

## Leather and Naughahyde It crosses my mind

Marilyn Dumont

### Il me vient à l'esprit / De cuir ou de cuirette

*Dans ces deux poèmes en prose, Marilyn Dumont s'interroge sur les possibilités d'inscription de son identité de femme métisse au sein de la «mosaïque verticale» que constitue la nation canadienne. Effacée par le concept de citoyenneté, reniée par celui de la pureté de la race, l'identité métisse comporte-t-elle néanmoins un potentiel d'«agentivité» ? Est-il possible de créer l'espace nécessaire à l'écriture de cette histoire occultée en occupant la position de troisième terme au sein du conflit dialectique qui oppose les Premières Nations à leurs colonisateurs ? «Suis-je citoyenne canadienne ? Oui et non; oui, par coercition.» / «Son regard me dit qu'il est fait de cuir et moi de cuirette».*

### leather & naughahyde

So, I'm having coffee with this treaty guy from up north and we're laughing at how crazy "the mooniyaw" are in the city and the conversation comes around to where I'm from, as it does in underground languages, in the oblique way it does to find out someone's status without actually asking, and knowing this, I say I'm Metis like it's an apology and he says, "mmh," like he forgives me, like he's got a big heart and mine's pumping diluted blood and his voice has sounded well-fed up 'til this point, but now it goes thin like he's across the room taking another look and when he returns he's got "this look," that says he's leather and I'm naughahyde.

### It crosses my mind

It crosses my mind to wonder where we fit in this "vertical mosaic," this color colony; the urban pariah, the displaced and surrendered to apartment blocks, shopping malls, superstores and giant screens, are we distinct survivors of the "white" noise, or merely hostages in the enemy camp and the job application asks if I am a Canadian citizen and am I expected to mindlessly check "yes," indifferent to skin color and the deaths of 1885, or am I actually free to check "no," like *the true north strong and free* and what will I know of my own kin in my old age, will they still welcome me, share their stew and tea, pass me the bannock like it's mine, will they continue to greet me in the old way, hand me their babies as my own and send me away with gifts when I leave and what name will I know them by in these multi-cultural intentions, how will I know other than by shape of nose and cheekbone, color of eyes and hair, and will it matter that we call ourselves Metis, Metisse, Mixed blood or aboriginal, will sovereignty matter or will we just slide off the level playing field turned on its side while the provincial flags slap confidently before me, echoing their self absorbed anthem in the wind, and what is this game we've played long enough, *finders keepers/losers weepers*, so how loud and how long can the losers weep and the the "white noise" infiltrates my day as easily as the alarm, headlines and "Morningside" but "Are you a Canadian citizen?" I sometimes think to answer, *yes, by coercion, yes, but no....there's more*, but no space provided to write my historical interpretation here, that *yes but no*, really only means *yes* because there are no lines for the stories between *yes and no* and what of the future of my eight year old niece, whose mother is Metis but only half as Metis as her grandmother, what will she name herself and will there come a time and can it be measured or predicted when she will stop naming herself and crossing her own mind.