That intrepid men of science should naturally be the caretakers of virgin cultures in distress is, of course, a gendered vision no longer validated by historical common-sense. Theodora Kroeber's gently ironic tone registers a certain distance taken from the self-appointed rescuers on the mountaintop. But she affirms the reality, and also the inevitability, of the emergency as understood by Boas and her husband. Her own story of Ishi would be infused with this same bittersweet sense of the "beautiful heartbreaking history of man."

In its time, Boasian cultural relativism—a belief that every way of life and mode of human expression was equally complex and valuable—could be a potent weapon against racial pseudo-

science and evolutionist hierarchies. Its message of tolerance and understanding was significantly anti-colonial, while also part of a system, a mode of liberal, often paternalistic, comprehension. In its developmental historicism, its assumption that small, “tribal” societies were destined to vanish, the Boasian project did nothing to disturb the settler-colony’s self-fulfilling prophecy. While valuing other cultures, it preserved the scientist’s claim to a superior, more inclusive perspective firmly located in the modern West. (Theodora Kroeber’s metaphorical “Parnassus” would become literal--San Francisco’s Parnassus Heights—location of the research institutions where Ishi was cared for and observed.) Yet when he opposed Ishi’s autopsy Alfred Kroeber famously wrote: “tell them science can go to hell.” There were, he recognized, humane limits to scientific objectivity, the will (and right) to know. Kroeber’s contradictions are good to think with.

The Berkeley Anthropology Department’s discussions were triggered by the repatriation movement and by the discovery that Alfred Kroeber had, indeed, given Ishi’s brain to science. A text, initially signed by fifteen members of the faculty, spoke of the Ishi episode as “a regrettable part of our history.” The relations of Ishi and the anthropologists at the museum were, they wrote, “complex: friendships entwined with academic ambitions, resulting in considerable insensitivity to Ishi’s personal and medical needs.” Kroeber “failed to prevent an autopsy,” and he “inexplicably” shipped the brain to Hrdlicka’s collection. The text went on to address Ishi’s wider symbolism in the context of Anthropology’s changing understanding of its relationship with colonialism. “What happened to Ishi’s body, in the name of science, was a perversion of our core anthropological values... We are ashamed of our department’s role, albeit unintentional, in the final betrayal of Ishi, a man who had already lost all that was dear to him at the hands of Western colonizers.” The text concluded with a call for wide discussion of the larger issues of anthropology and its relations with historical and actual California Indian cultures.

The draft statement drew resistance from various members of the department (and at least one of the original signers expressed ambivalence about its tendency to dwell only on the negative aspects of salvage anthropology and Ishi's last years). George Foster, who had come to Berkeley in 1935 and who knew Alfred Kroeber and other actors in the drama, led a protest against the draft. He and others argued that to speak of a "betrayal" was unfair and anachronistic. In a memo, he wrote that in the circumstances of the times, Ishi was lucky to be housed at the Anthropology Museum. He received loyal support and state-of-the-art medical care. As for salvage anthropology, Foster recalled his own research experiences: the eagerness of the Indians he worked with to record their language and stories. The founding traditions of the department, which valued native cultures, were far from colonialist. They represented something to be proud of and required no apology.

In the ensuing discussions, many historical details were debated, a range of different opinions expressed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, principal drafter of the original text, was convinced that the Department needed publicly to turn a corner in its relations with Native Californians by confronting an ambiguous and disturbing past. Nothing short of an apology could begin to clear the air and make possible changes of practice that would lead to post-colonial cooperation and understanding. (Scheper-Hughes was influenced by her research in South Africa, whose Truth and Reconciliation Commission helped to close deep wounds.) As things heated up, *Lingua Franca*, a forum for academic controversies, picked up the story. Karl Kroeber, son of Alfred and Theodora, a distinguished professor of English and Native American Literatures, wrote to the Chair of the Berkeley department vehemently protesting the scapegoating of his father. He also commented on the hypocrisy of a department taking a moralistic position in this instance when it had itself all but abandoned work with Native Americans. (Notable exceptions are the collaborative California archaeology of Kent Lightfoot and Nelson Graburn's long involvement with Inuit.) In the pages of the Los Angeles Times, the columnist Alexander Cockburn casually

included Alfred Kroeber in a sweeping condemnation of anthropologists' "depredations" as agents of colonialism and apologists for genocide. Los Angeles Times, 10/8/2000)

In the public eye, positions polarized: Scheper-Hughes the radical critic versus George Foster the entrenched conservative. In fact there was a spectrum of opinions as the department debated an ambiguous legacy. The final compromise text referred to "a troubling chapter in our history." Relations between Ishi and the anthropologists were "complex and contradictory." The first version's language was softened. Instead of "Kroeber failed to prevent an autopsy..." the statement now read, "Despite Kroeber's lifelong devotion to California Indians and his friendship with Ishi, he failed in his efforts to honor Ishi's wishes not to be autopsied..." The department strongly supported returning Ishi's remains to the care of California Indians while declining to apologize for the work of Kroeber or the assumptions of salvage anthropology. Scheper-Hughes, speaking only for the original signers, read the more critical first draft at a meeting in Sacramento where legislators were climbing on the repatriation bandwagon. Some expressed outrage at the University's apparent insensitivity (the authorities had initially appeared to be stonewalling, claimed there was no evidence of Ishi's brain being stored anywhere—evidence that was soon discovered by Orin Starn buried in the Bancroft Library). In the months that followed, the debate died down, and repatriation moved forward. Karen Biestman aptly observes that "Ishi had...personalized the debate between research and human interests and challenged scientists to think and act beyond institutional boundaries." The survivor's ecological and spiritual mission to white society took a new turn. "More than any advocate, activist, lawyer, scholar, or politician who has invoked his image...Ishi became a catalyst for accountability and integrity." (Biestman 2003: 153) A similar sense is reflected in Nancy Scheper-Hughes final, critically-nuanced account of the controversy's significance for Anthropology (2003).

Ishi's repatriation coincided, at times awkwardly, with the centennial anniversary of the Berkeley Anthropology Department. A year-long lecture series, which included Ursula LeGuin and Orin Starn, culminated in a two day event, "Alfred Kroeber and his Legacy: A Centennial Conference" (April 12-13, 2002). The event was complemented by other exhibits at the University — the Bancroft Library ("The Foundations of Anthropology in California"); the Hearst Museum ("A Century of Collection"); and Doe Library ("In the Field," an exhibition showing Berkeley anthropologists in exotic field sites). The conference had retrospective and forward-looking aspects. At its opening session, devoted to "Historical Highlights of the Department," Karl Kroeber offered a spirited defense of anthropological "curiosity" (against postmodern cynicism) spiced with vignettes of his father's eclectic interests and sense of humor. Piero Matthey traced the friendship at Berkeley of Robert Lowie and Bronislaw Malinowski. And Nancy Rockafellar assessed the postwar contribution of George Foster to the emerging field of Medical Anthropology. The tone, appropriately, was celebratory — the difficult Ishi discussions nowhere in evidence. Art Angle, noted in the program as an honored guest, sat in the front row.

The next morning "distinguished alumni" of the department recalled their student years (when *was* the best time to be at Berkeley?) or described their current work. Exemplifying "Decades of Excellence," they covered an impressive range of critical topics: from religious movements in China, to development politics in post-Soviet Russia; from resistance to corporate power in US journalism, to collaborative archaeology among native communities in Alaska. In the afternoon, "Anthropology and the World," organized by Laura Nader, looked beyond a focus on Berkeley anthropology to explore many current dimensions of politically engaged work.

Berkeley Anthropology framed its first century as A. L. Kroeber's legacy, choosing for its publicity a virile (some said "Indiana Jones" style) photo from 1912. Its present research was portrayed as forward looking and diverse (despite predictable grumbling that the canonical "four

fields” had not been equitably covered). This spirit of eclecticism, and a disinclination to look back — according to Kroeber’s children—was true to the founding father’s spirit. In any event, Ishi’s ambivalent legacy was nowhere addressed in the departmental program; and the critical issue of relations with Native Californians went undeveloped in the Hearst Museum’s 100-year history. Orin Starn had given a lecture in December on the Ishi repatriation and its consequences for a still-decolonizing anthropology, and that was enough.

Not quite.

During the Friday speeches, Art Angle sat quietly in the front row. As the room broke noisily into the reception, Nancy Scheper-Hughes claimed the floor and, with some difficulty, quieted the crowd. She introduced Art Angle who read a prepared statement, asserting among other things that Ishi was not a wild man, was a gifted language learner, a resourceful survivor, was half-Maidu, and was on his way to join his southern kin when he was captured. He ended by reminding the anthropologists of their ongoing obligations to California Indians, given all they had learned from Ishi.

As soon as Angle finished speaking the party hastily resumed.

*

A few years before the centennial, Berkeley geographer Gray Brechin published *Imperial San Francisco*, with the University of California Press: a trenchant, disturbing account of mining, racial violence, water politics and corruption in the founding of the capitalist, settler state of California. Brechin’s final chapter explores the explicitly imperial visions that animated the leadership, funding, and campus design of the University of California at Berkeley around 1900.

Phoebe Apperson Hearst, a passionate traveler and collector of antiquities (whose husband George had made an immense fortune in mining and whose son William Randolph would become a legendary media magnate) supported much of the University's dramatic expansion. Working with Alfred Kroeber she built the Anthropology Museum, a nucleus of the emerging department, where Ishi spent his last years. The patronage continues: only recently the museum, now located in Berkeley, was renamed to capture new funding from the Hearst Foundation. Accompanied by grumbling in the department, "The Lowie" became "The Hearst." On the museum's signature poster, Ishi is sandwiched between a primitive mask and an ancient Greek funeral portrait.



Figure 17. (Hearst Museum Poster, 2012).

The juxtaposition of Ishi's image with the name Hearst opens up another level of reflection on the ambivalent history of institutionalized anthropology in California. After 1900, the modern science of man would salvage and give value to cultures that had been violently disrupted by mining and its social consequences. And significantly, a mining fortune would become the material source of the department's early flourishing. To say this is not to assert an automatic, or functional, complicity between anthropology and predatory capitalism, but rather to open a discussion of the institutional, structural constraints within and against which the humanistic work of the founders was pursued. There would be no place in the historical portion of the Berkeley Department's centennial for such a discussion. No doubt it seemed inappropriate: there are times for celebration and good feelings.

Art Angle's irritating question about ongoing accountability to California Indians also found no immediate response. Today, Berkeley Anthropology shows little inclination to refocus on indigenous California. It has moved on to more global concerns. The place at Berkeley where the research traditions of Kroeber and Co. have been most positively reinvented is the Linguistics Department, founded in its modern form by Sapir's student Mary Haas. Inspired by her example, generations of students have documented vulnerable languages. William Bright and William Shipley, for example, would earn recognition as respected friends of the tribes (Karuk and Maidu) they studied and supported over many years. More recently, through the work of Leanne Hinton, Berkeley Linguistics has become involved with native activism in California around language preservation and renewal. Ishi's recorded stories are still, laboriously, being translated.

The chronically under-funded, spatially cramped, Hearst Museum has recently begun to develop cooperative relationships with California Indian groups. The history of its representation of Ishi, in artifacts and photographs, has been comprehensively discussed by Ira Jacknis (2008). In 1962, a display of artifacts "collected" by the surveying party from the Yahi's last hiding place, along

with many arrowheads, drills, etc. made by Ishi at the museum was accompanied by photographs and contemporary documents. The explanatory texts were largely drawn from Theodora Kroeber's recently published book. The immense popularity of *Ishi in Two Worlds*, insured a steady stream of visitors over the years, and throughout the 1970s and 80s, the museum was seldom without some kind of Ishi display. These generally followed Theodora Kroeber's canonical interpretation.

In the early 1990s the perspective shifted, in "Ishi and the Invention of Yahi Culture," curated by the newly appointed historian/anthropologist, Ira Jacknis. Rather than portraying the last survivor of a lost culture, this new approach stressed adaptation and innovation: qualities of traditional California Indian cultures that were exemplified by Ishi in San Francisco. Ishi had already been making arrowheads from glass bottles while in hiding, but in the museum he fabricated beautiful, long, and ultimately dysfunctional, specimens. He also enthusiastically used glue and paints in his arrow-making, cotton string, and other new materials. His arrowheads drew from the styles of neighboring tribes. (Shackley 2000) Jacknis' perspective was inspired by anthropological theories of cultural "invention" (Wagner 1975) and by Herbert Luthin and Leanne Hinton's interpretations of Ishi's recorded texts. In 2002, the Museum took another new turn, by creating a permanent "Native California Cultures" gallery that "dissolve[d] the special status of Ishi and place[d] his objects into the context of the rest of California Indian material culture." This proved frustrating for visitors, sometimes from abroad, seeking to re-discover Ishi. (Jacknis 2008: 82) Ishi's iconic status was both a blessing and a burden for the Hearst Museum, given its limited display space. Jacknis aptly compares the predicament to that of singers with a "hit" song audiences must always hear, and that they deny at their peril (p. 87).

Until now, the changing displays at the Hearst have been made without ongoing collaboration with Indian communities. Despite the good will of some staff members, a legacy of suspicion has

developed—the result of an insular attitude and slowness to complete NAGPRA collection inventories. This is changing, and a new Director, Mari Lyn Salvador, is actively building connections while establishing a Native American Advisory Council. When a major renovation is complete, the new Ishi exhibit will reflect Indian perspectives and ongoing cooperative relationships with California communities. Or so it is hoped. Mistrust of the University persists, fuelled—as the present essay goes to press—by outrage over a play performed on campus. An avant-garde San Francisco playwright makes free with the Ishi story in ways deeply offensive to Indians in the audience. There are protests, apologies, explanations. The internet hums...

In the fraught border zones of the university and indigenous resurgence, the wound called “Ishi” may never be permanently closed. Nor should it. However, the burial of his remains did bring a widely shared sense of relief—feelings of healing and even forgiveness. At the Mt. Lassen celebration of Ishi’s homecoming the afternoon talk circle was followed by a feast, including salmon cooked on an open fire, provided by Yurok from the coast. Then by firelight another, informal, talk circle formed. In an emotional exchange, Nancy Scheper-Hughes shared her understanding of what had gone wrong after Ishi’s death. Expressing regret as a Berkeley anthropologist, she implicated herself metaphorically as “Kroeber’s granddaughter.” An older woman, a leader of the Pit River tribe, rose to urge respect for the ancestors, Indian and White, who “had their reasons.” She then offered Scheper-Hughes’s “grandfather” forgiveness “from the heart of the people.” The healing of Alfred Kroeber (that inexhaustible symbol of anthropology’s tensions) was achieved. Temporarily.

A decade later, denunciations of Berkeley Anthropology were once again heard in Sacramento. This time a well-organized movement would agitate for the reburial of thousands of Native American ancestral remains: research collections currently in storage under the Hearst

Gymnasium next door to the Anthropology Department and the Hearst Museum. (Platt 2011: 171).

*

A.L. Kroeber's legacy for anthropology remains ambivalent in strong, ongoing ways. This is particularly visible in the transformation, the repurposing, of the "salvage" tradition.

Kroeber combined Boasian historicism with a meta-theory of cultural evolution. Cultures, which needed to be described with scrupulous empiricism and understood relativistically, followed a linear trajectory of growth toward ever-greater complexity and large-scale "civilizations." In this perspective, the innovations and compromises of individuals were relatively unimportant. And the small, "simple" societies of an older California were ultimately destined, by structural processes of cultural growth, to be subsumed by larger entities. The specifics of local transition were less important than the overall shape of cultural history. Thus Kroeber focused almost exclusively on a reconstructed pre-contact native culture, and showed little inclination to study the violent, but also inventive, history of culture contacts that had shaped the Indian people who were his interlocutors. By assuming a stable anthropological "object" in a traditional, cultural past his publications tended to make actual, changing Indians into remnants.

Tim Buckley, whose exemplary study of Kroeber is nourished by fieldwork and advocacy with Northern California tribes, shows that a less idealist history, and an attention to contemporary societies in transition, can be found in the writings of Kroeber's colleague T.T. Waterman.

(Buckley 1996) We might also add, for contrast, Jaime de Angulo's wild, poignant stories of his research among the Pit River Indians, Ishi's northern neighbors, *Indians in Overalls* (1950).

Kroeber would not have considered this memoir of fieldwork to be a contribution to

anthropological science, given its subjectivism and also because, as de Angulo wryly noted in a footnote, “Decent anthropologists don’t associate with drunkards who go rolling in ditches with shamans.” (p. 53) In the early years of documenting California languages, Kroeber had worked with a wide range of amateurs. But a concern to professionalize anthropology during the twenties and thirties led him to distance himself from the salvage collecting of energetic eccentrics like de Angulo or J. P. Harrington. (Leeds-Hurwitz 2005)

Of course Kroeber was not alone in assuming a relentless direction to history, a vision that could only view the adaptations of surviving Native Californians as degraded forms of an authenticity in terminal decline. In his monumental *Handbook of the Indians of California* (1925) he synthesized twenty years of cultural-linguistic survey work. (Long 1998) This collective research remains a major resource: masses of first-hand documentary material on languages and customs preserved in the Bancroft Library at Berkeley. However, the legacy of the *Handbook* has been negative for many groups of California Indians, scattered and disorganized but now re-connecting and unable to achieve State or Federal tribal recognition. The unambiguous “death sentences” (as they are sometimes called today) pronounced by Kroeber for groups who seemed to have vanished, continue to haunt their off-spring who currently struggle, in a changed political climate, to live as recognized Indians. (Field 1999)

The *Handbook* reflects, and to an extent freezes, the historical perspective of triumphant, late nineteenth and early twentieth century settler California, a particularly depressing time for native peoples. Kroeber himself was exhausted by his two decades of intense research and institution building. In the wake of a profound mid-life crisis, to which Ishi’s death certainly contributed, he turned toward new topics, away from California. His was, by many accounts, a restless intellect, disinclined to retrospection, always moving on. Kroeber did not, however, abandon his original research relations. Having married the younger Theodora Kracaw, a recent widow, Kroeber spent

long summers at the family's Napa Valley ranch with his children and in regular contact with visiting Indian researchers. Two family friends visited regularly: Ishi's San Francisco companion, Juan Dolores, who continued his work on Papago, and Kroeber's long-term Yurok collaborator Robert Spott, with whom he co-authored *Yurok Narratives* (1942). (*Yurok Myths* would appear posthumously in 1978.) In retirement, influenced by his younger Berkeley colleague Robert Heizer and by the changing times, Kroeber testified at length, as principal expert witness on behalf of Indian claimants in the California Indian Land Claims Commission hearings of the mid 1950s. In this he pioneered a new role for academic anthropologists.

The earlier "salvage" project—which nourished the court testimony, as shown by Kroeber's meticulous preparatory notes preserved in the Bancroft Library—was generating unanticipated outcomes. The work had been authorized by a sense of emergency. Many groups had to be contacted, linguistic and oral materials recorded, before crucial elders disappeared and their knowledge was lost. Kroeber conducted short-term ethnography, essentially survey-work, all over California, but developed a deeper, ongoing relationship with the Yurok. Buckley provides a nuanced sense of Kroeber's reputation among members of the tribe. He unearths evidence of hostility and resistance to his research due, in part, to the legacies of conquest Kroeber declined to explore in his writing. Waterman's research in the area provides a revealing counterpoint: what Kroeber notoriously called a "little history of pitiful events," Waterman termed "white invasion."

Buckley invokes "two kinds of salvage." Kroeber's purified, pre-contact California reconstructions implied the non-existence of valid contemporary cultures. The members of these very cultures, while resenting his assumptions, have nonetheless adopted many of his ideas of authenticity. In the eyes of contemporary traditionalists, native culture is defined "in the Boasian terms most tellingly introduced, in California, by Kroeber: language and music, traditional narratives, religious rituals, and material culture. Yuroks, for instance, have long used an

objectified understanding of ‘culture’ both in constructing their own accounts of the Yurok past...and in the continuing struggle for cultural survival that has, so far, been successful to a degree that would perhaps surprise Kroeber himself.” (Buckley 1996: p. 293) In a second process of salvage (translation and re-articulation), the documentary collections of Kroeber and his generation “provide those most actively engaged in ‘saving’ their own Yurok culture with a virtual textbook, however selectively it is consulted.” Kroeber might well have viewed this partial “culture salvaged from the wreckage of modern history” as without a future. But Buckley pointedly concludes with a quotation from “a Yurok Elder dissenting from the majority Yurok opinion of ‘anthros’ ...”

Thank God for that good Doctor Kroeber and Doctor Waterman and Gifford and those other good white doctors from Berkeley who came here to study us. If they hadn’t taken an interest in us and come up here and written it all down we wouldn’t know a thing today about who we really are. (p. 294)

Kroeber’s collecting was intended to contribute to the historical and scientific record of human diversity not the survivance toolkit of twenty-first century tribes. With pointed irony, Terri Castañeda (2002) describes how a “disappearing” salvage anthropology is itself salvaged in native-run archives and museums. New kinds of collection give life to old texts and artifacts, contributing to local histories and the emergence of inter-tribal identities.

It is hard to know whether those elders who, in the early years of the century cooperated with the ethnographers and linguists hoped for something like this “second life.” In the wake of massive disruptions, the knowledge preserved in the white man’s notebook must have seemed like a note in a bottle, a message to an unknown future. Perhaps the anthropologists’ interest was a welcome affirmation—offering respect in an intercultural context that had previously shown little

comprehension of their way of life. Others who resisted the intrusive “anthros” were no doubt holding onto a degree of control in the face of violent and potentially overwhelming pressures. We can’t know all the specific motivations that helped and hindered salvage research. Personal relationships of trust counted for a good deal, as always. There were things to keep to oneself, and things to pass on, in the right circumstances. The feelings engaged were certainly complex and often contradictory. As Jennifer Kramer has recently argued, both giving and holding back, performing culture and keeping it secret, have been critical for the continuing, relational life of native societies in North America. (Kramer 2006)

Who was Ishi addressing when he filled hundreds of wax cylinders with urgent recitations? (Jacknis 2003) And for whom did he keep other things unsaid? At the very least he enjoyed speaking Yahi and telling old, familiar stories for people who, though largely uncomprehending, at least took them seriously. Almost a century later, working with a few relatively well recorded and translated stories Ishi told to Edward Sapir, the linguists Herbert Luthin and Leanne Hinton have come up with some very intriguing clues. (Luthin and Hinton, 2003) In the story “Coyote Rapes His Sister” (which they compare to a Northern Yana version recorded earlier by Sam Batwi), Ishi gives unusual prominence to long, detailed recitations of daily life activities. Telling the coyote story, he spends half the tale describing the preparation of acorns. It is almost as if the “story proper” became an appendage to a vastly expanded background--a kind of experiential, mnemonic “world.” Long, intricate descriptions of everyday activities are Ishi’s signature: and the linguists go so far as to say that the style is so pronounced that it makes Ishi unique in the Native American recorded canon. They argue that his idiosyncratic manner goes far beyond anything he might have produced in response to anthropologists’ demands for documentary detail.

Why did Ishi speak this way? We should be wary, I think, of assuming that he was addressing an Indian “posterity.” There were no longer any young listeners capable of understanding his Yahi. And Ishi could hardly have imagined the present moment in which his words have taken on the value of a recovered “heritage.” He may simply have wanted things he knew and valued to somehow persist and be recognized in changing times. Luthin and Hinton suggest that the daily activities, so important to Ishi, were what kept the diminishing band of Yahi going for decades. His return to these in his storytelling was — in an emotionally-rich, non-pejorative sense — nostalgic. He loved recalling these activities in an intimate, resonant language. Ishi’s recollection is surely best seen not as an act of preservation, or of transmission, but as a performance in a particular here and now. Recent critical studies have focused on ethnographic and linguistic collecting as a performative social process. (Sarris 1993, Dinwoodie 1999, Cruikshank 1998) In this perspective, Ishi’s enthusiastic work as an informant seems less a matter of preserving traditions for the salvage “record” than of enacting them in new social contexts—a new gathering up of the self in a mode of engagement.

What sense did the past have for the refugee? Did he conceive of time in the categories of past, present, and future? Did he think historically, sharing Kroeber’s sense of an ending, a feeling that his past life was now finished? Perhaps he moved in time differently, edging into a novel present with wariness and curiosity, while drawing strength and reassurance from practiced skills and old stories, from the cultural body, the *habitus*, he brought with him from Deer Creek to the place he would call “home” in San Francisco.

Ishi may have had no future, but he was going somewhere.

4. Utopia

What was and what may be lie, like children whose faces we cannot see, in the arms of silence.

All we ever have is here, now.

--Ursula K. Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*

Ursula K. Le Guin, who was born in 1929, never met Ishi. And she heard nothing of him until the mid-1950s when talk of a biography began to surface in the family. Mother and daughter emerged as writers around the same time and were, as the daughter put it, “age mates in the art.” Le Guin heard a lot about writing *Ishi in Two Worlds*, and she was an important interlocutor for her mother in conceiving the version for schoolchildren. One finds distant echoes of Ishi’s story throughout Le Guin’s oeuvre--but no recognizable Ishi-figure, unless one counts a wild mountain lion who crawls into a neighbor’s Napa Valley backyard to die, as told in the short story, “May’s Lion.” (1989)

Le Guin’s oeuvre is permeated by the Native Californian stories and voices she learned from individual Indians and ethnographic texts. She translates and transmutes the land, creatures, and history of Northern California. These are not, of course, her only inspirations. The daughter of Alfred and Theodora Kroeber was brought up in a cosmopolitan environment filled with intellectual talk, books, and foreign visitors; her work draws on folklore and popular culture, Taoism, post-sixties feminism, and environmentalism. Of course it’s foolish to reduce an imaginative writer to her “sources.” And there can be no question of reading her works as *romans à clef*—for example, viewing the anthropologists and cross-cultural interpreters that populate her fiction as avatars of her father. Yet at broader allegorical, analytic, and meditative levels, Le Guin often returns to knots and themes central to Ishi’s world: colonial domination and miscomprehension; the compromised but real possibilities of cross cultural understanding;

complicity and friendship at fraught frontiers; preservation of traditions and the dynamics of change; the communal arts of living in balance with others and in scale with the environment.

During the Berkeley Anthropology Department's centennial celebration, in 2001, Ursula Le Guin delivered a talk that was, she said, the nearest thing to a written "memoir" she had ever permitted herself. She wanted to set the record straight about her father. Referring, no doubt, to the HBO film, as well as to notions in the air during the repatriation process, she dismissed "the emotionally stunted scientist exploiting the noble savage bit." Alfred Kroeber valued friendships with Indians, she insisted, and these were based on mutual respect and restraint. He mistrusted whites who claimed special affinities or spiritual connections. If he spoke little of Ishi after his death it was because his grief was deep and he lacked appropriate words. Le Guin recalled her father's mid-life crisis and his engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis, which also, she believed, failed to provide the language he needed.

She spoke warmly of her "Indian uncles," Juan Dolores and Robert Spott, who were long-term visitors at the Kroebers' summer place in Napa. Dolores good-naturedly allowed himself to be "exploited" by the Kroeber children: Spott, more reserved, kept them in their place. At the evening campfire, stories were told, and it seemed natural to hear Yurok spoken around the house. She remembered a milieu of freedom and social intensity, a deep feeling for place, a sense of being at "the center of the world." Le Guin's outrage at the damage done to the surrounding region in recent decades by overpopulation and agri-business (all the "poisoned vineyards") would transform personal nostalgia into critical utopia. Her tour de force of ethnographic vision, *Always Coming Home*, imagines a future Napa Valley inhabited by "a people worthy of the place," the Kesh, transformed and re-rooted indigenous Californians.

Le Guin's science fiction creates imaginative thought experiments that are forms of cultural critique. *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which became an early classic of second-wave feminism, created a recognizably human world without male and female genders. While avoiding direct reference to contemporary or historical situations, much of Le Guin's work shows an acute awareness of colonial invasion, indigenous transformation, and the difficult role of anthropology betwixt and between. In her "Haimish" series, quasi-ethnographers, or "mobiles," moving between distant but related worlds, grapple with the simultaneous risk and necessity of cross-cultural exchange. Among these "anthropological" novels, *The Word for World is Forest* offers perhaps the most direct meditation on critical issues in Ishi's story. It is also a direct inspiration for the global blockbuster, *Avatar*--acknowledged by the film's director, James Cameron. But there are obvious differences in the way this story of indigenous victory is told, especially the lack of a redeemed white hero in Le Guin's darker version.

Written at the height of opposition to the Vietnam War, the novella is angry and explicitly political in a way untypical of its author. It portrays a lethal confrontation of different worlds, recalling the world Ishi was born into: a situation of invasion where genocidal extermination is considered simply part of the "progress" brought by technologically superior outsiders. Like California after the Gold Rush, there is no functioning, reasonable government that can be counted on to play a moderating role. In *World for World* representatives of an emerging intergalactic League of Worlds can only ratify the outcome of a bloody conflict. Le Guin inverts the usual story of conquest, imagining a successful war of resistance. But her happy ending, as we will see, is shadowed, ambivalent. At the core of the tale two cross-cultural translators, an indigenous leader and an anthropologist, forge a friendship. The bond is real, admirable and fatal.

The heavily forested planet Asche has been invaded by two thousand men from Terra, a place that long ago wrecked its environment, destroying all the trees. Loggers and soldiers, the first

arrivals, harvest timber and send it home on robot spaceships. As the story begins, a shipment of women has just been unloaded whose purpose is to reproduce, thus transforming “New Tahiti” from an extractive to a settler colony. The three million indigenous Ascheans, genetically human, have over time evolved into three-foot tall, green-furred beings with a culture adapted to their forest world. These little people are understood to be doomed to extinction in the face of a more advanced, heavily armed society. (“Creechies” is the racist term used by the invaders, reminiscent of California’s “digger” Indians, also apparently un-heroic and close to the ground.) Passive and dreamy, a mixture of child and furry animal, the Ascheans pose no threat to the invaders who fly around in updated Vietnam-era helicopters armed with bombs, machine guns and flamethrowers. Loggers defoliate and clear-cut the forests, rounding up “volunteer” laborers who are kept in “creechie pens” (against the high-minded but ineffectual regulations of a distant home government). It is a classic extractive colonial operation, reminiscent of King Leopold’s Congo and many others. The Terrans are all recognizable imperial types, sexist and predatory, self-aggrandizing or, at best, “just following orders.” Here Le Guin paints with a heavy satiric brush. But the expedition’s anthropologist, Raj Lyubov, is more complex. He wants to understand the forest people.

The Ascheans live in a world where the line between waking and dreaming is fluid and can be manipulated. Dreaming is not limited to sleep but occurs in cycles throughout the day. Men are typically hunters or intellectuals (dedicated “dreamers”); women hunt and are political leaders. Old women have final say on important issues, their decisions informed by the male dreamers’ visions. Like pre-contact California, there are no organized tribes or large-scale governments. Villages led by headwomen are dispersed throughout Asche’s forested islands. Everything is close to the earth, lodges semi-subterranean... Life proceeds without hierarchy or war, in social and environmental equilibrium. Population size is under control, and behavioral mechanisms have evolved to keep anger and violence, which do break out, from becoming lethal.

The Ascheans seem to be a composite of Australian Aboriginals (the “Dream Time”), and the Mbuti Pygmies of Colin Turnbull’s widely read *The Forest People* (published a few years before *Word for World* was written). Other contributions may include egalitarian “gift societies” from Melanesia and elsewhere, Highland New Guinea cultures made famous by Margaret Mead where male and female social roles appear reversed, and of course traditional California Indian societies. But this kind of speculation only gets us so far. Le Guin characteristically re-weaves bits and pieces from her wide reading into unique syntheses that can’t be reduced to a list of ingredients.

Aschean culture, while it embodies the “balance” so central to Le Guin’s Taoist ethical imagination, is not static or unchanging. The story of culture clash portrays two dynamic societies in struggle and synergy. Raj Lyubov finds himself in the midst of a transformative battle where neutrality is not an option. The anthropologist is caught between a vicious imperialism for which he provides a liberal alibi and an Aschean resistance movement with which he feels a growing sympathy. A “spesh,” technician or scientist, he is charged with researching and reporting on native custom without involvement in either political or military aspects of the operation. As the situation deteriorates, he struggles with this “neutrality” in ways that recall the debates about anthropology’s complicity with empire that surfaced in the early 1970s just as *Word for World* was being published.

As in much of her science fiction, Le Guin focuses on a cross-cultural friendship. Lyubov’s Aschean counterpart, Selver, might have been called “an improved specimen” by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*: a “creechie” who learns the ways of the colonists and functions as an indispensable but scorned servant. Appreciating Selver’s crossover skills, Lyubov recruits him as an assistant, and the two work intensively on Aschean language and culture, exchanging perspectives on the clash of values and ontologies. The anthropologist even begins to learn how

to dream consciously, guided by his friend. Selver seems content with his role as a culture broker until suddenly, in an act of suicidal revenge, he attacks one of the invaders who has just raped and killed his wife. The object of his rage, Captain Davidson, unambiguously of the “exterminate all the brutes” school, has plans for bringing “light” into the “dark” forest by cutting or burning down the entire world of the Ascheans. His visions take on apocalyptic proportions--with echos (“thinking the unthinkable”) of the 1950s cold warrior Herman Kahn planning for life after nuclear holocaust. Davidson, a virile warrior, is about to finish off the tiny Selver when Lyubov organizes his friend’s escape into the forest. This act cements their personal loyalty, but is understood by the colonists as a betrayal. Lyubov always a suspicious relativist, is now firmly classified “pro-creechie” (*indigèneophile*, nigger-lover...).

Already an adept dreamer, Selver oneirically processes the terrible present and its possible futures, understanding that his world’s survival requires something very new. Coco Mena, an old man and a great dreamer, recognizes that Selver is now a “god.”

This is a new time for the world: a bad time. You have gone farthest. And at the farthest, at the end of the black path, there grows a tree; there the fruit ripens; now you reach up, Selver, now you gather it. And the world changes wholly, when a man holds in his hand the fruit of that tree, whose roots are deeper than the forest. (p. 48)

The fruit Selver has picked from Coco Mena’s visionary tree is war. He will soon lead overwhelming numbers of Aschean men and women on a series of raids that mercilessly kill hundreds of Terrans, including all the females recently imported for purposes of colonization.

A couple of days before the climactic Aschean raid on the colonists’ central base, Lyubov, on a fact-finding mission in a nearby forest village, encounters Selver. They re-affirm their friendship,

but recognize that new forces divide them. The connection is real: Selver takes the risk of losing the raid's element of surprise by warning his friend to get out of the base on a specific night. And Lyubov does not include this information, or any mention of Selver, in his official report. Having thus misled his fellow Terrans and protected the resistance, the anthropologist has nowhere to go. He cannot, or will not, save himself. Ignoring Selver's warning, Lyubov seems as surprised as the others when the Ascheans' overrun the base, and he is killed by a falling beam in his burning house. Selver mourns the anthropologist's death, carefully preserving all the ethnographic descriptions and texts they have produced together. These will later be handed to representatives of the newly formed intergalactic League of Worlds. At the novella's end, as all the surviving Terrans are evacuated, it is confirmed that a formal decision by the League now places "World 41" off-limits in perpetuity. Only a small scientific survey, after five generations, will be allowed to contact the Ascheans. Selver also learns that Raj Lyubov's ethnological reports have played a crucial role in justifying the decision to leave his forested world undisturbed.

In *The Word for World is Forest* a seemingly inevitable historical momentum is stopped dead. Sheer numbers combined with visionary leadership overcome the invaders' technological and military superiority (lacking this time that most potent ally in the conquest of the Americas, disease). But turning back invasion will not mean a return to the "pre-contact" world. Something crucial has changed. As Selver tells one of the departing interplanetary authorities: "There is no use pretending, now, that we do not know how to kill one another." Le Guin leaves her readers wondering if the Ascheans will sustain their peaceful, balanced way of life. And it is far from clear whether being left alone forever (indigenous "sovereignty" with a vengeance) is a good outcome. There is no place for innocence in this story.

Le Guin's sense of historical interaction and change in *Word for World* is complex. Violence is not portrayed as something simply imposed from outside, a contaminating agent. In Aschean

culture a “god” is a “changer, a bridge between realities.” (35) When Raj Lyubov first hears the terms used to describe his friend he searches the ethnographic dictionary he and Selver have compiled, finding among the definitions: “translator.” Selver, the latest in a series of Aschean “gods,” men and women, brings across a new reality from the dream time into the world time. Lived tradition is dynamic, as the elder, Coro Mena, says: “the world is always new, however old its roots...” (33). Ascheans consider dreams and the material world equally real. But the connection between them is obscure. A translator-god can bring one into the other, as world-changing speech and deed. The anthropologist wonders whether in translating/enacting a new reality—in this case calculated killing--Selver is speaking his own language or Captain Davidson’s. He cannot know for sure. Nor can we.

It is tempting to compare the Aschean god-translator to the Indian prophets who played so important a part in Western American contact histories. Wovoka, the great Paiute dreamer who inspired the Plains sun-dance movement is the best known. But prophetic dreaming religions played a role throughout native California in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, the idea of periodic “world renewal,” has a deep traditional root, rearticulated as (Christian influenced) messianism after the 1850s. Followers of Wovoka circulated in California, and dreamers (such as the twentieth-century Kashaya Pomo leaders, Annie Jarvis and Essie Parrish) have been important translators of a changing tradition. (Field 2008, Sarris 1993) The local histories are quite specific, and the analogy with Selver, can certainly be overdrawn. Suffice it to say that a focus on dynamic traditions, empowered by dreaming and prophecy, gives a different sense of transformative authenticity than before/after narratives of the “last wild Indian” or ideologies of “acculturation.” Change, even violent change, can no longer be confused with cultural death. One wonders what the scientific mission returning to Asche after five generations will find? Five generations is about the time span between the massacres of Ishi’s people and the composition of *Word for World*.

Five generations after the state's founding genocide Native California is alive and different.

Ishi was not the end. He was, and still is, a translator. He brought something across from one world to another, and he was selectively curious about the new. We have seen the way his story continues to seduce, to heal, to make new meanings in changing times for diverse people. At the very least, Le Guin's parable of colonialism, contact, and change confirms this historical open-endedness. It also casts a shadow across the healing closure imagined by her mother in *Ishi in Two Worlds*, while not dismissing the desire for human reconciliation expressed there so poignantly. The anthropologist in *Word for World* is not Alfred Kroeber, but a sacrificial figure, caught in a lethal crossfire. Ishi's "friends" at the museum, working in the safe space of history's victors, were never so exposed. They didn't have to choose sides between irreconcilable antagonists. "Salvage Anthropology" saw itself at a historical turning point, but after the fatal violence had done its worst. Scientific understanding could coexist happily with devotion to Ishi the survivor--a vision of cross-cultural friendship that underlies the humanist healing of *Ishi in Two Worlds*.

Le Guin wrote two decades later, at a moment when contradictions of power and knowledge had been sharpened by anti-colonial movements, feminism and, most acutely, Vietnam. In *Word for World*, while the loyalty and respect linking native and anthropologist is real, the relationship is deeply troubled. At the book's end, Selver realizes that a person like Lyubov, "would understand, and yet would himself be utterly beyond understanding. For the kindest of them was as far out of touch, as unreachable, as the cruelest." A harsh summation. There must surely have been times when Ishi felt this way about his doctor and archery mate, "Popey," and about the "Big Chiep." Yet there was no way of severing the connection that had been forged. Selver: "This is why the presence of Lyubov in his mind remained painful..." There would be no detachment, no getting

clear. Selver's intimate yet unapproachable friend stays forever in his dreams, as—in a reverse historical outcome—the patient, mysterious Ishi haunts Kroeber.

In its indirect, imaginative way, *The Word for World is Forest* comments on *Ishi in Two Worlds*. It does so most deeply, perhaps, by unsentimentally, generously, exploring the relationship of violence and friendship. In Le Guin's parable, as we have seen, anthropological humanism emerges as both essential and impotent in situations of colonial/anti-colonial antagonism. Lyubov is unable to reconcile inter-personal loyalty, political commitment and scientific comprehension: he will not emerge unscathed with his inter-cultural understanding. *Word for World* shows that cross-cultural friendships, however substantial, are overridden by larger forces of structural asymmetry and conflict. While Lyubov is not Kroeber, this experience may partly explain the latter's silence about Ishi, his lack of an adequate language.

Le Guin brings us to the place of historical determination E. M. Forster memorably evoked in the final paragraphs of *A Passage to India*. It will be recalled that Fielding, a Briton sympathetic to Indians under the Empire attempts to renew his old friendship with Aziz, the young Muslim doctor falsely accused of molesting an Englishwoman. As they ride amicably alongside one another, the air seems finally to have cleared. They can start fresh... But suddenly the horses veer apart: and all the surroundings--the temples, the jail, the palace, the birds-- "in their hundred voices" seem to be saying: "No. Not Yet." The Raj is still there.

And similarly, in settler-colonial California, a victim of genocide expires peacefully among loving friends: "You stay, I go." And a successor society understands and moves on, unencumbered by its vicious past... No. Not yet.

And yet... Visions of reconciliation (always flawed and in process) abound in Ursula Le Guin's work. Many of her travelers between worlds are anthropologists or at least serious, relativistic participant observers. They get involved, often for the best. A recent novel, *The Telling*, vindicates "salvage" collecting (aided by computer scanning and storage), cultural documentation portrayed not as post-mortem archiving, but as central to a community's fight to sustain its oral tradition against state mandated homogenization. Such stories, while set in faraway times and places, speak to the earthly here and now. A vision of oral archives as living and oriented to the future resonates with the contemporary recycling of salvage anthropological records by Indian activists, storyteller, historians, and artists. *Word for World*, a tale of anti-colonial victory, makes clear there can be no return to a pre-contact way of life. Freedom from invasion is good. Absolute separation, being left alone forever, is never a solution. In Le Guin's gently rigorous anarchism, sustainable community exists locally, but not in isolation, outside history. At the largest scale, she imagines a loose, facilitating network (not a central government) of worlds, the interstellar "Ecumene." And in narratives like *The Left Hand of Darkness*, it is contact with outside worlds that opens up nationalistic border marking and restrains chauvinism. A deeply rooted, and yet cosmopolitan, indigenous life...

*

Le Guin offers thought experiments, not political programs. Perhaps we should say — hope experiments. Unrealistic. But necessary. If something like post-colonial social relations are to have any chance, we need to be able to imagine a reconciled, egalitarian future. Fredric Jameson, an astute reader of Le Guin, has repeatedly argued for the necessity of utopias in a world of capitalist reification (2005). Alternate visions are tools for thinking and feeling beyond the given, outside the "reality" that seems inevitable, natural. Utopia takes different forms: it need not refer either to a distant future or a necessary next step for everyone. The recent reopening of Ishi's

story depends on the actually-existing, emergent spaces of “indigenism:” utopic, or perhaps heterotopic realities. (Foucault 1984) Peoples and histories assumed to be doomed are more and more visibly alive--moving forward, laterally and backwards, transgressing unilinear notions of progress (see Chapters One and Two). Emerging spaces of the indigenous—at once ancient and new--are composed of entangled, compromised, unexpected histories. Ishi’s story would never have been re-opened, his dispersed body reunited, without the embattled continuity and agency of California Indians. This “survivance” includes sweat lodges and Bear Dances along with installation art and gambling casinos, traditional basketry and novel-writing, tribal bureaucracy and hip-hop... Ishi in a loincloth, Ishi in work clothes. Ishi with feathers. Ishi in a suit and tie.

His story was never just that of a man. From the moment Ishi became known he was a myth. His engaging and enigmatic “humanity”—what he managed to communicate, and what others could discover in him—was from the start allegorical—political and prophetic. How could it not be? But the determining horizon within which his story would proliferate has shifted. Mikael Bakhtin’s notion of the “chronotope” may be suggestive here. For a narration to unfold with a sense of reality, it must “take place” somewhere. This spatial frame is a way to contain, to align, a temporal flux. The time/space within which Ishi’s story was first told, its historical “reality,” was the chronotope of the museum, a place of finality. This setting was not just the literal Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco where he lived his public life, but the “museum” (including a range of sites, like the “archive,” the “monument,” etc) where valued memories and objects are gathered, rescued from a forward-rushing, linear progress that never turns back on itself. A permanent home for things worth keeping, the museum is a last destination—thus its association with immobility, death. Things in museums or archives, deposited there by history, come to stay—or so it seems.

This museum was brilliantly satirized by James Luna--a specimen that could get up and walk out. And today the chronotope no longer contains Ishi's story. Indeed, museums everywhere, under pressure from cultural property claims, repatriations, marketing and commercialization, are in flux, unstable and creative "contact zones." (Clifford 1997, Phillips 2012) Ishi's story, we have seen, is now as much about indigenous futures as salvaged pasts. Indeed, the whole opposition of past and future that aligned the passage of "progressive" time wavers in contexts of tribal renaissance. Time is experienced as looping, genealogical, spiral--the chronotope of endless homecoming.

*

Becoming "indigenous" after colonization, crafting traditional futures in transformed places—such processes exemplify Le Guin's non-linear utopia. She has gathered this utopia in a work of visionary realism, the ethnography of a future society in a familiar landscape. *Always Coming Home* (1985), her intricate portrayal of re-indigenized California, is unlike anything else in her oeuvre. The Kesh, "who might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California," inhabit a valley called "Na," the Napa Valley Le Guin knows and loves from childhood. They live in a time when much, but not all, of modern industrial society and state governance has disappeared. The reasons for the collapse are hinted at, but never explained: apparently the transformation occurred through successive crises and adjustments rather than some cataclysmic event. *Always Coming Home* presents an intricate record of the world of the Kesh in a form that resembles the nineteenth-century ethnographies—ungainly collections of diverse, largely textual, data--that were the norm before more focused monographs emerged with Malinowski's generation. Le Guin's compendium brings together many sources and voices. "Raw" texts--transcribed myths, stories, language, poetry, computer printouts, and other records are combined with extended descriptions of rituals, technology, living spaces, family structure,

sexual practices... The land, flora, and fauna of Northern California, evocatively rendered, are immediately recognizable to those familiar with the region. (How far away is this time/space?) There are individual life histories, an intriguingly constructed sample chapter from a Kesh novel, descriptions of conversations involving an ethnographer, a woman named "Pandora," sometimes called "the editor." Every now and then this researcher grapples with epistemological or methodological problems in short sections called "Pandora worries..." . The ethnographer/editor provides extended ethnological interpretations in a hundred-page section called "The Back of the Book," including a glossary for the many Kesh words sprinkled throughout. Le Guin has invented elements of a language; and, working with a composer, she supplies samples of songs and music, initially in tape cassettes, now CDs.

Readers are invited to explore this jumble of resources, guided only by curiosity and Pandora's occasional explications. An extended autobiographical narrative by a woman called "Stone Telling" occurs in three installments and is the only obvious element of continuity. Stone Telling recalls growing up in the valley, leaving it to live with her father in a repellent militaristic society, and then gratefully coming home with her young daughter. But this is not the place, nor is it possible, to give an adequate description of *Always Coming Home*. It is an intricate work (How, Pandora worries methodologically, can I render all the branches and shadows in this thicket of scrub oak?). A multi-text, it asks for slow processing and can't be read like Le Guin's plot-driven novels. The book is overstuffed, the writing quirky, lyrical, poignant, entangling. One loses momentum and puts it aside...returning later, elsewhere.

Perhaps because the book is unfamiliar in form and not what her readers might expect, Le Guin has taken the uncharacteristic step of explicating her innovation elsewhere in a "theoretical" essay: "A Non-Euclidian View of California as a Cold Place To Be" (1982). After surveying several classics of the futuristic utopian tradition, she introduces a different sense of time with a

Cree formula, “I go forward, look back, as the porcupine does.” These words initiate storytelling: the porcupine backs into a rocky crevice and looks warily at an enemy or at the future. The admonition is to go slow, cool down (Lévi-Strauss’s famous contrast of “cold” and “hot” ways of being in history is invoked.) “Go backward. Turn and return.”

I am not proposing a return to the Stone Age. My intent is not reactionary, nor even conservative, but simply subversive. It seems that the utopian imagination is trapped, like capitalism and industrialism and the human population, in a one-way future consisting only of growth. All I am trying to do is figure out how to put a pig on the tracks.” (85)

Utopia has been Euclidian, it has been European, and it has been masculine. I am trying to suggest, in an evasive, distrustful, untrustworthy fashion, and as obscurely as I can, that our final loss of faith in that radiant sandcastle may enable our eyes to adjust to a dimmer light and in it perceive another kind of utopia.... It may look very like some kind of place Coyote made after having a conversation with his own dung. (89)

A “yin” utopia, in Le Guin’s Taoist vocabulary, “would be dark, wet, obscure, weak, yielding, passive, participatory, circular, cyclical, peaceful, nurturant, retreating, contracting, and cold.” (90)

Her non-Euclidian utopia consists in “side trips and reversals,” (95) an “interactive, rhythmic, unstable process.” (91) It may, in important ways, already be here—in the belly of an increasingly dysfunctional techno-capitalist beast. Le Guin’s principal sources are Taoism, feminism, and a Native California that did not die with Ishi. The Kesh live in scale with their environment, having established gender equality, population stability, and an economy of wealth-as-sharing. Their society is differentiated by skill, age, gender, “house” affiliation,

personality, etc, but not by race or economic class. Animals are persons; rituals are keyed to natural cycles; oral transmission limits the need for archives; names change according to life stages or transforming experiences; everything is close to the earth (for example the California Indian style semi-subterranean community houses); altercations stop short of deadly violence; progress is imagined as “gyres,” relations are always primary (everything already “hinged”). Individual Kesh can be quirky and difficult; but the society manages its problems, more or less well, without formal government. We discover that the Kesh have been grappling with a militaristic sect that has taken root inside their community.

Le Guin’s utopia is not smooth, perfect or finished. The phrase “always coming home” names an endless process of indigenization: a way of slowing down and going back, in order to move ahead, or sideways. There are clear affinities with native peoples’ survivance since the nineteenth century: a watchful waiting, enduring in or near old places; a reinvention of traditions, of traditional futures. Who would have dreamed, in Ishi’s time, that the Indian population of California would rebound to pre-contact levels? That tribes would be aggressively reclaiming ancestral remains from university museums? That casinos would be flourishing, with Indians a political force in the state? That intertribal “big times” in mountain meadows and pow-wows in school gyms, or at rodeos would all contribute to an evolving tribalism? That native arts such as basketry, dancing, and storytelling would find a second life in heritage, performance, communication, and marketing?

Not so fast... We are far from utopia. Most Indians in California, as in so many other places, are poor. They still lack adequate health care, good education and life opportunities. The exceptions, nourished by casino profits, are just that. More than a century of social trauma caused by devastating epidemics, relentless expropriation, racial intolerance and cultural prejudice, forced assimilation through missions or boarding schools—this history persists, as a determining force.

(James Luna's father "passing on the tradition of alcohol...") Many scattered tribes now struggle, unsuccessfully, for recognition and access to even a tiny homeland. (Field 1999) In the real valley of Na, industrial vineyards continue their march across the hillsides, uprooting oak communities and disrupting animal habitats.

All this is true, and more. It is never difficult to shoot down radical utopias. When we shift the focus to contemporary "reality," *Always Coming Home* looks like an elaborate exercise in wishful thinking. Jameson, writing on utopian fiction, has noted its way of getting past current common sense with a strategy of "world reduction." (Jameson 1975) Let's remove capitalism, the nation state, industrial production, cars and airplanes, and see what life could be like. Le Guin does something like this, stripping away an enormous amount of "modernity"--though she holds onto the internet. World reduction simplifies as it clarifies. And it takes a point of view: it excludes. The world of the Kesh could all too easily become a white settler utopia: a site for New Age appropriations of native tradition, for returns to primitive authenticity, for getting closer to nature. This, when most Indians today live in cities and towns.

An indigenous California without Indians--I have heard this said about *Always Coming Home*, in a tone of dismissal.

But then I think of Gerald Vizenor's "post-Indian." And coyote's shape-shifting that crosses-up racial and cultural lines. And what about James Luna's cosmology of the four colors, a vision of conviviality here and now? In Le Guin's fictions, where people have names like Raj Lyubov, all the currently recognizable ethnicities, races and nationalities have been scrambled.

A post-race utopia? Absolutely. Something to be suspicious of in current contexts of managed “multiculturalism—ideologies of premature reconciliation that hide realities of violent antagonism and structured inequality? Yes, to be sure. Beyond race? No, not yet.

But a tough-minded realism can lock us in the present, blinding us to other worlds, old and emerging, that already exist. We can at least search for ways of thinking and acting that keep Le Guin’s “not yet” from *Word for World* in tension with the “and yet” of *Always Coming Home*. It could help us accept a different realism: the project and predicament of constantly becoming (and failing to become) post-colonial. What are the real, the really imaginable, worlds and coalitions that could lead to new forms of reciprocity and conviviality?

Ishi’s story is a resource of tragedy and hope, terror and healing, meaning and silence. An historical companion...

Becoming indigenous in new ways, in twenty-first century California, is an urgent Indian project. There is a great deal to be sustained, reclaimed and renewed—much to be corrected, justice to be done. But ultimately the historical processes at work--whether they appear to be going forward, to the side or back--will be broader and more inclusive than the visions and projects of any one group of Californians. The many populations of the state are not heading “home” — to New England, Oklahoma, Mexico, China, Vietnam, Japan, Cambodia, or Iran.

The utopia of always coming home is an interactive process not a completed destination.

Becoming indigenous together in California’s places--linked with many other global places--would have to be a long contradictory history

It could never be a matter of somehow copying the Kesh. Utopias, especially of the “yin” variety, aren’t recipes. And dreams are never innocent of power. But re-learning how to live in a

responsible relation with the land, with non-human creatures and with available, shared resources is hardly a project of neo-colonial dominion--despite the capitalist commodification of "green" products. Sustained relationships of multi-directional learning, remembering, and translating may yet find ways to proceed in conditions of relative equality and mutual respect. And the differences among peoples, Indians and others, would not necessarily disappear in a future that could merit the name post-colonial. They could well become less absolute, less important. Let's hope so... People may yet be able, like the Kesh, to change names as their life among others twists and unfolds.

One of Ishi's stories has him exploring the new world of San Francisco accompanied by a cosmopolitan Papago bearing the Spanish name, Juan. The wild man in the story is content to be wearing white peoples' clothes, sleeping in their beds, eating (some) of their food...

What songs are playing on his i-Pod?

*

The different retellings of Ishi's story question all-or-nothing outcomes, the inevitabilities that govern so much thinking about Westernization, or modernization, or a triumphant American History.

Ishi's "You stay, I go" becomes: "We remain. You make room."

What became of Ishi's divided body? The brain from storage at the Smithsonian and ashes from Mt. Olivet Cemetery in San Francisco were placed together in a basket woven by a woman of mixed Yana ancestry from the Redding Rancheria. The basket was buried secretly by a small

group of old and young people from the Redding and Pit River groups. No Maidu were among them. A non-Indian, Thomas Killion, of the Smithsonian Institution, was invited to be present.

Ishi's burial place is now part of his story, a part that people like me should never know.

Theodora Kroeber's classic, *Ishi in Two Worlds*, wasn't the last word. It remains a moving, resonant, story—a period piece, like all our stories. Native Californians have their own ways of telling and understanding Ishi's life and its meanings—moving in and out of changing traditions, tribal institutions, and all the command performances of identity. The changing story and images of Ishi are part of this emerging future.



Figure 18. (Portrait of Ishi, seated)

Ishi, the man, remains distant—however closely we listen to his recorded voice, his partially-translated stories and songs. His story cannot belong to anyone, crucial though the native reclamation of his legacy has been. Ishi's story is still too richly enigmatic and productively ambivalent to be contained. Indeed, it would be a divestment of historical responsibility by members of California's non-Indian societies if "repatriation" of Ishi were taken to mean that in going home, he had now left the white world for good--that now only his people could really understand him. If giving Ishi back means being clear of him, divested of his troubling questions, this is the wrong kind of reconciliation. "Ishi" remains a provocation, a potent silence. Around this name swirl images and echoes of entangled lives, of white and native memory, of colonization and its legacies, of historical wounds and ways to heal them.

The wild man of Oroville has, at long last, been returned to his homeland by people who recognize him as a relative. But Ishi's story won't be laid to rest.