THE ULTIMATE DILEMMA

An Interview with Ben Morea

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Ill Will Editions[1] - Like other groups at the time, Up Against the Wall Motherfucker! (or, the Family) tried in various ways to break down or blur the line between personal and political, private and public life. You built communes, weaponized your desires and fantasies, resisted the atomizing effects of work and property. Can you talk a little about the way the group functioned at the time?

Ben Morea- We were not like a lot of political groups in the past, especially European ones, who tended to have a certain ideology to which they all adhered. We were the exact opposite—we had no ideology, and nobody adhered to anything. This was our strength. As a result, our group was highly varied.

IWE- At the same time, was there a desire to try and create a communal life, to build up a collective force…

BM- Collective maybe, not communal. Also that wasn't the priority for us. The priority was more tribal; however you define that.

When we started, we were all very individualized—my feelings about it were different than those of many other people. We never had a unified ideology, a way of thinking. Like how certain groups- you say to them, "What do you think about A, B, C?" and they have an answer. But, to us, you say, "What do you think about A. B, C?" and I say, "Well, I think A," and so-and-so thinks B, and that other guy over there thinks C. So, we didn't fit the mold.

Our primary objective was to make a change in society outside of our personal life. Like we had things we had to deal with that don't exist anymore. We were dedicated to stopping the war. Whether you live with someone or don't, or you share or don't- it's meaningless compared to our

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[1] Interview taped in New York City, December 2016, prior to the memorial service for Clark Fitzgerald. Transcribed by Mia.

objective with that war stopping, ending or we're dead. We're going to stop it. It's not going to go on. The same with the racial thing.

Like, in other words- we had these goals that were not marginal. They were our complete focus. So, to solve those things- to bring them about- we chose different ways to go about our own lives. But we were not trying to devise a method of living. We just had to find a way to live within our goal. Which was a very collective effort to change society as we knew it.

IWE- That so funny, because when I read some of the writings on self-defense and specifically some of the stuff about the hippy community, and so on, I get the opposite impression. That y'all are trying to say, "we're not about some political cause we're about finding another way of living". We want to live in this whole way- we want to overcome western separations, and that's about a way of living. But what you're saying is that the way of living was

figured out on the way to somethings else actually, that was more unified?

BM- Yeah, they were both happening simultaneously. In other words, on the way to making the changes which we thought were necessary, we had to figure out how to live. And what parts of society were causing the problem that we had to alter. It was all a big experiment.

IWE- Can you give us a sense of the scale of what the Lower East Side looked like? Because there's actually not so much detail in the writings that survived and the interviews and stuff? Like how many buildings, people, food pantries, what scale of organization materially we are talking about? If that's possible.

BM- We had community meals four or five times a week, that fed four or five hundred people. We had a free store, and gave out food. We'd go to [the market] and get day olds- but we were doing things that felt natural to us, that felt right to us, and that were counter to the normal American experience. But it wasn't like it was written out- there wasn't an agenda. I'm a little uncomfortable with the perception that we had some (either spoken or unspoken) methodology. We didn't. We were just so experiential, so spontaneous. Like, we'd feel something, and we'd do it.

IWE- When I mean the scale of organization, what I mean is that I know you weren't an official organization. You had no charter, no platform, no sort of program or anything like that. I guess I am more interested in helping people today who live in such a different New York, a different Chicago, to try to understand what it was like to live that experiment in the Lower East Side. What ways did you have to build power and share experiences with one another?

BM- But that's making *a priori* decisions. Our methodology was to just do it, just feel it out and let it dictate to us which way it should go. It's very different than

theoretical or ideological movements. There was probably nothing like us before or since. I mean, it wasn't thought out. It wasn't like, "Oh, well, let's do A. B ..." We would just do things and part of what we did felt right, so we would continue. Part of what we did didn't feel right so we would discard it. So, in a sense, it was anti-theory.

IWE- So, a radical rejection of any kind of *a priori* plan or model.

BM- Exactly. And as we developed, certain things felt right, and we then seized on these to propel us forward to the next thing.

IWE- You talked to me yesterday about the affinity groups you guys had. Did those also form spontaneously? Or did you guys have separate living situations- like did you guys live with your affinity groups? Was the Motherfuckers carved up into to certain smaller tribes, or was there a single tribe who would do different actions together? How loose was the collectivity itself? I guess at some point, it would be nice to mention the gender dynamics in it too, which some have raised criticisms of.

BM- Don't believe everything you hear.

IWE- I'm also not trying to put you on the spot for that.

BM- The women in our group were not an auxiliary. They were their own entity. They didn't do what we said, and we didn't write the program for all of us. Like for instance, this one guy, I remember- they were all getting dressed, because you know they dressed like gypsies, when they really get dressed up. You know how the kids used to do. And I noticed this- and I said, "Where are you guys going?" and other women from the other communes came in and they were all [dressed up] and they said, "We're going to listen to Captain Fink give a talk, and we're going to drive him off the stage. And you guys can stay home and cook dinner,

or you can come along and watch us." That was indicative of them.

IWE- So that wasn't a one-off thing, that was typical?

BM- Yeah. That's how they were. Like, "We're doing this- you can join us, or you..." And then at the same time that we were doing something, we would tell them we were doing it. We wouldn't tell them they "should do this" but we would tell them what we were doing and then they have the choice is they were going to do it with us, or not.

IWE- So they actually constituted separate affinity groups, you might say? There was a sort of gender line?

BM- No, they just had their own identity. They identified with each other. They didn't just think of themselves as part of the Motherfuckers. They thought, "We're the women's' part. We're ourselves." They were really strong! They did things and chose to do things- they would do things without even telling us. Things weren't codified... It wasn't like we would have a meeting, and somebody would say something and then somebody would say ok. We never had that kind of meeting, ever- not even once!

IWE- You wouldn't have a little assembly where you would plot out an action?

BM- No! The affinity group would be working with each other, they'd be talking about such and such happening, and then asking "what do you think?" and they would maybe tell the other affinity groups, "Hey, we're thinking of doing..." and then they would decide what they're going to do, how they're going to take part, or not take [part]. It was very autonomous.

Like in other words, your affinity group could do something even if I was against it. They were completely autonomous. If I didn't like it, well, alright, if you didn't

like it- tough shit, but this is what we're doing. Even with the leaflets- people could put our name on a leaflet and hand out a leaflet. I never even saw it. They can say anything. If it had the name and the group on it- does that mean I am in agreement? Maybe I disagree, but you know- that's how we operated. We could do a mimeograph sheet and half the family wouldn't even know it was out. There was no central committee. [...] There could be four or five of you sitting around, saying, "You know we should put out a leaflet saying 'whatever' and the four or five people would be like, 'yeah, we should do that!' And the other fifty people wouldn't even know they were doing that. They didn't bring it to us and say, 'Hey, we are going to do this.'

IWE- A high level of decentralization.

BM- Total decentralization. And I'm not suggesting that the world can function that way. I'm just telling you how we were.

IWE- Did that create problems, though?

BM- For whom?

IWE- For y'all. I hope it created lots of problems for your enemies. We can talk about that in a minute, maybe. In your writings there's a strong sense of like, you talk about a hip community, you talk about it being across the country. It's not a niche, it's not a subculture, it's a movement of dropping out and reclaiming our lives, and so on... And there was this real effort to write and act in a way to create this community. Not just to describe it but to build it.

BM- But a lot of that was poetic. In other words, I don't know if every single person in the family agreed with that. If I wrote it, it might be only two of us that agree- me and the person who was with me when I was doing it. I mean, that's why within the family you had people who had no defined ideology. They were kind of loose- they were generic anarchists. There were some that were Marxist anarchists... it was such a blend. Nobody said, "Are you an anarchist?" And the answer is “Yes!" Some wouldn’t use that word. I would... Osha wouldn't. He would never call himself an anarchist. I don't know how he would define himself, to be honest.

IWE- Well he says, "I was a founding member of an anarchist street gang."

BM- He was. But that doesn't mean he was an anarchist.

IWE- Fair enough. [laughs] ...Can you talk about Bookchin a bit, and your anarchism? Your differences with him, and how anarchism found its way into New York in those days?

BM- I knew Murray really well. Do you know the word avuncular? He was like your uncle. I used to tease him. I would say, "Murray, you're not an anarchist! You’re a Trotskyist in anarchist clothing." And it used to piss him off! But that's the truth. He was a Trotskyist in anarchist clothing. It's that simple. But he had the ideology of

anarchism down. He could recite it from A to Z, but if you spent time with him- walked with him or talked with him- he was not an anarchist.

IWE- In what sense was he not an anarchist?

BM- Ideologically he might have been. He might have thought he was. But his demeanor, his approach, his way of thinking, his structure, his way of talking- everything was Trotskyist leaning toward anarchism. That's what he came out of. It was ingrained in him. I'm not being negative...

IWE- But you came into anarchism through him?

BM- No.

IWE- Because some narratives suggest that.
BM- No, not at all. Not even close. The Living Theater were probably the first people who were anarchist that I associated with, that made me realize that that's what I actually was. Except they were pacifist anarchist. And that was way before Murray. I used to go by Murray's for his discussions once in a while, but we always ended up disagreeing, fighting, not getting along. I mean, you see- I don't know how to convey this to you. It sounds redundant. Like for instance, on Murray's wall he had a painting by Andrew Wyeth. I used to walk in, and say, "Murray, either you take this painting off the wall or I'm leaving! You're supposed to be an anarchist! Andrew Wyeth on your wall!" But see, he couldn't understand that. We were not the same kind of anarchist. I don't know if that makes sense.

IWE- I'm going to have to go look up who Andrew Wyeth is...

BM- In books, things are different. But in living... there was a side to anarchism that defied... that's why the Marxists hated the anarchists and tried to kill them whenever they could. Because the anarchists, they didn't

define themselves necessarily. They acted it out. It's a way of life. Anarchism is not an ideology. It's a way of life. You can live as an anarchist and even call yourself a Marxist, and you'd be more anarchist than a guy like Murray who believed in anarchism but lived like a Marxist.

IWE- Can you say more about the anarchist way of life?

BM- It meant that you had no restriction in your way of thinking and acting. Everything was open. Murray could never hang out with the Black Panthers, for instance. He's an anarchist by definition, but me, I'm an anarchist by my lifestyle. And I would rather hang out with them than him. Some of [the Black Panthers] were Maoist, and I'd rather hang out with them than with this avowed anarchist.

It's funny, when I was in Spain, these old guys came to see me. They were in their 80s and 90s. They were in Durruti's youth movement. They came to see me, and they had a translator. They said, "We've been wanting to meet you for all these years. You're so much like the way [we were]". And they said the name in Spanish, and this guy translated it, and it was 'Sons of the Whores' like the Motherfuckers. Sons of the Whores! He said, "We even had the sons of the whores" ... It was like this wild strain that didn't get along with the Durruti column, but they were part of it. But they were wild, and that's how we were- wild. Not definable. Almost contradictory to some people. And we thrived on it. We loved it.

IWE- Can you talk about the effort to take the hippie community as you found it and make it into a force that could fight and be an offensive force, and not just a victimized target of the police?

BM- Part of that was real. And part of that was a poetic fantasy. In other words, we were the blending of political and hippie. That was us. Like, the hippies disliked us, some of them, because we were almost too political and violent.

And the politicos hated us because we were too hippie. We took LSD and hung out in the street. So, like what are we going to do? Are we going to organize students? I couldn't stand students. So, the hip community was where we lived. It was us. We were the fringe of it. And I think it's a fantasy- I don't think we ever thought that the whole hip community would mirror [us]. It was just a vernacular. Like a song. I don't want to disappoint you, but…

IWE- I don't want to give you the impression that I'm putting you in a box or anything like that.

BM- We resisted being boxed-in. Like, I always said, there were two actions that we did, that were equally important to me. We cut the fences at Woodstock, and we busted the doors of the Pentagon. To most people, how can you even compare the two? But to me, they were equal. That helps explain how we thought- who we were. We didn't define ourselves by a political goal. Which then you would say, "Wow- breaking into the Pentagon, those guys are heavy duty."You cut the fences at Woodstock, and most politicos are like, 'who cares?!' And then, when it rained, and people were stuck in the mud, we found the supply tent, cut the supply tent from the back, and handed out thousands of sleeping bags for free. That's just who we were. That was a political act to us. To a politico, it's like, they wouldn't even be there. They wouldn't be in the mud handing out sleeping bags. Like say in Boston, when I got busted for attempted murder- no political would go there and stand with these hippie kids and say, 'I'm here with you guys.' No political would do that.

IWE- But for you, it was enough that they tried to stake out a space in the commons and they were getting kicked out?

BM- They were getting beaten. And to us, it was like a challenge. "Oh, you're going to beat up these kids? Long-haired, innocent kids, that probably never had a fight... well, alright- beat us up". We went all the way from New

York to Boston because we heard about it. It was like, what normal 'political person' would do something like that?

IWE- The State's response to that event was fairly serious. Can you talk a bit about the role of repression in your decision to eventually leave New York? How much was due to concerns about state repression, and how much was an imminent sense of necessity or desire for something that NYC couldn't offer?

BM- It was both.

IWE- Osha talks in his biography about the decision not to go to Chicago. And he recounts-

BM- He went to Chicago.

IWE- Right; he also talks about your decision not to, and he says that you said something later, that there had been a shift in you, and as you put it, a beginning of a process of internal change, a realization that things weren't going to change the way you had hoped, and that maybe the

decision to leave New York also had to do with a spiritual shift, or a sort of political shift in you-

BM- It had been both, but he was completely wrong about Chicago. I was on my way to Chicago, and my girlfriend at the time had a blue Volkswagen. I was traveling with her. So we kept stopping. We stopped in Ann Arbor, Detroit—wherever we had groups, we stopped. And I kept getting phone calls, "The police are stopping all blue Volkswagens in Chicago, with your picture. And as they approach the car, they are armed, they have guns... either they're going to provoke something, or they're going to say something happened." After the third call like that, I did not continue on to Chicago. But I was heading there…Osha is wrong about that.

IWE- He also mentions that you had a certain protective instinct vis a vis the young Puerto Ricans you guys had been tight with?

BM- Yeah, that's true. After I took off, I felt guilty, like I left all these young kids behind... so I went all the way back to New York, and stole five cars to help get them out.

In some sense, Osha is right. It's true that I had come to a realization that there was something else going on, but I hadn't formulated it yet in my mind. And when I had to disappear, because of this other warning, I thought, 'Well, this is my chance now to find out now what that other part was that I sensed was missing.' Since I had to leave anyway.

IWE- So you got as far as Michigan, and you were getting death threats, basically. And that was what ultimately led you to leaving New York.

BM- Correct.

IWE- Why did other Motherfuckers decide to leave? Was everyone facing the same level of repression, or did they follow you?

BM- It was both. Some of them felt the heat, they sensed that I was leaving, that there were other people in my affinity group leaving.

We sensed that the change that we were looking for was not going to happen. The effort to end the war was going to be successful, but we're not going to change society as we saw fit, as we saw necessary. Some left for the West Coast, and got involved with what came to be called Armed Love (I coined that term).

So, it was all happening and it's hard to say what's the dominant [reason]... but the best thing I ever did was leave.

IWE- Was there something about the city itself that made the kind of change you wanted to see ultimately impossible? Because some of us, you know I live in Chicago, my friend sitting next to me lives in New York... we're trying to relate to the metropolis as a place to organize…

BM- But I think a lot of people realized that New York and Brooklyn are a good place to build collective organizing, but there's something missing from it. Clark and I talked about this. This is where [Woodbine's] whole upstate expansion thing comes from...

The city is an arena for battle, and also a place where we can work out certain ideas... but they can strangle you in the city. And ultimately, if we're going to learn what we need to survive, we will have to get out, and learn how to hunt, to grow food, etc. You know, all those things are necessary. To be honest, I didn't realize until I left how important it is to understand these other things. Because we're not going to survive. The city is *their* world. You can

co-exist with it for awhile, and organize there and build collectives- but we have to acquire skills that pertain to non-city living.

IWE- Clark used to say, "No one wants to live in cities, no one wants to go back to the land."

BM- There you go.

IWE- You're someone who has both fought in cities and intensely inhabited non-city life. These days you move back and forth between the two. I was wondering if you can talk about that in-between space, and how people who want to be revolutionaries now could maybe think about that dance of back and forth, city and non-city, in a way that doesn't overestimate or underestimate both. Because I also wonder what it meant to go into the countryside or wilderness in 1968, maybe there is no wilderness left for us today.

BM- There is. It can't be done the way I did it. But it can be done.

[…]

IWE- I wanted to ask you about this question of allyship and anti-racism and solidarity. The Motherfuckers made a point of refusing this identitarian way of thinking of oneself as an ally in ‘someone else’s’ struggle, arguing that white people need to take their own lives seriously and not make yourself into a means for someone else. There’s this flyer I really like that y'all gave out at the Fillmore during a Black Power event. It says,

> We don't ‘support' the Black Struggle. Support is not struggle. Support is the evasion of struggle. To support is not to understand our own needs for liberation, to support is to remain passive in the struggle for life. It is the failure of whites to see

> their own being, to see the possibilities of their own humanities. It's only through making our own struggle that we can join in common struggle, revolution.

BM- I wrote that. Is it signed, "Whitey 29x"?

IWE- No, should it be?

BM- I wrote another one that I signed Whitey 29x

IWE- There's an ellipsis here, so I don't know what's the rest said. Osha only quoted a piece of it in his memoir.

BM- Yeah, I wrote that.

IWE- I ask this because sometimes it feels like it might be best to abandon the whole concept of 'solidarity' today. Instead of assuming that people's identities should be the thing around which we should make a community, maybe we should organize our own lives with whoever *sees* the same thing and *feels* the same way as we do? As we try to work through what that means today, it's been helpful to go back and think about this really strong and rare stance you guys took on these matters in the late 1960's.
How did that stance inform yall's interactions with the Panthers? Or, there's a story about Valerie Solanas saying you might be the only auxiliary male in the S.C.U.M.?

BM- Not exactly. What she said was, 'you'll be the last man we kill.'

IWE- (laughs) There's this story about y'all being offered this position in the Panthers, and y'all saying something like, 'politics is shit', and that they respected this refusal to become a part of their thing.' And they respected that you never placed yourself in the service of some third worldist group, that you always did your own thing...

BM- But see, I didn't overlap with them in a day-to-day way. I would do what I was doing, they would do what they were doing. But they respected me because I was doing something that was needed, and had to be done. And they liked that, and thought more people should be like that. Like, 'don't piggyback on our struggle. Find your own struggle' so to speak. And they really respected that. Even if was always a stretch to assert that the counterculture could become politicized, that was where we had to make our pitch, so to speak. Because that's where we lived, that who we were. And the Panthers respected that.

I remember telling H. Rap Brown that we weren't coming up to Harlem, and he said, 'We have enough people. We can handle it. What are *you* going to do?'

IWE- This is during the riots?

BM- Yeah. I spoke with him on the phone. I said, "we're planning to open another front of battle, which seems better." And he agreed with me.

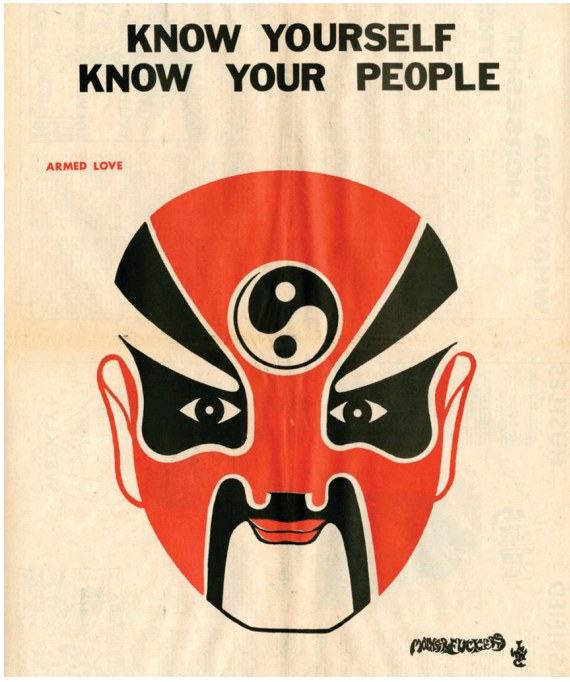
IWE- Can you talk about what y'all actually did?

BM- Well, we had a public thing, we did something in the streets- there were cops ringing it, there were snipers on the roofs... all of this meant that these cops couldn't be in Harlem.

IWE- Were the cops the only ones with guns on rooftops in those days on the Lower East Side?

BM- Most of the time…

IWE- And the thing with Eldridge Cleaver's presidential run, can you tell that story? [...] He offered you a vice presidential position on his ticket, and you said-



BM- I said, 'I don't believe in the political system. I don't see that as a way out.' And I don't think that he did either, but you know... he was a very egoistical, media-type person for whom running for president sounded good.

IWE- [laughs] Is there anything you're willing to share about your life with Native Americans after you left New York, or the path that led you to embrace animism? What drew you to it? I know Clark was really impressed by all of that.

BM- He was really into it. More than anybody. To me, losing him was a big thing, because he was the one most committed to understanding these views [...]

IWE- Can you talk a little about y'alls conversation, or animism, or your path to animism?

BM- See, with me, personally, it was a thread that started a long time ago. It didn't just come to fruition when I had to leave [New York]. I was really attracted to the Native American struggle. I sensed there was some part of it that we didn't understand. And I was interested in indigenous cultures, from an artistic angle as well. It seemed to me that indigenous people were in touch with something that "civilized man", that Western man, had lost, the Western mind took a detour somewhere and lost it. I was always trying to read more about it, or find out more about it. And you could see in the rap pages, my constant use of Native motifs, and that was part of that. It wasn't a conscious...

IWE- You even talk about yourselves at some point as the Indians, or the New Indians.

BM- Yeah.

IWE- When you were being interviewed by the Free Press, I think it was?

BM- Yeah. We felt partially like what had happened in America, with Europeans coming…there was something already here in the soil, and that somehow it was affecting us. There was this energy here that hadn't been completely eradicated, and we were picking up on that. You know how hippies and new age people are. Anyway, we sensed this. I don't know if it was true, and it doesn't matter! It felt like there was something here that predated European arrival, and somehow, we were all attracted to this energy that came from that. To explain this feeling, we said it was in the soil, it was in the air, that it was somehow *there*. We absorbed it.

IWE- How did you do that?

BM- At first, through using those motifs; then later, when I had to physically leave, I was drawn toward indigenous, animistic thinking.

IWE- How did you find the people who became your teachers eventually?

BM- Just by trying to go around, sensing where it was- what is it I'm looking for. And when I saw something that felt right, just trying to stay close to those people. In other words—and this goes back to what I was saying earlier, too —I just went out there, without any end presupposed in advance. I could feel these different, alternative ways of existing. Something attracted me. I was attracted to a certain energy. Maybe you would have been attracted by something different For me, it was primarily Plains people. It may sound stupid, but to me, Plains culture was one of the freest cultures that ever existed on this earth. Not all Native Americans, but…

IWE- What was it about the Plains culture?

BM- There was something more autonomous, a certain anarchist autonomy there. Other indigenous people were more hierarchical. Certain groups, especially amongst Iroquois, had confederations, they had voting. They in some ways were what America ended up being: 'constitutional'. But the Plains people, to me, really resonated for me.

IWE- Do you think it was geographical? A way of life spread across a flat surface?

BM- Sure, it's all mixed. It's something geographical, it's something cultural, it's something stylistic… Me personally, I'm more drawn to the result of something, than to its definition. Like, when I got amongst Plains people- I felt like, 'Shit. This is where [*inaudible*]'

IWE- Can you talk about life with them? 40 years can't be easily summed up I'm sure, but we've heard little whispers about trains and horses. Is there anything that you feel you're able to repeat?

BM- Well, no... you know, some of those stories are true and some of them are not true. I had different experiences and... you know, when I lived in the mountains with the *banditos*, they were not indigenous- they were more remnants of illegalist radical culture.

IWE- They lived like bandits…

BM- Yeah, they even robbed a train, like you see in the movies. And I stopped it. I told them, 'Are you fucking nuts, man? They'll wipe us out. They'll make sure there's nobody in the mountains left.' It's just some kind of a movie set.

IWE- Did trains get robbed during that period?

BM- They were going to. I stopped them. I pointed a gun to their head and said, 'If you do it, you're dead.'

IWE- Did they end up dead anyway?

BM- Some of them, yeah.

IWE- Because of the same foolhardiness? The same ideas?

BM- They got in a shootout with the State Police.

I don't know the numbers, I'm not big on statistics, but there were a lot pf people living in the mountains that picked up on the horseback life that I [...] I was one of the first. There were hundreds of people...

IWE- The Native Americans weren't living on horseback, but *you* were living on horseback…

BM- I was.

IWE- They were living on reservations.

BM- Correct.

IWE- You were living on horseback, with your wife.

BM- Right.

IWE- You were in the mountains five years. When we talked last night, you said that you were 'looking for reality'?

BM- There's several things happening at once. First, I wanted to disappear completely for a length of time so that I would have no track record. A lot of people thought I was dead. I wanted that. At the same time, I wanted to see what it means to put yourself out there with no support system. Can you make friends with this universe? It was all going on at once.

IWE- The repression track, the personal discovery track, the metaphysical side of it?

BM- Correct. They were all pushing me. And then, when I came out of the mountain, I stayed on horseback but I started homesteading. And as I homesteaded, I started using vehicles again, and I would get to the reservations and go hang out with the natives, and that's when this whole thing began.

IWE- So your animism didn't lead you into the wilderness, repression and self-discovery led you there.

BM- Yeah, but animism was in my mind, as well. I sensed that there was something that included Native people, Aborigines, Africans, there was something that they all shared that we were missing. I didn't use the term animism

then, but I was trying to figure out what that was, and I thought: I have to be away from society, so here's my chance to find out what it is.

IWE- So if I hear you right, it wasn't the positivity of some 'alternative' doctrine that you were after…

BM- Oh no.

IWE- What was obvious was, rather, the poverty of the west.

BM- Yes, and there was an inkling that there was something else, and that Indigenous people had a sense of it.

IWE- You have spent 40 years practicing this other thing, do you want to say anything about it?

BM- No. [laughs]

IWE- You said some stuff last night- is it okay if I repeat it? You said that reality is not material. And that you're actually opposed on principle to materialism.

BM- Yeah.

IWE- That for you reality is spiritual.

BM- Right.

IWE- Is there a war within spirit? Is there any relationship between spirit and war? […]

BM- War is part of spirit. Your body is at war. As you're speaking, right now, there's a war going on in your body- between white cells and red cells, between viruses and bacteria. War is a tool of nature- it's not negative. This fucking liberal bullshit about war... I'm not anti-war!

IWE- Neither am I.

BM- War is like a tsunami or a hurricane. You can't define nature positively or negatively. You have to see it as a process. It's not a good process or a bad process- it's THE process. There's nothing but it. There's no other world than this spiritual, creative entity that we call "cosmos". That's it. That's all there is. And so you begin to realize there's black holes that are sucking in planets! You talk about war- I mean war, these guys are fucking killing each other, bang bang, but a black hole sucking in a whole planet- that's a war. That's a war to end all wars. But you have to stop seeing it as positive or negative, you have to understand that it is an organic, natural process, and within it you make choices. And that's where our humanness becomes vital. You make a choice, do A or B.

IWE- You described yourself to me last night as a revolutionary animist. That it was important to you to not just be an animist, and not just be a revolutionary, but the two need to be in unison. Animism doesn't replace revolution, there's still revolution…

BM- There are animists out there, who think this whole thing is perfect, it's just nature. Then there are animists out there like me, who think that the nature is perfect, but the human hand in it is fucked up, and we have to change that human hand. Then there are the revolutionaries out there who think it's all about distribution and regime change and all that, and have no sense of the spiritual... so I don't want to call myself just a revolutionary then, so I made up the term revolutionary animist, since it's there are two sides that are both necessary to understand.

IWE- A revolution that doesn't found itself on some deeper principle than what the west has to offer, you would say there isn't much to hope for from it?

BM- To me.

IWE- Can we find those principles somewhere else other than Native American life do you think?

BM- Oh, you have to. What I'm trying to say is that it's not Native American culture *per se* that has this kernel of understanding. This kernel of understanding exists, and Native folks tapped into it, Aborigines tapped into it, Africans tapped into it, some Europeans tapped into it before civilization—like Celts, or others. It's there- it's not like it's hidden. You can look out there and you can see it. But materialism has blinded many to it. To use a metaphor- you have so many street lights in New York you can't see the Milky Way. That doesn't mean the Milky Way doesn't exist. It means you can't see it, because the city lights become material, and the Milky Way is that spiritual world. You have to dim the lights- or blow out the lights- to find the Milky Way.

IWE- We still need to flatten New York, it's just that we're just doing it for something else…

BM- We can start with the lights, all those fucking LEDs. Somebody's got to start with them.

IWE- There was actually a novel, called *The Flamethrowers*... did you hear about this novel?

BM- Yeah, it's based on me.

IWE- Parts of it, yeah. There's a couple chapters in there about someone named Burdemore or something like that…

BM- Yeah, that's me. I met her, the author.

IWE- Some of those stories felt pretty real. Are there any you want to talk about?

BM- It's all cartoonized.

When I first re-emerged, I spoke at the New School for Social Research and her husband was there. He went home and told her, 'You know, the most fantastic thing! This guy came and spoke tonight that had disappeared for 38 years and he spoke, and it was like...' And she started to say, ‘who...?' and that's what pushed her to write that book. The author said all this to me herself.

IWE- She talks about a power outage at some point in there.

BM- She talked about a lot.

IWE- You fed her some stories, I suppose, right?

BM- No, I never talked with her, other than that short conversation about how the novel came about. I wasn't interviewed. It always surprised me.

IWE- I assumed, reading it, that she got stories from you and then novelized them…

BM- It actually bothered me, and I told her that. She came to an opening of my artwork. And I said, 'Look, this is an opening, I don't want to spend to much time on this, but it really bothered me that you did this without even consulting with me' And she said, "okay, well let's talk. Call me, or I'll call you. What’s your number?” She took my phone number, and she never called. It bothered me. […]

IWE/R—One thing that Clark really brought to our minds was the idea that our struggle is taking place on more than one plane.

BM- [...] It affected me personally that Clark is the one missing now. Because he was the closest to understanding what I was talking about. A lot of the things I talk about, like not with you necessarily, but with other people, they fall on deaf ears. Like, 'who cares.' But Clark was the

closest to understanding it, and I enjoyed having someone to bounce it against, to see if what they would do with it. He was the closest to that, he made the overt moves.

IWE/R— And he was really at the beginning of the process.

BM- Yeah and I could see it when I started, that nascent sense- it was not completely formulated, yet.

IWE/R- But his belief in this, and his pursuit of it... though cut short, also opened for many of us that question and that dimension. But there's something else that he also pushed us towards. So not only thinking of what we traditionally call the struggle taking place on these different planes, all these different dimensions, but he also thought about it taking place across generations, as well. And sometimes that can be a bitter pill to swallow for those that think that the insurrection will come tomorrow- it very well may, but he was starting to open up a question of what it would be like to live knowing that our struggle…

BM- It could be three or four or five generations…

IWE/R- It's going to be a generational struggle.

BM- I'm convinced that it is. It's not going to be tomorrow. I lived as if it was going to be tomorrow. We expected it tomorrow.

IWE- But you said, even today, you would wake up and walk outside and you would say, 'let's live as if it were today.' That today is the day we're going to die.

BM- Yeah, but not that the struggle would be successful.

IWE- But that you were going to die that day.

BM- Yeah.

IWE/R- I think the question then becomes, for thinking in those terms, how do we begin to relate to those generations that came before us and those generations that come afterwards, how do we make that part of our day to day lives and think about that part of how we conceive of the struggle?

BM- That's your job. I have ideas that I think would help, and someday I'll delineate what I think. You know, I'm always reluctant to lay out platforms.

IWE/R- And Ben we like you a lot, but we probably wouldn't listen to you…

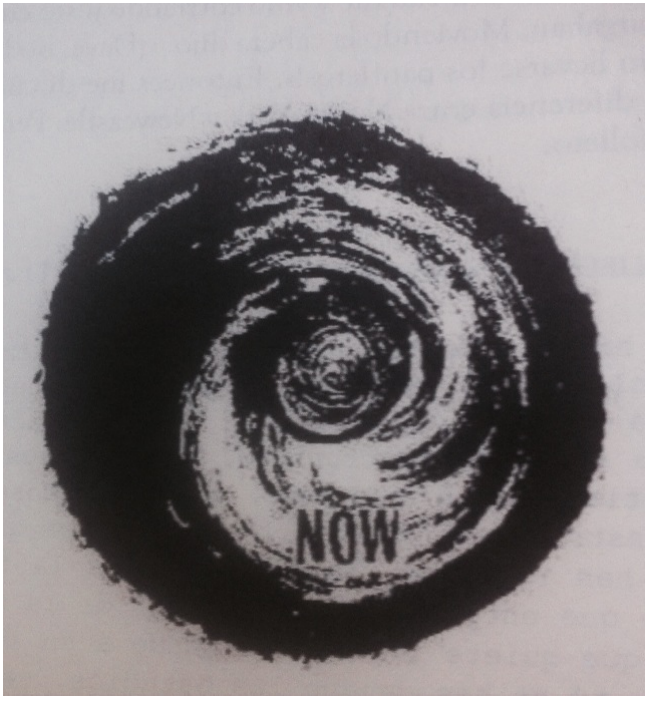
BM- You probably wouldn't like me anymore. (laughs)

IWE- You got any clues now we can twist your arm for?

BM- I could say something extremely simplistic.

IWE- Sounds great.

BM- You have to live as if its going to be tomorrow, knowing it's not. That's the dilemma. You have to live as if it is going to be, but you have to realize it is not. And most people can't do that. That's a tough one. I learned to live this, but it's not easy. Because most people want to think it's going to be, that it's *there*. And this can prevent people from acting, because it's not there. But you cannot allow it to prevent you from acting. You have to act as if it's there. And that'll make it there. It's not going to announce itself. It's just going to be there. Or you're going to wake up some day and it's going to be there. And it will be because people lived as if it's there. And they're going to all wake up, and say 'it is here!', but you can't think it's going to be there. This is the ultimate dilemma. And we have to learn to live with it.



Ben Morea, *'Now'*