

William K. Powers. *Beyond the Vision: Essays on American Indian Culture.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) 197 pp., \$27.95.

Powers' collection of seven essays (mostly about Lakota culture) is of great value to students of Native American Studies. They vary in approach and topic from ethnomusicology to art, religion, and psychology. In his preface Powers pays tribute to Levi-Strauss' structuralist theory and its usefulness to American Indian cultural studies. But Powers qualifies his tribute by suggesting that because structuralism has its limitations, eclecticism is more appropriate for his purposes.

The first essay "The Vocabal: An Evolutionary Perspective" effectively states that "vocabal, in fact, serve other communicative functions of both signal and symbolic import." Vocabal cannot by any means be isolated from their context as they quite obviously have non-arbitrary functions such as the mimetic stylization of bird and mammal cries. Powers further discusses the limitations of all music theories that postulate that language *precedes* music; he believes that the reverse is true. In order to appropriately develop a theory of music one must take into account bioevolutionary functions of which the vocabal is an integral part.

"Regulating a War Dance: Nonverbal Cues Around an Oglala Drum" centers on a specific problem: "How do singers and dancers know when to start and stop singing and dancing?" Powers furnishes the reader with many examples of cues: pipe whistles blown at a certain time, singers waning and dancers becoming enthusiastic, head nods, and the like.

"Counting Your Blessings: Sacred Numbers and the Structure of Reality" explains the importance of the numbers four and seven in Lakota culture. Numbers for the Lakota people represent a *process* rather than a categorization (as in stages of ceremony and dance). "Numbers are," writes Powers, "at once paradigm and syntagm, metaphor and metonym," and, as such, serve as a kind of equilibrium between the nervous system and the environment.

"Sacred Art and the Culturation of Nature" is, to this reader, perhaps the most significant. He focuses on those art critics who are unwitting victims of their own local culturation and who assume American Indian art is not Art writ large because it is "functional"—"as if the two terms 'functional' and 'aesthetic' are always somehow mutually exclusive." Powers proceeds to define all planetary art in the following manner: it seeks to record events significant to a social group; it seeks to preserve; it seeks to duplicate nature and codify the sentiments of a group; it seeks to express the sentiments of an individual. It seeks both to exaggerate ordinary events and deemphasize extraordinary events, and finally it seeks to explain reality by transforming nature into culture.

"Dual Religious Participation: Stratagems of Conversion Among the

Lakota” quite effectively explains why some Oglala participate in both Christianity and native religion: “Christianity and Oglala religion coexist because they serve quite disparate functions. The latter maintains a set of beliefs and rituals sanctioned by ‘supraempirical’ beings and the former serves a social, political and economic function.” The Christian church, in other words, has helped provide the basic necessities of life while the native religion continues to be of immense significance in terms of private belief.

“Alternatives to Western Psychotherapy: The Modern-day Medicine Man” stresses the importance of the Lakota Yuwipi man who “is primarily a diagnostician.” Powers goes into great detail as to how a person becomes a medicine man and the curing process of a patient who has an “Indian sickness” as opposed to a whiteman’s sickness (for which he may wish to consult a white doctor). However, Powers does point out, and correctly so, that in recent times, Indian medicine men have been quite successful in curing whiteman’s diseases.

Finally, “Beyond the Vision . . .” provides the reader with an overview of the increasing significance of Native American Studies worldwide, particularly in Europe. While the book is, on the whole, excellent and useful, there are a few aspects that could be strengthened. The second essay is liberally laced with inflated vocabulary (e.g. “sacrility inhered in the number 3”). The beginning of the seventh essay is somewhat repetitive of the previous essay, and Powers fails to mention the significance of Native American Studies in the Far East; Japan, for instance, is paying very close attention to contemporary Native American writers such as Leslie Silko whose *Ceremony* has been translated into Japanese.

—Richard F. Fleck
University of Wyoming