

FAILURES OF SELF-SEEING

James Luna Remembers Dino

Jane Blocker

For Graham

Consider Pierre Nora's claim that today history is replacing memory. Nora, editor of the seven-volume opus on French history *Les lieux de memoire* (*Places of Memory*), claims that history, embodied in the coldly official text, datum, and archive, eradicates memory, which is not embodied because it *is* body, cannot be written because it is lived. Memory's body is, for Nora, "displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility." It "has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body's *inherent self-knowledge*, in unstudied reflexes." Because we are products of Western civilization, citizens of capital and industry, the news media and simulation, change and progress, Guy Dubord's "society of spectacle," we are estranged from customs and performances of remembering. Driven away by neglect, the "living," "actual," "affective and magical" past has but one haven today among those societies bound to "rituals of tradition"—what Nora calls, "peoples of memory." Real memory, he says, is "social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic society."

Nora's thesis uncomfortably rehearses Western historiography's fetishization of the "native" other. It upholds, under the banner of critical theory, the ambivalent discourse of primitivism, the suspicion by whites (presumably peoples of history) that salvation lies in tribal "secrets." I support Nora's interrogation of Western culture's reliance on official history, and the damaging ideological effects of its mindless reverence for the uninspected category "information." Yet, his firm distinction between history and memory depends on a belief that the former is textual and Western and the latter is experiential and native. How do Nora's claims help justify the development of technologies for reading and writing these lost authentic memories? How do his assertions embolden Nora to make historical claims on memory whose inviolate purity he has himself discursively produced? How does his thesis ultimately endorse the need for historiography, a practice he ostensibly seeks to dismantle?

The ambiguity of Nora's phrase invites a mis-reading. When he writes "peoples of memory" does he mean those who remember, or those who *are* remembered? And

does not the former depend firmly on the latter? I am concerned here with what balances on the point of that “of,” with the conclusions to which its double meaning leads. Let us consider the damaging effects on one hand of claiming that archaic societies are more mnemonically successful than our own, and on the other hand of presuming that such societies exist pleasantly in memories of our own past. The stakes here are high because although peoples who remember may be envied by whites, as Vine Deloria points out, native memory, “pre-historical” legend, and mythology have a hard time competing for legitimacy in Western epistemology. What manner of violence is done when memory is tied like a stone to the foot of the native and then is tossed into a sea of postmodern cynicism? If, as Nora claims, self-knowing is inherent in the body, a living aspect of memory, then the native body itself stands both as proof of memory’s purity as a category and as cause of its elusive nature and incommensurability with authoritative discourse. In that sense, what results from self-knowing cannot be *known* in a theoretical sense, cannot be written, cannot really be expressed.

The results are no less troubling when we consider peoples who are remembered, for to be remembered means inherently to exist only in the past, to succumb to the process of forgetting and blurring, the “misty watercolor memory” of Barbra Streisand’s song. When Nora writes of archaic or primitive secrets, he reveals something about the sources of his own memories. Vivian Sobchack writes that, just “as filmgoers have not been able to escape the lessons of historiography, so, on their side (and try as they might), historians have not been able to escape the lessons of the movies and television.” Nora seems to be remembering a Hollywood character like Tonto or a literary figure like Queequeg and mistaking them for real natives. Tonto’s crossed arms and stony silence and Queequeg’s mysterious tattoos are signifiers for their enigmatic character and proof that their self-knowledge must be given voice by others. In saying this, I am not arguing that Nora’s picture of the native is somehow tainted by the televisual or fictional image, that Tonto cheapens his otherwise legitimate historiography (a claim that Sobchack’s essay vigorously questions). Rather, I am suggesting that history, in an intensely mediated environment, often suffers from a confusion—did this really happen or did I just see it on television? Moreover, I think that there are times in which the historian is keenly invested in retaining rather than sorting out the confusion. It is not “peoples of memory” who animate the historian’s text, but the mysterious native whom he has, in Joe Roach’s words, “imagined into existence as his definitive opposite.” I am forced to ask whether our memories as Westerners are “peopled” by a cast of invented natives whose performances of authenticity and “silent customs” are scripted by our own historical accounts.

Performance artist James Luna deconstructs the phrase “peoples of memory” in his 1996 performance *In My Dreams: A Surreal, Post-Indian, Subterranean Blues Experience*. He toys with white anxieties that native cultural memories are more significant, more spiritual, or more pure than their own. Luna spends a great deal of his time as an artist clowning in the costume of memory and history throwing a pie in the face of liberal guilt and white “native envy.” He does pratfalls over the



James Luna, *Artifact Piece*, 1987. Installation at the Museum of Man, San Diego.
Photo: Robin Holland, courtesy of the artist.

question of authenticity, tripping again and again over the problem of the body's "inherent self-knowledge." He also shows that, in the context of dominant culture, being remembered, like being dead, is often a stifling experience. This essay examines Luna's performance in order to learn his strategies both for getting some memories forgotten and others restored. These strategies are important because, to the degree that Nora is a self-styled "historian of memory," he is among a burgeoning number of scholars who investigate identity through the past. His suspicion that "we live in an age of rupture" is the contemporary historian's motivation, and it lends urgency to Luna's project because it hints at the desperation with which that historiography is produced. It is in the context of this urgency that I want to show how Luna uses Dean Martin as the visual signifier for white culture's stupefaction, its customs and rituals of forgetting.

James Luna first engaged these issues in his *Artifact Piece*, which he performed in 1987 at the Museum of Man in Balboa Park, San Diego. As a critical parody of the ethnographic museum, Luna composed a display on the Native American in which he, himself, lay in a museum vitrine clothed only in a towel. Placards that appeared with the display transcribed the various scars by which Luna's body is marked:

Drunk beyond the point of being able to defend himself, he was jumped by people from another reservation. After being knocked down, he was kicked in the face and upper body. Saved by an old man, he awoke with a swollen face covered with dried blood. Thereafter, he made it a point not to be as trusting among relatives and other Indians.

The burns on the fore and upper arm were sustained during days of excessive drinking. Having passed out on a campground table, trying to walk, he fell into a campfire. Not until several days later, when the drinking ceased, was the seriousness and pain of the burn realized.

Having been married less than two years, the sharing of emotional scars from alcoholic family backgrounds (was) cause for fears of giving, communicating, and mistrust. Skin callous on ring finger remains, along with assorted painful and happy memories.

By transcribing these scarified signs and pretending to decode their meanings, Luna objectifies the script that is etched in his skin. The contusion, the burn, the callous in this case function, like Queegueg's tattoos and Tonto's folded arms, as signifiers for mysteriousness, wildness, the body's "self-knowledge."

In this performance, Luna engages the problem of alcoholism among Native Americans, a theme that recurs in various ways in his work. The educational texts in this mock museological display are unified by their references to drunkenness, which has both comic and tragic overtones. A few years after this performance, in 1990, Luna addressed the theme again in his work *A.A. Meeting/Art History*. In this piece, the artist is photographed mimicking the Indian's pose in James Earle Fraser's

famous sculpture *The End of the Trail*, except that instead of a pony, Luna straddles a sawhorse, and instead of a spear, he carries a bottle of liquor. In the guise of the contemporary Indian warrior, Luna's trail is blocked by the debilitating effects of substance abuse, his battle for independence lost to chemical dependency.

It would be a mistake to see these works solely as tragic commentaries on the troubles that plague Native North America. It is important to recognize that they also interrogate historical representations of natives, question how Indians are remembered by whites. For Luna, Fraser's sculpture is part of the same historical imagination, distorted by the desire for poetical authenticity, that produced the film *Dances With Wolves*, which, in his words,

did nothing but glorify all the good stuff. It didn't show any Indians mad, or any Indians upset. It didn't show any Indians cry. It didn't show any Indians fucking up. We're still beautiful, stoic, and pretty. You see the movie and you go out and see a fat, overweight, acne-covered, poor, uneducated person—is that the real Indian you want to see?

The liquor bottle that appears in *A.A. Meeting/Art History* has more than a merely sociological significance, as the work's title suggests. It is not just an artifact of alcoholism, it is also metaphorical of history's inability to determine whether its memories really happened or are manufactured out of fiction, television, film, and popular art. It is a vivid reminder of history's tendency to pass out and forget the past.

In My Dreams depends on similar jokes to introduce two significant themes that balance uneasily on the question of memory. "Wildness" and "control" are like two white lines marking the boundaries of the highway that appears as one of the performance's central images. James Luna rides, sometimes erratically, between these lines. One component of the performance is a ritual of examination that functions as an eating ritual, a solemn purification and blessing of food. In this scene, Luna enters the stage wearing a sleeveless white t-shirt and black pants. He sits down at a small table and begins arranging the empty plastic food containers that are set there. First Luna takes the lid off a Styrofoam cup and pours in a packet of artificial sweetener, the contents of which sound like fine sand against the empty cup. He then pretends to smell the coffee and stir it. He pantomimes a sip, shrugs as though to say "why the hell not?" and adds another package of sweetener, inducing a few people in the audience to laugh uncomfortably. Then he opens a clear plastic box with raised divisions between compartments (the kind in which a deli sandwich or salad might be served). Into one compartment he squeezes a flatulent packet of catsup, the contents of which appear like a dollop of bright red paint. Into an adjoining compartment he empties a packet of mustard, thus adding a bright yellow to his palette. Luna then opens a small packet of salt and sprinkles it over the whole container, shrugs, and adds more. More people laugh. He finishes by sprinkling a packet of pepper. He pantomimes taking a taste of the invisible food smothered in real, artificial flavorings.

Before he proceeds to “eat,” however, Luna takes out a small black case with a zipper, opens it and removes an object resembling a calculator, that the audience soon discovers is his glucometer. He places it on the table, then opens a light blue plastic toothbrush holder and takes out a small plastic container about the size of a medicine bottle. He opens the top, takes out a strip and places it in the meter. He then pricks his finger, squeezes blood from it onto the strip, and sucks off the salty excess. The audience waits while he silently watches the meter count backwards from 45. He returns the strip bottle to the toothbrush holder and removes from it a syringe and a small bottle of insulin. He draws up several units, lifts up his t-shirt and injects himself in the abdomen. He then re-caps the needle and puts the insulin and syringe back in their case. He picks up the plastic utensils as though to eat and the lights black out bringing the scene to an end.

In this scene, Luna engages diabetes similarly to the way he did alcoholism in his previous works, that is, he treats it both as an artifact of the dysfunction of Indian culture and as a metaphor for the dangers of white historiography. The former idea is the most obvious because, like alcoholism, diabetes has achieved epidemic proportions among Native Americans in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. On the La Jolla Indian Reservation where Luna lives, some 42 percent of the population are diabetic. Luna’s project has long been to show the present reality of “Indians,” to demonstrate native appropriation of white culture, and to document his community’s persistent survival despite its occupation by outsiders.

In this scene, Luna seems to invoke Foucault’s claim that in the culture of discipline, the body becomes an object “perpetually offered for examination.” The examination is essential to the rhetoric of diabetes care, which is based on control. Since the disease is incurable, the goal is simply to control it, to force the body against its will to work “normally,” and it is the glucometer that polices the boundaries of normativity. To be out of control means to be unconstrained by rules or consequences, to be irrational, unreasonable, unpredictable. The test, to the degree that it both produces and polices the boundaries of the “normal,” is a tool of history’s representational authority, the source of its claims to truth, to universality. The glucometer is an artifact that testifies to contemporary culture’s devotion to technology and simulated knowledge. “Everywhere,” Baudrillard insists, “the test functions as a fundamental form of control,” and this is because in it “the answer is called forth by the question.”

As a diabetic, James Luna’s life literally depends on his acceptance of what Baudrillard calls the “manipulative truth” of the test. It is possible to read his performance of this ritual examination as an engagement with the question of “manipulative truths” of various kinds. In this scene, the injection Luna takes reads as an inoculation against simulated food, mass produced and excessively packaged condiments. Luna’s silent performance mimes the gestures of traditional thanksgiving blessings, but in a context where food is a symbol of white colonization of Native America.

In the era of what he calls the “McIndian,” in which one can order sweat lodges, dream catchers, shaman lessons, ceremonial drums, and an endless array of turquoise jewelry from mail-order catalogs, Indian culture is packaged as spiritual fast food for white consumers. But as much as Indian-ness is consumed by whites, whiteness is consumed by Indians. The television, popular music, alcohol, fast food, commercial food additives, and consumption-producing packaging associated with dominant white culture is a central part of the Indian way of life. The consumption of whiteness is toxic, however, it is devitalizing the native population with alcoholism, hypertension, and diabetes, which in turn ironically invites still further intersections with white culture in the form of its political, scientific, and technological response. What can the glucometer mean to Luna as a surveillance device? How is its power exercised on him? To what end does he perform publicly the ritual of examination?

The glucometer writes Luna’s identity as a contradiction between wildness and control, savagery and civilization. He is wild because he is an Indian and prone to diabetes and alcoholism, unemployment and the loss of traditions—diseases of consumption that threateningly point to capitalism’s extreme conclusions. He is controlled because he is subject to repeated examination by a device that stands for white ingenuity and authority. Such stereotypes essentialize Indian identity as either “savage or civilized, descended from pastoral shepherds or warlike plunderers.”

Luna uses a mock ritual to confront the two versions of white memory—repudiation and desire. He disturbs the happy image of the “peoples of memory” by showing whites what it can mean to “be remembered,” what white identity looks like from the point of view of its own representation in television, film, history, and popular culture. Luna fabricates this performance of whiteness out of ambivalent memories of McDonald’s, the Lone Ranger, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, a whiteness that manifests itself in anxieties over the loss of spirituality, meaningful tradition, authenticity, and nature, and unquestioned faith in science, technology, and progress. The performance exposes how both Anglo and Indian identities are each produced, as Scott Michaelsen writes, “within sight of the other, with reference to a site for the other.” Luna calls those whites, who envy what they perceive as the native’s “better memories,” gentle, prehistorical memories of meaningful ceremony, as a tribe of Wannabees. He disillusion their fantasy by showing just what native memory now includes: the remembrance of whiteness remembering nativeness.

Luna’s goals with respect to constructions of identity can be seen more clearly if we consider other sequences from this performance piece. *In My Dreams* is set on a small stage with a white screen at the back. A white stationary bicycle is positioned at center stage facing downstage toward the audience. The handlebars of the bike are elaborately decorated with red, white, and blue feathers, a small white basket, and a “dream catcher.” Directly in front of the bicycle is a circular electric fan, which is also decorated with red, white, and blue feathers. Behind the bicycle on a small ledge beneath the slide screen a pair of small crutches is placed, the wooden framework of

which is decorated with simple curvilinear black lines. The same red, white, and blue feathers are affixed along one side of each crutch with eye hooks.

The overture for the performance consists of a medley of popular songs by: Jefferson Airplane ("Plastic, Fantastic Lover"), Cheryl Lynn ("Got to Be Real"), Rick James ("Give it to Me Baby"), Junior Brown ("Surf Medley"), Dean Martin ("Return to Me"), and a monologue by Jack Kerouac on the Beat Generation. The music is accompanied by slides projected onto a large white screen including documentary black-and-white photographs of Native Americans posed in groups, performing dances, etc., and images of Luna from previous performances. The lights fade and a song called "Only In Dreaming" is broadcast; the slide show continues, this time with an image of Dean Martin from an early record cover.

Luna steps from behind a door at stage left dressed ridiculously in a cheap costume-like headdress with a flashing orange light in the center, a brightly colored sequined vest, black pants, and red athletic shoes. From his waist-band hangs a white hotel towel positioned as a breech cloth, the embossed words "Hampton Inn" clearly legible. He carries a long stick with a pointed spear at one end. He climbs aboard the bicycle and a video on a continuous loop is projected behind him, which at first shows the pavement rushing by from the vantage point of the back of a car. The clip of the rushing pavement is inter-cut with a scene from *The Wild One* in which a pack of motorcyclists dressed in black leather approaches the viewer and grows to fill the screen. The motorcyclists seem to be roaring past Luna who continuously pumps the pedals on his bicycle. Another clip shows Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda from *Easy Rider* riding motorcycles across the screen from left to right, perpendicular to the direction of Luna's trip. While the three clips keep rolling in sequence, Luna first pedals his bicycle slowly, then displays his "spear" and does "tricks" like standing on one pedal while balancing his other leg behind him. He stoically motions the audience for applause. He sits down again and resumes his pedaling, reaches into the basket and draws out a pack of cigarettes and lights one. Then he takes out a can of beer and pops it open. After taking a drink he returns it to the basket to the sound of nervous laughter from the audience. With the projected images of the road speeding away behind him and the fan blowing both the feathers on the handlebars and his headdress, one has the sense that Luna is riding along slowly and silently as if in a dream.

Suddenly there is a change in the repeating loop of the video. For the first time, we see the scene in *Easy Rider* in which two "rednecks" in a pickup truck pull up alongside Dennis Hopper, riding his motorcycle. The film's soundtrack is not broadcast, so the two men engage in silent dialogue with Hopper who turns coolly to them and "flips them off." The man in the passenger side of the truck takes out a shotgun and points it at Hopper. The audience watches Hopper get knocked from his motorcycle by a bullet. Luna rides steadily throughout this scene and then, looking upward, "flips off" some unseen interlocutor. The video cuts off, he dismounts his bike and goes out the side door.



James Luna, *End of the Trail*, 1990, from *AA Meeting/Art History*, 1990–91. Gelatin silver print, 30" x 39", mixed media installation. Photo: Richard Lou, courtesy of the artist.



James Earl Fraser, *End of the Trail*, 1894. Bronze. Photo: Courtesy of the City Clerk's Office, Waupun, Wisconsin.

Luna's use of *The Wild One* and *Easy Rider* in this performance is significant because both films depict wildness, cool failure, and rebellion as forms of cultural resistance. *Easy Rider* especially associates wildness with freedom, with a return to the land and to self-sufficiency. The entire plot of that film is based on the pursuit of freedom. The cross-country motorcycle trip that forms the film's structuring device begins when the main character, Wyatt (Peter Fonda), throws his wrist watch into the road, symbolically rejecting the preoccupations of work and economic ambition. Along the journey he and his partner, Billy (Dennis Hopper), experience various alternative lifestyles from a hippie commune to Mardi Gras. In one scene Wyatt says to a rancher who has come to his assistance, "It's not every man that can live off the land. You can do your own thing in your own time. You should be proud." The focus on wildness is sharpened by Steppenwolf's song "Born to be Wild," which forms the soundtrack for Wyatt and Billy's cross-country trek. Freedom here is associated with wildness in the sense of pastoralism, unrestrained growth, and living off the land.

The motorcycle is the perfect symbol of individualism and rebellion. In both that film and *The Wild One* the riders are perceived as threatening. Yet Wyatt and Billy in *Easy Rider* are completely misunderstood. It is not they who threaten, but the lower-class, racist whites who ultimately murder them. On the contrary, the life they seek is the romanticized bucolic life of the native. The native's lifestyle is positioned as the most peaceful, pure and enviable. The film, released in 1969, had a strong impact on its young viewers but had special significance for Luna and his college-age friends for whom it resonated with the American Indian Movement and a validation of Indian identity.

The Wild One serves as the violent counterpoint to the pacifism of *Easy Rider*, its characters are the "warlike plunderers" to *Easy Rider's* "pastoral shepherds." With Johnny (Marlon Brando) as their leader, these motorcyclists travel in a pack, a threatening group formed in solidarity to create meaningless havoc. In this context Brando's character takes on a cool cynicism and nonchalant anger so that the film's most famous scene—the one in which someone asks, "Hey Johnny, what are you rebellin' against?" and he answers, "What have you got?"—is its most disturbing. This is just blind rage. Like *Easy Rider*, the film's plot involves the unjust persecution of the misunderstood hero. When the gang occupies the small town of Bleeker, threatening its citizens, especially the sheriff's daughter, the men in the town, whose masculinity has been intimidated by the gang's behavior, form a lynch mob. Through a misunderstanding over the death of one of Bleeker's elderly residents, they pursue and finally imprison Johnny. In its final scenes, *The Wild One* toys with the questions of truth, justice, and mob violence, and ultimately Johnny is saved by the honest testimony of an eyewitness.

While the native sits at the heart of the freedom fantasies in these films, Luna shows here, as he did with the food ritual, that wildness and control are interchangeable operations. He reveals the ways in which the native is tamed by colonizing forces. His stationary bike is literally going nowhere. It is a "girl's" bike in contrast to the rugged masculinity of the motorcyclists' roaring machines. He wears a cheap

costume with a fake loin cloth and a headdress that doubles as a reflector, against which Hopper's blue jeans and Brando's leather take on a rugged authenticity. In his basket he carries no secrets, no tribal artifacts, only beer and cigarettes. Unlike the pervasive use of marijuana in *Easy Rider*, which shows the characters' assimilation of an enriching spiritual practice associated with Indians, Luna's contraband marks him ironically as "white trash"; it reads as low-class and self-destructive. When he dismounts to perform his Eagle Dance, he does so not with traditionally decorated wings, but with crutches that symbolize the limitations placed on his flight, which is no longer a tribal ritual but entertainment packaged for white tourists.

Peter Fonda wears a jacket with a red, white, and blue flag, meant to suggest an America made out of adventure and quest for the authentic, which is offered in response to bourgeois conservatism. In contrast to Fonda's jacket, the red, white, and blue feathers that decorate Luna's bike and crutches suggest a commodified version of the native, the sell-out to America, Incorporated. Unlike the horrifying instant in which Hopper is stopped by the bullet, Luna's conflict is measured more slowly and less dramatically by incremental accommodation to the influences of dominant white culture. His gesture of resistance seems less brash, less cocky, and ultimately inauthentic to the common stereotype of the wise and stoic Indian.

In My Dreams is more than a lament on the state of native culture, however. It employs effective strategies whereby history is remembered and memory is historicized. This move may be seen most dramatically in Luna's enactment of horse tricks on his bicycle. By balancing on one leg and extending his other behind him, his arms outstretched, Luna seems at first to parody Indian horse tricks performed at rodeos and Wild West shows for white tourists. His performance is complicated, however, by the fact that Dennis Hopper as Billy in *Easy Rider* performs the exact same moves on his motorcycle. What does it mean that Luna is performing Dennis Hopper performing Billy performing Indian horse tricks? "Like performance," Joe Roach writes, "memory operates as both quotation and invention, an improvisation on borrowed themes, with claims on the future as well as the past." This seemingly infinite regress of quotation complicates native memory to show that it does not spring solely from pure origins in venerable ancestors, but that it is constructed in part out of its own representations in popular culture, out of what it inherits and redresses from whiteness.

In the performance's last scene, Luna reenters the stage holding a wooden rattle, and stands momentarily in front of a slide of Dean Martin projected on the screen. The slide shows an aged Martin in black-and-white with the caption "Dec. 25, 1995, Dino Dead." Luna then launches into a monologue about where he was and what happened on the tragic day when Dean Martin died:

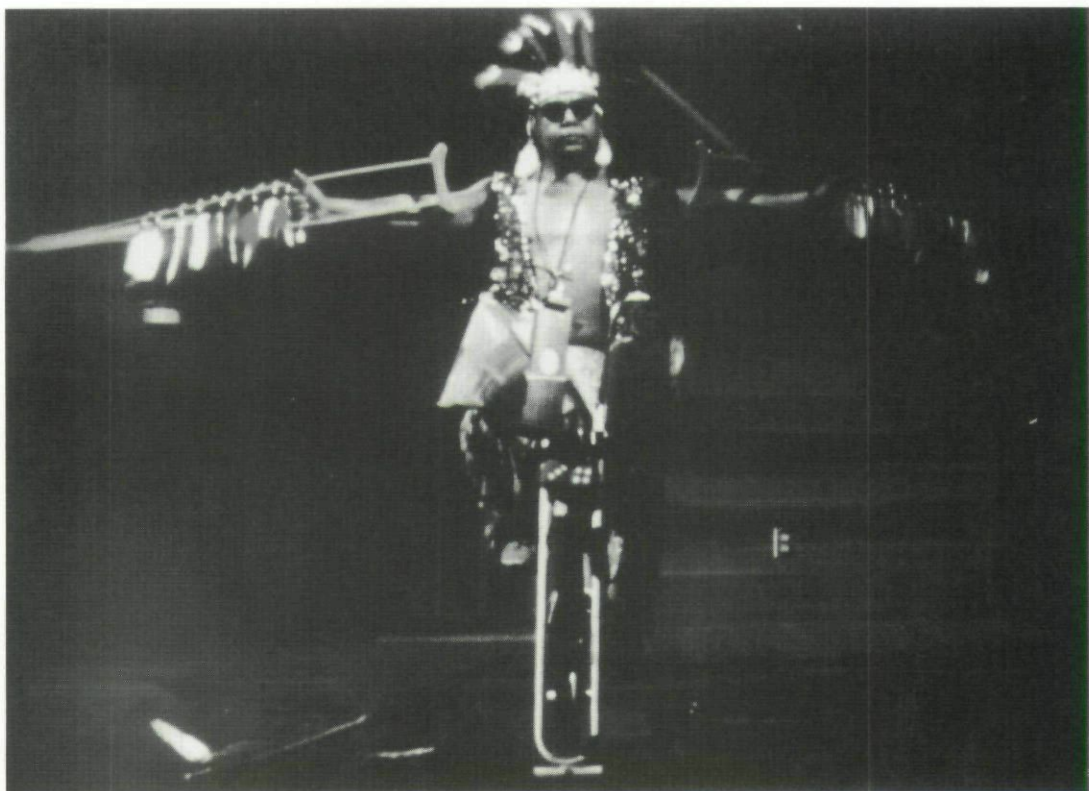
I awoke Christmas Day and turned on the radio to listen to NPR. The first news that I heard was that Dino had died. I thought I was dreaming. We were listening to him last night while we were gassing. We like Dino on the La Jolla Reservation—we like a good song; we like a good story; we like sad

music. You see it's not just about Dino, but the times that he brings to mind when we hear music like that. When Willie was in the service in Germany he had all of Dino's records. When I first started going to bars I would hear him. When his TV show was big, though I didn't watch it, I was in college and all the politics were going on, and so forth. The good times are now, though. We don't think about the future in La Jolla, we live for now cause I think that what we know is that we are in heaven; this is our heaven and we'll get our hell later. We don't think about our health like we should; we don't think about ourselves like we should. We think about getting through the week of work and what this next weekend will bring. So when I heard Dino had died, it reminded me what a fucked up life I have sometimes and that when he went he took some of the good times with him.

At this point Luna says, "Fuck it, let's dance for Dino." The lights come up and Luna holds the rattle upright and shakes it as he jogs around the stage to George Clinton's "Atomic Dog." He proceeds to the audience and chooses three people to dance with him. He leads them to the stage, jogging and shaking the rattle. They dance around the stage until Luna directs them back to their seats. He ends the dance and the lights go out except for the slide of Dino.

What is most obviously unexpected about this last scene is the way in which Dean Martin—pop singer and comedy actor, Jerry Lewis's partner and member of the "Rat Pack"—functions as a conduit for native memory. In another performance of this piece Luna explains that "it isn't about Dino, but about the memories he conjures up. The music helps us remember. He did something for us." It is as though Martin's music formed the soundtrack for Luna's college memories of the American Indian Movement. In November 1969, when Martin's show was seen every week on NBC, a group of more than six hundred Native Americans representing more than fifty tribes occupied the former island prison of Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay. The occupation continued for a year and a half before the Indians were forcefully removed by federal officers. Four years later, in 1973, on the site of the 1890 massacre at Pine Ridge reservation, several hundred Oglala Sioux claimed the village of Wounded Knee as a liberated territory in order to protest the unemployment, welfare, alcoholism, and suicide that were the pervasive results of U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs' management of Indian lands. Martin's show was still on the air, but was canceled the next year in 1974.

That Martin could figure as the backdrop for this political struggle is confirmed not only by his popularity in the sixties and seventies, but also by his role as professional drunk. Here was a celebrity whose comic "bit" in this period was playing the stereotypical alcoholic—burping, weaving, losing track of his routines, slurring the punch line. In his obituary, Associated Press reporter Annie Shoorman describes Martin as "highball swilling," and claims that he once had a license plate reading "DRUNKY." These facts resonate with one of the other scenes in *In My Dreams*, in which Luna tells a story about a sailor who gets drunk at an annual fiesta. He explains that on the reservation the Indians joke "drink and be somebody!" In other



James Luna, *In My Dreams*, 1996. Performance.
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

James Luna, *Take a Picture With a Real Indian*, 1991.
Life-sized figures, black-and-white photographs mounted on
foam core. Photo: Sheldon Collins, courtesy of the artist.



versions of this piece, Luna, an alcoholic, explains how his memories of Martin coincide with the period when he “first started drinking.”

Luna’s performance can be amplified by artist Dan Graham’s essay on Dean Martin, and what Graham claims was Martin’s cynical subversion of the television medium. Graham analyzes Martin’s TV show performances—his “stumbling style” of comic delivery, his purposeful mis-readings of cue cards, and his calculated performances of inebriation—to suggest that Martin overacted his signature role in order to expose the gap between his real and televisual identities. Graham claims that Martin’s performance of drunkenness is not taken for reality by television viewers. Rather, he suggests, Martin purposefully performs the standard “bit” that audiences have come to expect so as to distance himself cynically from it at the same time. The stupor he enacts is thus a metaphor for the stupor induced by watching television itself, for the feeling that the somniferous medium of television deadens thought, disorients, and depresses.

By embodying the alcoholic and performing drunkenness to the point of cliché, Martin takes a risk as a celebrity. The character he plays is contained by the self-referential nature of the joke, that is, sobriety is proffered as a true identity and then taken back with the rapidity of a one-liner: “I drink moderately. In fact, I keep a case of Old Moderately in my dressing room.” His act depends on teasing the viewer, pretending to be sincere, and then revealing the punch-line. Like a strip-tease, Martin’s performance pretends to unclothe him, to unveil his true self, but in the end only offers an image of what everyone watching always already knows. In the end, Dino is worthy of Luna’s dance because, as a professional drunk, Dino *cannot* remember, and thus becomes the celebrity mascot for the white man’s customs of forgetting.

We have said that the contemporary historian is impelled by the profoundly disorienting effects of globalization to shore up destabilized identities (national, ethnic, or racial) through their remains in collective memory. To the degree that identity politics are the wages of this historiographic practice, “being remembered” for Indians often means to dress the stage set on which dominant culture’s past is performed—a fact of which Luna’s project *Take a Picture with a Real Indian* is a vivid example. In this 1991 work, gallery visitors chose from a selection of life-sized photographs of Luna, dressed in various costumes, with which to have their souvenir pictures taken. About this work Luna states, “I saw some Indian selling his red ass to sell jewelry, and I was ashamed but knew what he was doing—he was working. I’ve worked too. When this opportunity came to do a statement on tourism, I thought of the Navajo and how as Indians we have all been on the tourist line.”

Luna’s project seeks to expose the pure theatricality of the living history museum, infotainment, the historical theme park, the waxworks diorama, and the brown highway markers that map the tourist experience of history. To accomplish this, he over-acts the part and runs history’s shtick into the ground. Like Martin’s ubiquitous tuxedo, Luna’s headdress, beads, and sequins tease the audience that, in the language

of the tabloids, wants to know what the Indian is "really like." With his lively eulogy of Martin, Luna remembers instead of being remembered, a rare reversal of the sentimental histories to which Tonto, Queequeg, the Indian at the end of the trail, and Kevin Costner lend their celebrity.

WORKS CITED

- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e), Inc., 1983.
- Deloria, Vine Jr. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. New York: Scribner, 1995.
- Durland, Steven. "Call Me in '93: An Interview With James Luna." *High Performance* 14, no. 4 (Winter), 1993. 34–39.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Graham, Dan. "Dean Martin/Entertainment as Theater" in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, ed. Brian Wallis. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1987. 362–370 pp.
- Michaelsen, Scott. "Resketching Anglo-Amerindian Identity Politics," in *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, ed. Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 221–252, 245 pp.
- Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring), 1989: 7–25.
- Pierre Nora, ed. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past: Traditions*, Vol. 2. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Shooman, Annie. "Celebrity-Friends Reminisce About 'Dino.'" Dean Martin Page [web site]. December 26, 1995. Available at <http://www.plweb.at/dino/mart05.htm> and Mercury News [database online].
- Sobchack, Vivian. "The Insistent Fringe: Moving Images and Historical Consciousness." *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 36, no. 4 (December), 1997: 4–20.
- Weintraub, Linda. *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society*. Litchfield, CT: Art Insights, Inc., 1996.

JANE BLOCKER, author of *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity, and Exile*, is an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Her new book project, a feminist examination of the history of seventies performance art, is called *What the Body Cost*.

PAJ, NO. 67 (2001) PP. 18–32: © 2001
The Johns Hopkins University Press and PAJ Publications