

Interview participants:
Interviewer: Hartmut Lutz
Interviewee: Lee Maracle (Sto:lo)

Date and time: 27 October 1990, time unknown
Location: Vancouver, BC, Canada

Hartmut Lutz: [inaudible, 00:00 - 00:04] an interview with Lee Maracle. Lee Maracle was born in 1950, in North Vancouver, where she grew up as the daughter of a Métis woman from Lac La Biche, in Alberta, and a father from Saskatchewan. In 1975, the Liberation Support Movement, in Vancouver, published her autobiography, *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel: Struggles of the Native Canadian Woman*. [tape button pressing] The book is based on extensive taped interviews, and was published this year by Women's Press in Toronto. In 1988, her second book, *I Am Woman*, was published by Write-On Press in Vancouver, and this year, saw the publication of at least three books by and with her: *Seeds*, published by Write-On Press, *Sojourner and Other Stories* by Press Gang, both in Vancouver, and, together with Daphne Marlatt, and Betsy Warland, and Sky Lee, she published *Telling It: Building Language Across Cultures*, also published by Press Gang in Vancouver. She has edited Rita Joe's *Songs of Eskasoni* in 1988, and she has been very active in supporting and developing Native writing in Canada. She has made presentations at various conferences and has spoken out against the misuses of Native authors and Native stories by non-Natives. She has published reviews, and... shared stories, poetry, in various magazines. She now teaches and studies at En'owkin School of International Writing in Penticton, British Columbia. [tape switching off]

[people laughing in the background]

[tape button pressing]

Hartmut Lutz: Uh... maybe you say something so we can check [inaudible, 02:36]

Lee Maracle: Yeah, let's see if we're taping here this morning.

HL: Okay. [tape button pressing]

LM: Okay, good morning.

HL: I think I'll put this on here so it doesn't [inaudible, 02:45]

LM: Maybe you should start with your questions, sir.

HL: Yeah, well, I can tell you the questions, but I know that some of them [inaudible, 02:53 - 02:54] to perhaps go over. One is uh, some things about... [inaudible, 02:58 - 02:59]

LM: About a half hour or so.

[third person speaking, inaudible, 03:02]

HL: You can stay... well, you've got other things to do? Otherwise, why don't you join us?

[third person speaking, inaudible, 03:09 - 03:21]

LM: I don't care what *you* do... [laughing] Does that make it plain? [laughing]

[third person speaking, inaudible, 03:28]

LM: Okay.

HL: Um, yeah. One, um, one question that I still have about uh, the first book, is the uh— in the— the thing in the English language introduction, that says that it's based on the recorded

uh, on tape recordings. And I— another time, I think we talked, and you said no, you wrote it. [Lee Maracle laughing] And then I was...

LM: No.

HL: No?

LM: No.

HL: So... so how did... was that put together?

LM: It was... it was part of a course I was taking on how to do life histories. We each did each other's.

HL: Oh, I see.

LM: I did my partner's, he did mine.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: And... because the oral was, uh, well, I helped transcribe them.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: And... the oral was, the presentation was quite good, so they decided to publish it. Um...

HL: Is that most of it verbatim?

LM: Well, not really.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Uh, they had to, shrink it down for brevity. There was 80 hours of tapes...

HL: Ooh!

LM: To that story. And I think... [door closing] I think an hour's about, 10 pages? Somewhere like that.

HL: Mm-hmm. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It... it's really long.

LM: Yeah, it's quite long. It's about three inches of manuscript.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: In the taping, I had the same problems with uh... or *they* had, actually, the same problems with hearing my voices as you had when you first interviewed me. Um, so some of it is *pretty* mixed up. And I decided not to change the original text, because even though things are y'know... the events didn't actually happen the way that they're said in the book. The events happened, and so I left that the way it was. I was gonna redo the whole thing, and more in the voice that I actually spoke it in. Um... [pause] there were moments of almost poetry in the spoken version, in the transcription, but it would've made for what they call uneven narrative in English.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: So the editors made the decision to make it all even throughout.

HL: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it is pretty even.

LM: Yeah. And... uh, I wouldn't have done it that way.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: I'm planning to write a novel, and it's not going to be an even voice.

HL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

LM: Because here, the speakers don't... well they try not to use their own voice. They try to let the voice reflect the subject.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Just a different way of speaking.

HL: Uh, well it comes across as something that is uh, well, you said even, that is round in itself, and, and did you say it was [Lee coughing] always the same chronology as events happened but it's like flashbacks so... I reread it...

LM: It's got chronology.

HL: [speaking simultaneously] I reread it...

LM: The chronology is there, but sometimes, Ed's doing what I'm doing and I'm doing what Ed's doing or, you know...

HL: Oh I see. Mm-hmm. No, but it's, it's very... I reread it, and it's really a very straight and very readable narrative.

LM: Mm-hmm. Yeah. So I decided to leave it that way.

[inaudible, 07:03 - 07:09]

[paper fumbling]

LM: You catching this?

[third person speaking, inaudible, 07:16 - 07:18]

LM: Oh. Okay.

[third person speaking, inaudible, 07:23 - 07:25]

LM: He'll come back.

Third person: One day.

LM: Someday.

TP: One day.

[third person speaking, inaudible, 07:34 - 07:36]

LM: Yeah, I know we are, but [laughing] I don't wanna give everyone fifty cents, either.
[laughing]

[door closing]

HL: Um, *I Am Woman*, on, when we were on the phone the other day, you said it comes the oral tradition, and I thought I'd, uh, like to, to tell you how I saw that, and then maybe get your reaction to that.

LM: Sure.

HL: Um, I... If you look at the book as a whole and it has poetry, it has history, it has personal narrative, it has very sort of, uh, um, aspects.

LM: Mm-hmm.

HL: If I use western, uh, categories, it sort of transcends genre.

LM: Mm-hmm.

HL: And, and I think a lot of um, uh, minority writing and women writing do that.

LM: Mm-hmm.

HL: And the one that I had in mind when I read your book and where I saw a parallel immediately, I remember reading it in Penticton was, uh, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, where she consistently, sort of deliberately transcends the borders and move from one uh, from one... mode of narrative, from one genre [Lee coughing] to the other, and it reflects her own sort of what [inaudible, 08:52 - 08:54], what a lot of uh, um, minority people, especially of mixed ancestry, uh, have that they share in various traditions, and, and refuse to sort of be marginalized or put in their place and [inaudible, 09:09 - 09:11] say you belong here or you belong there. She says she straddles the border, and from there, has access to various cultures, and I thought that uh, uh, *I Am Woman* well reflects that process. And uh... [Lee laughing] I didn't, I didn't, uh, see it then as coming from the oral tradition at all. But then when I hear you perform and uh, witness that, I realize how important performance is for you. So those are my thoughts.

LM: Mm-hmm, well, in the big house you're standing in the middle of the room, and if you're going to talk for a long time, which usually happens... uh, you'd better be interesting. That's one.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Secondly, uh, for us, words and meaning are more important than structure.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: And thirdly, uh, the voice you use...

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Should reflect the subject. Um... certain things can't be said outside of humour.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Um... certain things aren't funny. [laughing]

HL: That's true.

LM: And there's a whole set of— well, in English they have a word called syntax for the way things are framed.

HL: Mm-hmm. Yeah, in the sentence. Yeah.

LM: For us, syntax is even bigger than just in the sentence.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: It's in our life.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: In our conduct. If you can kind of equate syntax to conduct and being.

HL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

LM: There is a syntax in the book that's very very different from English. Um, the other thing is that the beauty of the language has to come out. In all of our, um— all of our speakers that speak English, um... I dunno if you've read any of Pauline Johnson's translations of old stories...

HL: Yeah.

LM: I was just— I saw my first copy the other day, actually.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: I never did read her work until just... at least, not the, not the um, the stories, but... the *voice* of Capilano is what I remember most distinctly, and she was true to his voice. The beautiful language that he used *in English*.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Um... I also wanted to do it that way to show that our great grandmothers and our grandfathers... and great-grandfathers really, *did* speak English very well in the beginning.

HL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

LM: That residential school robbed them of both languages.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Those who didn't go to residential school had *no* problem learning English or speaking English. But we *do* speak it differently.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: And I tried to capture that, that essence throughout the book. And the *last* thing is, is that it's a presentation of theory and high philosophy.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Um... and that is best done through story and poetry. So it moves in and out of story and poetry constantly.

HL: Yeah.

LM: I think in English, um... the, the so-called theoreticians and philosophers kid themselves that um, they don't have story in their, in their presentations, but they do try to... take the passion and the spirit and the life...

HL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

LM: Out of the story, then they call it an example.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: To me, it's all just story and...

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: The more interesting and entertaining it is, the better. [pause] So I did a whole bunch of things with *I Am Woman*. I tried to— but I wasn't concerned with English genre. I don't even know what that word means.

HL: [speaking simultaneously] Mm-hmm. No, no, I'm... yeah. Yeah.

LM: And I had never—

HL: [speaking simultaneously] It was just a category that I had in my mind and that I operated on...

LM: Yeah. Yeah.

HL: It's, uh—

LM: [speaking simultaneously] I want to explain this—

HL: I'm not saying it's the adequate—

LM: [speaking simultaneously] Please, let me explain this, okay?

HL: I'm sorry. Yeah.

LM: There's a point I'm making here. [laughing] Um, before I did *I Am Woman*, I hadn't taken any English literary courses. I have since, uh, because I wanna do a novel. So I have studied some English literature. So I had no idea beyond, uh, meanings of words, and thinking, and being about how a book is structured, and... actually, it does create some problems with the book, because some people think it's a novel, or an attempt at a novel. Uh, some people think it's a collection or some sort of anthological presentation. Um, some people don't know what to think about it. Some people think it's an uneven voice, or faltering narrative, or just a number of things.

HL: [speaking simultaneously] Mm-hmm.

LM: But in fact it isn't either of those things. It's theory coming through story, is what it is.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Colonization, decolonization, very very [inaudible, 14:09 - 14:10].

HL: If you, um, well, since you talked about that, if you, if you fight to sort of... explain where the various thoughts, uh, the theories, the, the experiences that you have and that you express in there, where they come from, you said that as one source of... uh, the great house...

LM: Mm-hmm.

HL: And of course your background, you mention, uh, Emily Pauline Johnson, so there's a regional aspect if you think of those stories.

LM: Mm-hmm.

HL: Uh, in [clearing throat] *Indian Rebel*, there's quite a bit of uh, um, Westerner European theory too, political theory, and, and I, coming from uh, theoretically a similar background, Marxist and, and, and so... I— for years and years, I have had problems with my Marxist convictions since I... I've worked with Native people and learned from Native people. Because that perception of reality very often is just too one-dimensional. At least that's what I experienced. How do you, uh, how important is sort of Western political theory, uh, in your thinking and in your expression? I mean, decolonization is partly a lot of it, and the most important, uh, parts are written by... people who are decolonizing themselves.

LM: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

HL: However some of them still also refer to European thinking. How, how do you see that connection?

LM: Well, I'm really glad that you asked that actually, because... I had... spent, oh, such a long time trying to come to grips with... the essential disagreement between myself and *all* of the European...

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Philosophers that I read including Marx. That there's something about all of them that they *all* hold in common... that I don't care for. I think it's on the relationship between thinking and being, or thinking.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Or what the concept of thinking that, um, Europeans have, and that's the objectification...

HL: [speaking simultaneously] Mm-hmm.

LM: Of thought. Um... for us, thinking is a complete and total process.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: You harness in the sweat, or in the big house or wherever. Around a pipe. You harness all your energy, physical, spiritual, emotional, and, and... intellectual. And you retreat into solitude... to work out... the nature of your particular... solidarity with creation.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: And you retreat into *lineage*... as well. Uh... because the farther backward in time the grandmothers you have, the farther forward... the grandchildren. You *actually* represent an infinite number of people, and it's their only physical... manifestation *is* yourself.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Also, you, you own your own house, and that's all you own.

HL: Yeah.

LM: Is this... house that I live in. The eye that lives in here is the thinking eye, the being eye, the eye that understands creation, understands the object of life is solidarity, understands that there are consequences for every, for every action. In European thought, beginning with, uh... such men as John Stuart Mill — he's probably the most famous, there's others that came before him, but, he's probably the most famous, or infamous, depending on your humour — uh, is to become dispassionate.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: To, uh, drown the passions... you know, I mean, wine does that, maybe it's because there are wine drinkers [inaudible, 18:30 - 18:32]. Um, and then calculate. And it's what it is, adding and subtracting, multiplying and dividing.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: It's all done very mathematically, and I think the Industrial Revolution... sort of, uh, I'm not sure which came first, the calculating or the Industrial Revolution, but they work well together.

HL: Yeah.

LM: [laughing] Everything's debit or credit, balance and...

HL: Sure.

LM: Reconciliation of that sort. Um... that's not how things are for us. I think Seattle says it best and he's one of our... ancestral, um, intellectuals that uh, we don't spin the web of life, um, but we're responsible...

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: For its continuum. That's the basis of thinking for us.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: We also have a story, an origin story that, here on the west coast... uh, that I prefer of all the stories of course, because you know, this is where I grew up, and that's that everything was thought...

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: At one time, and then because we kept tripping over each other or whatever the case is, um, we were transformed into physical being.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Along with stone and...

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Flora and fauna and all the rest. Um, and then consequences came into being, and thought, uh, took on some significance.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Lineage significance. Personal significance. With— Marx agrees with John Stuart Mill on that, um, all the current sociologists and theorists agree that thought is, is a mental activity, a head activity... we don't feel that way.

HL: Mm-hmm. [pause] I think, um, uh... more and more people in Europe uh, now I think maybe I use the term European different from you, I don't know. Uh, I think you used that in what I've read in *Telling It*, uh, sometimes when you say European, I as a European object to it because you're talking about European-arrived Canadians, and I feel being from Europe and being in Canada now, the differences between European-Canadians and Europeans.

LM: Mm-hmm.

HL: So when I say European now I really mean people over in Europe. Uh, but I think the same probably happens here but, uh...

LM: Is a cat in Egypt a cat?

HL: A what?

LM: Is a cat in Egypt a cat?

HL: Sure.

LM: A European here is a European. [laughing]

HL: Sure. Sure. Sure. Uh... it's, it's just uh, uh... well, it has to do with a lot of uh, uh feelings and reactions that change over time and separation.

LM: I mean that—

HL: [speaking simultaneously] But I didn't really want to get into that. What I wanted to say is that in Europe [Lee laughing], uh, um, I think more and more people, and also in academia, although we're still a minority, uh, try to uh... think in different ways and act in different ways, uh, that are less linear, maybe less sexual...ized, and less alienating and try to— we realize that the straight thinking and the linear thinking is on the road towards death, right? And, and, uh... there are various theories when this started but when the, uh, uh... we have to come to think in holistic or... I don't really like that term very much, but in a much more complex way that is... that takes into consideration all our actions and all our thinking, uh, all the generations, the coming and the past, and all the beings around us. I think, I don't know much about systems theory, but apparently there are theories where you say if you take one part out of the whole, the whole thing sort of reshuffles and, and changes. And you can't just change one thing without affecting so many other things. So there are... I'll leave you with something that we did along those lines with regard to literature, but, uh... uh, I think that more and more people in Europe and in other countries are, are realizing this, and we are very grateful for... uh, a lot of help we that we've got in the last years from Native people. Helping us to, to rethink and also to decolonize *our* minds.

LM: Mm-hmm. [pause] Yeah. There's... um, there's a lot of people that are trying to think differently here too. I don't think that's where the problem lies.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: I think it's in the feeling.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Um...

HL: Okay, maybe I shouldn't—

LM: [speaking simultaneously] I really... and I believe this. And I have— I am familiar with European, um, writers and thinkers. Um... what, what European influence I have in my life is from reading Europeans.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: I prefer to read Europeans over North Americans. I think there's an inherent, uh, lie in everything that comes out of North America... um, that doesn't exist in Europe. The lie of the colonization process.

HL: The *denial* of colonization. The displacement.

LM: Yeah! Exactly. Yeah. So I... when I say Europeans, I also mean those in Europe.

HL: Mm-hmm.

LM: Um, and I think it does centre on feeling and uh, the spirit, and coming to grips. I have noticed that the struggle to come— [tape ends]

Draft by Bran Schaffer, 8 Oct 2018.

Please contact The People and the Text at people_text@sfu.ca with any comments or corrections.