Reading Herbert Singleton

Professor Andy P. Antippas

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Herbert Singleton's years in Angola Prison, the bullet scars on his stomach, the New Orleans Police Department Swat team that criminally killed his sister, handcuffed him, pounded his head with a phone book while suffocating him with a plastic bag, have already been discussed by myself and others. (1) Lesser known events, the explanation of the stab wounds on his back splayed out like the Pleiades, or the time he beat his landlord with the butt end of a shotgun and the excellent attorney willing to take African art from my gallery in payment for managing to plea bargain a potential 20 year sentence down to simple battery, and only one year in jail for Singleton, can await fuller exposition at some other time.

It is worth mentioning, however, the toxic effects of riding out Hurricane Katrina, instead of evacuating to Houston with the rest of his family, aggravated Singleton's already pulverized liver and further unraveled his immune system. His best and most concerned collector, Gordon Bailey, some months before Singleton's death said to me: "The world is waiting for a Singleton Katrina piece." I tried to encourage Singleton, bringing him new sets of chisels, pre-sanded and reinforced cedar panels, and visiting with him often and getting his meds. Unhappily, that was not to be. Aside for an utterly anomalous painting on canvas of Pope John Paul II and the slight repainting of an earlier piece, Singleton did not create any new work before his death, July 25, 2007.

All the biographical and historical details we accumulate about our folk artists may explain the source or origin of some of their imagery; unfortunately, our preoccupation with these opportunistic and even exploitive biographical details, endlessly repeated in exhibition catalogs, also frequently passes for informed art commentary reducing folk art scholarship, for the most part, to an aporia with a vengeance. It is no different than the Slotin Folk Art auction catalogs complacently illustrating the great, the good, and the awful as identical colorful, decorative 1 ½ inch postage stamps.

There are at least two other related disruptive Möbius ribbon discourses spiraling around us, further encouraging non-orienting, apotropaic conversations and inhibit the development of systems and methods of comprehending American folk art.

The first is, in part, reflected by the unproductive, futile, inbred argument about terminology: primitive, self-taught, outsider, naive, folk, *etc*. No other forum of art criticism has this problem—things glide everywhere else easily, retrospectively, from Modern to Post Modern to Post Post Modern with sensible, if occasionally wayward sub-divisions along the way. It is likely we have this issue because we may conceive of the folk art genre as a moribund and static form and that, principally, because we see individual folk artists as a sum of their biographical details, unevolving and static. (2) In any other field of criticism, this would be attributed to a neo-colonialist mentality.

The discipline of Anthropology, especially its in-the-field ethnographers, has gone through a remarkable period of introspection. Formerly the hand-maidens of the 19th and 20th century colonial powers, they have since come to understand their study of technologically primitive societies was affected by not only the character of the anthropologists themselves, but their methodology as well. As the basic principles of Quantum Mechanics filtered down to all of us, enlightened ethnographers comprehended the very act of measuring anything affects the thing being measured. A few months ago, a case was made that our merely observing dark matter may have affected the equilibrium of the entire universe. Put simply, old school anthropology conceived tribal history began the day they entered the village with their tape recorders and note books to “salvage” (3) that ephemeral culture—whatever cultural practices and activities existed were frozen at that moment like a smear of blood on a slide—even though those villagers were soon wearing Grateful Dead t-shirts and Yankee caps backwards.

Generalizing from personal experience and scholarly gossip, the moment a dealer or collector intrudes into the life of a folk artist—a village, of sorts—that folk artist’s creative mode and materials are rigidified, like the details of his life—we decide ‘that’s art, don’t move”—after all, as Ad Reinhardt probably said: “It’s not art, until someone says it’s art.” Once we have decided it’s art, we encourage the artist to sustain a readily identifiable style. (4) This also allows us, to put it politely, to preside over his artistic output and place him successfully within the monoculture of the folk art market. I mentioned earlier Singleton’s last creative effort was to paint a Pope. It was so unlike him, the “him” that I had defined, I made him put his signature on the back although he never signed anything. All I could think about was that maybe he could have flourished as a painter and all I did was force chisels and cedar, cypress and oak boards down his throat. However, in the same way allegedly primitive cultures arose to give us a wealth of modern literature, modern music and modern art, so also have great folk artists like Singleton, and I should add Roy Ferdinand, have risen above the myopia of their particular dealer.

Whatever the cause of our categorizing dilemma, for all practical purposes, Lyle Rexer solved the problem recently when he wrote, in effect, —if its expensive, it’s outsider art, if it’s mid-range, it’s self-taught, if it’s cheap, it’s folk art. (5) I’m not particularly inclined, as the AFAM is, to accept the over-arching communality of the term “folk art.” Like the swastika, the word “folk” should be forever contaminated by its nationalistic commandeering by the Third Reich. (6) The term studiously avoided is “proletarian.” With that term's rich Trotskyite and political vibrations, it is my personal choice—Singleton is a master of proletarian art—an art which springs from a mind dynamic, revolutionary, transformative, contemplating the numbing, oppressive and subjugating forces around him. That he is, in Wordsworthian terms, “a man speaking to men.” Singleton art exists for the sole purpose of raising the revolutionary consciousness. It is that challenging voice I chose to listen to. I am privileged everything Singleton knows about the political world he carves and places before me; it is only right I place before him everything I know—then we are as perfect equals, as closely aligned as a figure and its reflection in a mirror: he and I, artist and viewer, following the same illusive, indirect,

and sometimes subterranean pathways on both sides of the glass. He gives me something to read and I read it.

The second and related issue I would like to comment on briefly again touches upon my sense of Singleton—that is the abuse and misuse of the all too brilliant work of Robert Farris Thompson, especially *The Four Moments of the Sun* which, I think, has clouded the conceptual genius of African American folk artists. I have been shown evidence African American artists were encouraged to copy directly from Thompson's illustrations. That can't be surprising because, similarly, the Maroon carvers in the eastern and central forests of Suriname, indiscriminately began to copy from a dictionary of Maroon symbolic motifs compiled by an ethnographer. (7) I have personally seen, among hundreds of other fakes, Portuguese Guinea Baga Nimbas copied in the Ivory Coast and major Benin bronzes cast in The Cameroon—all copied from coffee table African art books. The strident desire to argue all African American artists, albeit unconsciously, slip into an African continuum—dip into a cavern of African archetypes —to create their colors and forms, diminishes significantly both their intelligence, their imagination and their artistic achievement. It is as if African American folk art is produced without intentionality, without reflection. (8) Singleton came into my gallery for 18 years, everyday of the 7 years before Katrina, where he was surrounded by usually over 300 wonderful wooden African and other ethnographic artifacts; he regularly traversed a cavern of African archetypes. Yet, in terms of color, he worked with whatever cans of Home Depot Rustoleum were around. In terms of form, there was never anything about his art but the most superficial similarities to my ethnographic inventory. When he carved a face into a stump, it was as much Alpine as it was Senufo, except better; when he carved a snake and spider cane, it was as much Mexican as it was Baule, except better; when he carved a door, it was as much Nepalese as it was Yoruba, except better; when he carved a totem, it was as much Haida as it was Dogon, except better. Every form Singleton needed was inherent in the wood he worked and in the universalizing Black experience of living in New Orleans. There is no doubt there is such a thing as an African spirit; however, that princely African spirit who comforted those in chains, flying the Atlantic alongside the slave ships, dancing in the same breezes that blew those despicable vessels to New Orleans, (9) was only an insubstantial spirit. It was not until that incorporeal African Prince walked the cotton fields of Louisiana and the Jim Crow woods of Mississippi as John the Conqueror did he get bones and flesh and the trickster's wit from the slave story tellers. The African American culture, from the outset, was self sufficient enough to invent its own forms of language and literature, its own forms of music, its own forms of mythology, its own forms of visual metaphysics, and its own cosmology. It is worth remembering, as Derrida said, "Form fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself." (10)

It is this unmediated "force from within" Herbert Singleton I would like to explore in three of his works. The first two are an integral pair and were the result of my first encounter with Singleton. Around mid-1989, a new employee at my old gallery on Royal Street in the French Quarter told me about a carver she had met who lived in one of the predominantly Black neighborhood of Algiers, across the River from Jackson Square. She told me he carved on commission for his neighbors: staff totems of cypress limbs for

Hoodooists and Mardi Gras Indians; self-protection canes of oak pick-ax handles for pimps, gangsters, and buggy drivers; and porch stools out of stumps into which he carved grotesque faces—and all colored with enamel paint. She brought him over to the gallery a few days later. I took him out to the patio area where the folk art gallery was located on the ground floor of the slave quarters, the long, narrow rectangular attachment to the main building, common to most French Quarter buildings. Singleton was laconic, suspicious, and clearly unimpressed with the immense clutter of Haitian flags, Tollivers, Sudduths, Mary T's, Burnsides, Bernice Sims, Royal Robertsons, and Willie Whites. It didn't help my equanimity when, looking around at the narrow confines of the rooms, he cocked his head, spread the fingers of his right hand across his chest, and observed sarcastically, "I see you keep all your Black artists in the slave quarters." This was a good natured, but relentless theme developed by Singleton over our entire relationship. Chagrined, I told him I would refrain from using the term "slave quarter" if he did some carving for me. Singleton said it didn't matter anyway; he couldn't carve anymore because he had been crossed, jinxed, hexed by the mother of an Algiers's woman he had dumped. "She put snakes in my stomach last month," he said. He lifted up his T-Shirt—I was momentarily distracted by the bullet wound scars, until, dumbfounded, I saw his stomach churning—either he'd had a bad batch of Popeye's fried chicken, or there were actually snakes in his stomach. I took that moment to overwhelm him with the Old Dead White European Male Tradition and proceeded to tell him about Aristotle's *Poetics* and how doing art could have a cathartic and healing effect and if he did some carving for me, he could cure himself. His response, "I don't need no Aristotle," reminded me of Chuck Berry singing, "Roll over Beethoven and tell Tchaikovsky the news." What he needed, he said, was $150.00 to get the right stuff from a Hoodoo doctor to cure himself, but he couldn't until the moon was in the right phase again. I don't believe in that, he said, but you "have to fight fire with fire." Of course I gave him the money and suggested while he waited for the moon to come around, he could take a slab of cedar I was using for shelving to do a carving showing what the hex was doing to his body. I few days later he brought me this piece displaying the snakes poking through his ribs.

Plate 1: From the collection of Gordon Bailey

Voodoo, or Hoodoo, as it's called in New Orleans, is what Walter Benjamin said about Surrealism: "the mysterious side of the mysterious." Typically, in explaining the anomalous events associated with Hoodoo, the argument is that it requires two madnesses: a mad victimizer and a mad victim. In 1942, Walter Cannon wrote a now classic field study of the phenomenon of "bone-pointing" among Australia's indigenous people. When a man was "pointed," his family went into mourning immediately and prepared his funeral. The man would be dead within days. Cannon argued the death was caused by fatal psychological pressure exerted by one person over another. He titled the article "Voodoo Death." (11) But New Orleans Hoodoo, and its now distant cousins, Voodoo in Haiti, Santeria in Cuba, and Cantomblaé/Umbanda in Brazil, may all be fragments of an Ur religion antedating by millennia even its immediate parents in Dahomey and Nigeria. It may date back to the very morning of our species in the Riff Valley, where our fragile prototypes had only guttural sounds and their minds to exert control over their environment. I'm not suggesting we need to believe in magic, but like

the Florentine Neo-Platonists and some contemporary anthropologists suggest, we need to consider the existence of different realities and even intersecting layers of the same reality. (12)

An account in the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* for August 13, 1863, certainly suggests snakes in the stomach were common enough in 19th century New Orleans for a woman, at least according to the reporter, to try to disguise her pregnancy:

A few days ago a colored woman named Susan Williams resided in a house on St. Peter Street. Alleging that she had become the victim of some Voudou incantation, she excited a good deal of sympathy among the dusky daughters of that neighborhood. When asked how she was affected, she persistently declared that she had a snake in her stomach. To dislodge the reptile intruder, she applied to several of the Voudou serpent charmers, and obtained from them roots and herbs which she steeped with the infusion of tobacco, and drank the liquid which was thus obtained. (13)

The story ends sadly with a sudden delivery, the infant's death and its mother's.

Robert Tallant, one of the jewels of mid 20th century New Orleans literature, went through files of data collected by the WPA Louisiana Writer's Project, and in 1946 wrote *Voodoo in New Orleans*—Chapter 22 is entitled "Snakes Jumped Out of Her Mouth"—and contains several pertinent contemporary anecdotes:

Corrine Mothershed vowed some evil Voodoo doctor had killed her mother…Her mother came home from church one Sunday night complaining of pains in her abdomen…. "My ma was a good Baptist," she said. 'We never did have nothin' to do wit' hoodoo. She went to bed and slept, but the next mornin' she call me in her room and asked me to get a doctor. But before I could answer her she started havin' some kind of fit. Her eyes rolled in her head and she screamed four times. Then, when the last scream come, little blue snakes began jumpin' out her mouth. I was so afraid I couldn't move. Them snakes hit the bed and the floor and they ran away as fast as they could move.'

Then there was the story of Aunt Laura:

'I remember when I was a little girl,' said Mamie Fonts, who lived in Pailet Lane, a Negro section of New Orleans near the Bayou St. John, 'there was an old lady named Aunt Laura. She had snakes under the skin of her foot. You could see 'em crawlin.' Some hoodoo had boiled a lot of snakes and put powder on Aunt Laura's foot when she was sleepin.' Sometimes they would crawl up her leg to her stomach and then she would vomit snails. It was awful you know when she died—and this is the truth—you could hear a frog croakin' in her belly.'

He records several other stories.: There was Feltie Butler who spurned a "yellow woman" whose retributive hoodoo caused Feltie to die coughing up "three slimy snails and a little green frog." A friend of Feltie's at the death bed said "…I seen them come out of Feltie's mouth…I know that Feltie Butler died a Hoodoo death." And there was Mrs. Desportes, whose daughter had been autopsied, and it was discovered that a crab had eaten all her internal organs. And Joe Bezibon's friend who died, despite a hoodoo doctors best efforts, with lizards under his skin.

Tallant concludes:

Negroes believe that tragedies such as that which overtook Feltie Butler are commonplace. For many years the curious belief that snakes, snails and frogs can be placed inside the human body to bring about ill effects has been widespread among them. It was said of both Marie Laveaus that they could thus afflict enemies, and today many illnesses and symptoms are believed by Voodoos to be caused by various living creatures inhabiting the human body. (14)

When the moon was in its right phase, Singleton probably went to some small side-street drug store in Algiers, like the old West Bank Dixie Drug Store on Simon Bolivar. He would have bought a bunch of hex removing and uncrossing material: a large black candle with a red core or nine small green ones; tiny bottles of Counteracting Oil, Protection Oil, and St. Michael's Oil; some 7 Holy Spirits Bath Salts, or some Hi John the Conqueror or King Solomon root; and maybe some Helping Hand Incense, Jinx Removing Powder, or some 4 Thieves Vinegar floor wash. He would have certainly stopped on the way home to pick up some garlic, Spanish Moss and Magnolia leaves. I never did inquire. When he brought this piece into the gallery later that month, I knew he had cured himself, without Aristotle.

Plate 2: From the collection of Gordon Bailey

The third Singleton piece I'd like to discuss also takes us deep into Black culture, and not only of Singleton's Algiers neighborhood. It is one of Singleton's masterpieces, but it is his most perfect masterpiece. By masterpieces I mean, "accomplices of power" and "efforts against nihilism." (15) In "Catch me if you can," carved in oak in 1992, Singleton brings fundamental antinomian elements into hovering balance through the ceremony of his creation.

Plate 3: Anonymous Collection

I sold this piece 15 years ago to the House of Blues. Last month they asked if I would take it back because they decided it was too offensive, they were unable to display it, and they no longer wished to deal with. I was happy to do so. I wished Singleton had been there to receive its surrender—like Cornwallis handing over his sword wrapped in bubble paper—the British surrendering to the wild colonial nomads who fought to stay free of the Empire's Apparatus. The House of Blues is an agent of the totalitarian empire which seeks to repress liberating artistic potentialities. The House of Blues, like Disney, (now a significant stock holder), creates a Magical Kingdom, without vicissitudes. It takes the raw art of the proletariat, de-contextualizes it, neuters it, makes it wall paper, makes it part of their menu. But Singleton had created an indigestible work of art.

Singleton's "Catch me if you can" is a "desire machine," a "war machine," in Deleuze and Guattari's essential terminological scaffolding. The desire-war machine derives from a natural revolutionary instinct—"when inserted into the social structure' it is capable "of exploding things, of disrupting the social fabric." (16)

Singleton's war machine is the wooden board before him and the convergence of two singularities, his hammer and the chisel. Among the nomads, Deleuze and Guattari explain, there is a complementarity between tools and weapons—the war hammer and the

short sword. Singleton at work is Deluxe and Guattari's nomad, "creating turbulence across a smooth place"—his fully sanded cedar board. (17) The nomad's war machine is not only to defend political independence, but intends to collide with the oppression sponsored by the State Apparatus. We are close to Picasso's comment on *Guernica*: "…painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy."

The agency of the State Apparatus in Singleton's "Catch me if you can" is the Klan—malevolent draped abstractions: the embodiment of anonymous mob tyranny, simultaneously hiding and revealing the abstract universality of evil: Nazi's bursting into synagogues; Turks murdering Armenians at prayer; the monk murderers in Burma; the night riders of Rwanda and Dafur. They are the swat team that killed Singleton's sister and beat him almost to oblivion. They are the high school students in Jena, Louisiana who hung nooses in the schoolyard's trees. And the Tree behind them is the noose-hung tree from the high school campus in Jena. But it is more ambiguous—both embracing and threatening. Its branches surge to Heaven, but its roots tangled in the gates of Hell—truly the Tree of Good and Evil. It is Nat Turner's lynching tree with the strange fruit Billie Holiday sings about and, recalling Langston Hughes poem, "Christ in Alabama"; it is also the tree of the Crucifixion.

Singleton's brilliantly provocative title, "Catch me if you can," is a text floating above and outside and yet embedded in the scene, unscratched runes. We recall it from the innocent lyrics of *Frosty the Snowman* and the refrain in *The Gingerbread Man*. But in Singleton's context, it is a cluster bomb of words—unwritten, invisible—an articulated bolt of lightning across the sky, redolent with illumination—momentarily pausing above the heads of the antagonists, but destined to streak into eternity. It is the abrupt military speech of some commander facing sure death, as classic as Leonidas' retort when Xerxes, another crusher of freedom, asked him to lay down his weapons: *Molon Labe*, "Come and get them." For Singleton the phrase has immense ontological weight and is directed against those who would crush his freedom: against the Masta, the Boss Man, Mr. Charlie…and the Fox—because we are now also in the realms of Ba'er Rabbit and the Black Gingerbread Man. We are in the domain of Chuck Berry who sang, in 1956, "You can't catch me/ If you get too close/you know, I'm gone like a cool breeze." We are in the zone of the 1970's graffiti artist, SEEN AU's spray paint message on the B trains, taunting the NYC Transit Police: "To the Boys in Blue/ Catch me if you can."

More recently, more than fifteen rappers have used the phrase; Shyheim, for example, says "catch me if you can/ I move faster than the average man," Notorious B.I.G. in one song says, "I'm due in court, catch me if you can," and again in another, he tells the Feds "to catch me if you can." 50c tells his Parole Officer, "catch me if you can." 2Pac sings, "doin'eighty on the Freeways, Po-lice/catch me if you can." (18)

"Catch me if you can," unhappily also summons up the circumspect Steppin' Fetchit —"Feets do your thing," and the slave folk song, "Oh, run, nigger, run." It evokes the message in the recursive envelope dream of Ellison's Invisible Man, with the final gold lettered statement: "To Whom It May Concern: Keep This Nigger Boy Running." It

recalls the Underground Railroad as well, and the fugitive slave notices in 19th century newspapers mocked by poet Robert Hayden:

If you see my Pompey, 30 years of age,
New breeches, plain stockings, negro shoes;
If you see my Anna, likeable young mulatto
Branded E on the right cheek, R on the left,
Catch them if you can and notify subscriber.
Catch them if you can, but it won't be easy. (19)

But it also reminds us of Muhammed Ali, O. J. Simpson, and Richard Pryor and their "kiss my black ass" attitude. "Catch me if you can" goes back to what naive Southerners called "rascality." Josia Henson, the inspiration for Uncle Tom, in his 1877 autobiography recollects how slaves played dumb to antagonize their owners. He tells of Dinah, who was "clear witted and sharp," but when her mistress would tell her to do something, Dinah would laugh and say, "yes, yes when I'm ready or Go do it yourself." Sometimes she would shout out "'…I won't…catch me if you can,' and take to her heels and run away." (20)

This "rascality" was a transcript of scornful defiance against the white overlords spoken by the self confident trickster spirit, John the Conqueror who, as Zora Neale Hurston says, clears the escape route of obstructions, makes "a way out of no-way." It is the chant of the Hoodoo Man and the Hoochie Coochie Man who, by will, manipulate cause and effect or conjure societal obstacles away.. It is the sound of John Henry's steel hammer, if fatally, defeating the States' oppressive technology. It is the sound of Stagger Lee's pistol defending his manhood, his Stetson hat, in a bar. It is the summation of all the turbulent eloquence of Bobby Seale in his *Jail House Interview* in 1970, of Malcom, of Huey Newton, and Eldridge Cleaver. "Pity the fool," (to quote one of Singleton's favorite TV characters), and the art critic who doesn't understand how unaccommodating and angry Singleton's work is and then, further, not see that Singletons's social criticism has something Malcolm's and Huey's and the others never had—irony and ambiguity: sure whitey kept the Black man down, but he sets the burden of guilt for its self-destruction squarely on the Black community itself, its corrupt church-going superstitions, its drug dealing, and its gun culture--a perspective strongly shared, by the way, by Roy Ferdinand. Singleton told me he stopped making his canes which came to be known as "killer sticks" after a Black French Quarter buggy driver used one to kill another Black man: he said, as only he would be permitted to say: the canes "were just another way for niggers to kill niggers."

But Herbert Singleton's perfect masterpiece exceeds Black American specificity. This all too human doomed, laughing and derisive heroic figure, leaping up in a Dionysian joyous, ecstatic dance above the abyss surging below, defying the leadened spirit of gravity; the figure takes on the life of a transcendent, endlessly revolutionary spirit against all oppression, and who defiantly accepts at once supreme grief and supreme hope, taking joy in his personal triumph and in the probability of his annihilation.

My last few sentences were composed of ordinary words and phrases, but they are derived from a philosophical masterpiece where they are no longer ordinary, but an arsenal, a catechism of self-affirmation—in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In the Third Part of that book there is an allegory, a riddle, which brings us full circle—it is recounted by Zarathustra:

> And truly, what I saw then I never saw before. I saw a young shepherd, writhing, chocking, jerking, his face distorted, a black heavy snake hanging out of his mouth…
> …Then something in me screamed: Bite it off! The head! Bite it off!....
> …the shepherd bit…he bit off a good bite. He spit the snake's head far out—and jumped to his feet.
> --No longer shepherd, no longer human—but transformed, one who laughed! Never on earth did any human laugh as he laughed! (21)

Whatever else this allegory means, it is testimony to the joy of the individual taking his fate into his own hands, loving that fate, and achieving self-determination and self-realization. Nietzsche, who warned about the State Apparatus, and that Western Civilization had failed to prevent the degradation of morals and had encouraged the suppression of individual freedom, would have appreciated the irony that Herbert Singleton, the descendant of slaves, through an act of creative will, could envision so powerful a roughish freedom reaching beyond death to immortality and true being. And we too must exult in Singleton's achievement…in what he has given us. I once asked Singleton why he carved. He responded, "So I can get better." I understand now the moral richness of his remark: Singleton carved so that we can all get better.

A. P. Antippas

END NOTES

1. A. P. Antippas, "Herbert Singleton," *10 Southern Black Folk Artists, an exhibition catalog for ICONS Gallery* (Houston: March 1990), and, "Herbert Singleton: Secular and Sacred," *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, Vol. I (New York: Tinwood Books, 2000), pp. 214-216. See also, Bill Sasser, "Herbert Singleton," *Raw Vision* (Autumn/Fall 2002), pp. 30-37.

2. Lyle Rexer makes a similar point: "We might call outsider artists vertical artists in a horizontal world." *How to Look at Outsider Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005), p. 54.

3. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," *Writing Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* eds. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 112.

4. Terry Smith, writing about indigenous Australian artists, notes similar issues: "Emily Kngwarreye…[h]aving become…one of the most sought after artists in the country… spent much of her last two years, coping with daily, sometimes hourly visits from dealers….they had each latched on to one aspect of her style as "essentially Emily," and

were insisting that she keep producing similar works for them to sell." "Primacy, Convergence, Currency, Part II," *Art Papers* (Atlanta, July/August 2005), p. 24. I'm convinced this is an undiscussed matter permeating all folk art dealer-artist relationships.

5. Rexer, p. 32.

6. The word "Volk" still causes chagrin in Germany. Above the entrance to the Reichstag in Berlin, the Nazi dedication, "*Dem deutschen Volk,*" ("To the German People"), remains intact—and reflects "…the Nazi dream of a homogeneous eugenically bred German race.") In April, 2000, the Bundestag narrowly approved Hans Haacke's installation at the Reichstag. The Parliamentary debate arose because the work included a neon sign "*Der Bevölkerung*," ("To the Population"). "Haacke says that this phrase offers a purposely dry and statistical alternative to the still-powerful idea that the German people, or *Volk*, is a community based on blood kinships…." Christopher Phillips, "German Parliament Approves Haacke Installation," *Art in America* (May 2000), p. 37.

7. Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 118-119.

8. The issue raised here parallels the contentions raised after MOMA's 1984 "Primitivism" exhibition which attempted to establish formal, stylistic analogies, or "affinities," flowing from (decontextualized) tribal work to the West. It is argued that MOMA took a colonialist perspective and intended to buttress the flagging Modernist aesthetic. See, for example, Sally Price, pp. 82-99 and Thomas McEvilley, *Art and Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (Kingston: McPherson & Company, 1992), pp. 27-56. James Clifford's, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern," *Art in America* (April 1985) pp.164-177 is the principal review of the exhibition.

9. The image is Nora Neale Hurston's in "John de Conqueror," *American Mercury* 57(1943), p. 452.

10. Quoted in Howard Felpin, *Beyond Deconstruction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 144.

11. A. David Napier, Foreign *Bodies: Performance, Art and Symbolic Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 148.

12. Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 186.

13. The article is reproduced in Ron Bodin, *Voodoo: Past and Present* (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1990), p. 63.

14. Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (New York City: Collier Books, 1946), pp. 196-201.

15. Heiner Müller, *Germania*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Bernard and Caroline Schütze (New York City: Columbia University, 1990), pp. 175, 216.

16. Felix Guattari, *Chaosophy* (New York City: Columbia University, 1995), p. 76.

17. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York City: Columbia University), p. 21, pp. 77-78.

Singleton was politicized at The Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola in the 60's and 70's. In Angola, Singleton encountered Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace, who founded the first in-jailhouse chapter of the Black Panthers, and there he read Marcus Garvey, Elijah Mohammed, Malcolm X, and Huey Newton. Singleton spoke often of the events in New Orleans between Sept and December 1970 involving the BPP's National Committee to Combat Fascism: during that period, the New Orleans Police Department, with excessive fire power, laid siege on two occasions to offices of the BP, leading to the death and wounding of over 20 people and considerable civic disruption. Singleton's personal religio-political views, often reflected in his work, were developed by Wallace Ford, an inmate at San Quentin in the 1920's and subsequently adopted by the Nation of Islam. The religion holds that God first created the black tribe of Shabazz and later the other "colored races"; 8,400 years later, on an island in the Aegean, Yakub, the evil scientist, by 600 years of selective breeding, created the white race of devils to rule over the black people.

18. Insane Clown Posse, Da Brat, Memphis Bleek, Pist. On, RZA, Fabulous, GPWu, Compton's Most Wanted, Z-Ro, DIVIT, Lil Wayne, Young Flav, Cashmier, Ghipz, and Rihanna. Relatedly, another rapper, M F Grimm, has assumed the guise of the black Gingerbread Man throughout a cycle of songs, identifies the fox as a prison, ("the belly of the beast"), and gets revenge by getting himself regurgitated and gunning for the fox —"I'm a kill him, make a rug out of his ass."

19. Robert Hayden, "Runagate Runagate," 1962.

20. *Josiah Henson, Autobiography of the Rev. Josia Henson, Revised and Enlarged* (London: Schuyler Smith, and Co., 1881), p. 161. Singleton gave me an example of Angola Prison "rascality": all the black prisoners were mindful that the prison was located on the grounds of a former plantation and reflexively hated their obligation to refer to the white guards as "boss" and "mister." Somewhere along the way, some prisoners decided among themselves they would, sarcastically, substitute "chief." According to Singleton this would always result in much preening among the guards, much to the amusement of the prisoners.

21. Frederich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All or None*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Gateway, 1957) pp. 162- 163.