

I sent a long letter to Frank Waters on November 2nd 1992, asking him for an interview. On January 2nd 1993 he typed (on his old Olivetti Lettera 25?): “There are many things I’d like to discuss with you, as you have mentioned, but I have just come from a month’s stay in the hospital where I underwent surgery on a broken leg, and I’m slowly recuperating at home. Perhaps we can meet at a later time, and when my mind is more clear. Right now it’s still full of hospital imagery, soggy sheets, lukewarm coffee, and all the joys of a modern crowded hospital.”

FRANK AND BARBARA WATERS INTERVIEW, TAOS, AUGUST 4, 1993

Frank Waters is sitting in the sun alone looking out on the plateau that descends to the Southwest towards the Rio Grande Gorge. The vast Taos Indian territory begins just across the road. Ilse Arreaza and I arrive unexpectedly explaining as we approach that we had arranged an interview several months before. We are invited to sit down by this tall old man, who begins.

F: Your memory is better than mine.

R: I’ve never been known for my memory. Just ask Ilse. Ilse is from Venezuela.

F: Oh, are you? We’ve been to South America, to Peru and Bolivia. But not in Venezuela. Too bad, yes. I hear it’s a great country.

R: You know, I wrote to both you and Laurens Van der Post. Both of you wrote back to me within two weeks.

F: Sure.

R: Saying you liked my letters. And then I wrote back and suggested a time to come. And neither of you responded to me so I just decided to come anyway. Laurens Van der Post, who is not a young man... he was in London taking care of his wife. He had just come back from a tour of the States.

F: Oh, had he?

R: He’s about 88.

F: Well, I’ve got him beat a little, I’m 91. 91 this month.

R: What day?

F: The 25th of July. I was 91. Well, I’ve admired his writing for a long time. It reminds me so much of America, in years past... writing about Africa...

R: Have you ever corresponded with him?

F: No. No. Never have.

Frank Waters speaks very *slow and easy* with deep timbre.

R: *I ask because in your Book of the Hopi, the preface speaks of both of you.*

F: *It was written by another man though, associated with the foundation which financed the publication of the book... 88 years old.*

R: *More or less. I think he was born in 1906.*

F: *Is he in good health?*

R: *He was in very good health.*

F: *Good.*

R: *He was. I'm more interested in talking about you. I basically sent the same letter to him that I sent to you. Do you remember reading this letter that I sent you?*

F: *I don't remember specifically. Wait till Barbara comes. She's got such a good memory.*

Barbara Waters joins in.

B: *I'll get it back out, when he scans it he'll remember it.*

R: *I've got a copy of it right here. I'm not a professional interviewer. I don't really know what I'm doing here.*

B: *Did you have an appointment for today?*

R: *Well, I wrote a letter, and stated this day with this hour...*

B: *Really?*

R: *And I never got a response and since I didn't get a response from Laurens Van der Post either, I just decided to come.*

B: *Oh, good! Laughing.*

R: *Taking my chances.*

B: *I did write you, something must have happened to that. But we didn't record the date, because we didn't hear from you again, and so, it's a good thing it all worked out... that we're home and everything.*

F: *I don't remember...*

B: *Yes yes, I remember because Frank had to reread the letter to write the second letter. But go ahead.*

R: *Well, I'm not sure exactly where to begin. I don't even know if you feel like dealing with this stuff. Do you want to take a look at this letter or shall I read it to you, Frank? What fascinated me most about your writing I could ask you about. You say some very provocative things.*

F: *Good. I'm glad they catch your attention. (Barbara laughs)*

R: *The most provocative thing that I find that you wrote is that American culture has a psychotic aspect to it. **That** you said over and over again. For instance this book right here... you see I read these books very carefully "...the psychosis of the white man." I just felt like congratulating you for observing that*

fact. I'm not sure what you'll want to say about it. But I told you in that letter that I used to feel psychotic and it rings a bell for me when you tell me that the culture around me is psychotic in a manner of speaking and I was interested to hear what you had to say about that.

Finally Frank speaks.

F: I think the country is psychotic. We are so materialistically minded, we are so greedy for money, and if that isn't a psychosis I'll eat your hat. If we'd say this about a person, one single person is as greedy for money as this country is, we'd call him psychotic, wouldn't we?

R: A characteristic of psychosis is the inability to feel the body and to feel the ground, in my experience.

F: Right!

R: When you feel the ground and you feel the body you are less interested in money, I suspect.

F: Well, I don't feel we feel the ground here in this country.

R: You don't feel the ground?

F: I do!

R: You do! That's why I want to talk to you.

F: Oh well...!

R: Because I don't!

F: Oh, you don't?

R: Well, I'm beginning to. But it has taken me twenty five years of very deep body oriented psychotherapy. Very good serious work with my body to begin to realise how much I don't feel the ground.

F: I'm speaking about this country as a whole. We don't feel the ground. (pause) Indians as a contrasting group do feel the ground. They are conscious of the ground, of the Earth, all the time. We're not. (long pause)

*R: In your writing you alternate talking about psychosis with talking about **embodiedness**. And I love that. Which would make sense, that if you're describing a problem you are also talking about a solution: which would be to be more embodied. I would like to hear more about what you mean by **embodied**.*

F: What would be the subject of this?

R: Of this what?

F: Of embodied.

R: You sometimes are saying that, for instance... I have lots of examples.

F: We embody the virtues of courage, for example. (pause) Does that give you an idea?

R: Uh huh... it says here... "the new nation embodied all the strange paradoxes which compose the characters of its founders."

F: Barbara, don't you think we ought to go into the shade?

B: *I would think so.*

F: *It's a little too hot out here.*

B: *You've been out here so long.*

R: *By the way, please, if this constitutes an invasion of your privacy just tell me.*

B: *Oh, no. This is a lucky day to hit us. We've been real busy lately. This is a day we didn't have to do anything. Rick, you can help Frank bring in his oxygen (F.W. seems to have emphysema)*

F: *Let's all go in then. (Frank moves with his walker) I had two hip operations and then I broke my leg.*

R: *That's what you said in your letter to me. You talked about all the joys of a modern hospital.*

(laughter all around)

B: *Do you live in Italy full time?*

R: *I live in Italy, we both live in Italy.*

B: *So then, how long are you over here?*

F: *He just came.*

R: *Well, we came on July 12 to London, I wanted to meet Laurens Van der Post for the last ten years also.*

B: *And you got to meet him?*

R: *Under the same circumstances. He said "I didn't know you were coming but I just happened to be free today." (laughter)*

B: *A Jungian friend of mine in Tucson was going to get together Laurens Van der Post, Frank and Joseph Campbell for a group in Tucson. And then Joseph Campbell died, and he left a... Frank, turn your oxygen off, to the other oxygen now, we can go to the house. Oh, well, that must have been a really good experience.*

R: *Meeting LVP. Well, these two men have such similarities, that in the letter I wrote I asked whether they had known each other.*

B: *How old is he now?*

R: *About 88. He is still writing.*

B: *Well, Frank just came out with a new book too. He sits there and you should probably sit right next to him so he can hear you. Your friend (my wife Ilse) can sit on the couch.*

R: *I'm taping for my own use here. Not for broadcast.*

B: *Good. This is Frank's new book, **Brave Are My People**, which are short sketches on some Indian chiefs across the United States and their famous speeches at the end.*

R: *I'm wondering whether it would be of any use if I read this letter to you to give you a sense of what I am after. I sent this from Italy to Taos on December 9, 1992.*

B: *That would be good.*

Dear Frank Waters,

My name is Richard Nathan. I am an enthusiastic reader of your books, all of which I possess. (which turns out not to be true... laughter) I have been planning to send you a letter for a long time to express my feelings about your work. When I was a graduate student in American cultural history in 1970 to 1972 your work was not presented to us. I was looking at the time for a quintessential characterization of the American - and I never found it. So I resigned my teaching assistantship and dropped out into a personal psychotherapy with a focus on the condition of my organism. The deeper I looked within, dropping out of my head, the more I discovered how split I was from my feeling and sensation. I eventually felt obliged to leave the United States and live in a more body oriented culture like that of Italy, where I have resided since 1977. My condition became clearer and clearer - a very profound internal split of almost psychotic proportion, that had occurred already in utero, and which had served to isolate the core of my being from consciousness.

*The principle reason that I am writing to you is to affirm that your perception of American culture as being psychotically split is not only accurate in the terms you define in **The Colorado** (1946, 1984), **The Earp Brothers of Tombstones** (1960, 1976), which I found to be a great book, **Masked Gods** (1950, 1989), and probably a lot of other places... as an unconscious fear and hatred of the Indian and his natural world, which you take one step further, reminding us of Jung's observation that the Euro-American born on American soil has an Indian within...*

F: Right!

R: You then state that this hatred of the Indian without and within leads to a loss of soul. Which you say very often.

F: Right!

*R: And alienation not only from the earth but from our dark maternal unconscious - its psychic counterpart. That's from *The Colorado*, you use those words. I want to ground your observation in terms of the call for embodiment, which is your most recurring word, and articulate in terms of an organismic psychotherapy - I am a psychotherapist working with the body...*

B: So am I.

R: You are a psychotherapist working with the body?

B: Yes. Oh, here it is (my letter). And your answer. "Thank you for responding to my letter. It looks like I can be in Taos the afternoon of August 4. (laughter all around)"

F: Oh my gosh.

R: Well, I just decided to do it. In fact, I had the option of calling you, and I didn't want to make a connection via telephone.

B: Uh huh.

R: Just see what would happen.

B: Uh huh.

R: *So let me go on. "I want to ground your observation in terms of a call for embodiment - which is your most recurring word - and articulate in terms of an organismic psychotherapy what are the impediments to embodiment for the European-American. I am a European-American. And thus, by extension, what might be the path to true embodiment of the split off soul. OK? Jung once made a curious observation to those of his trainees who were working with North Americans - this is from Barbara Hannah's biography.*

B: *Yes, I have that.*

R: *"The European has a door in the corner of the room of his consciousness, with a reasonable flight of stairs that leads down to his shadow. He may refuse ever to open the door, but it is safe for him to do so. (I work exclusively with Europeans recently so I know a little what he is talking about.) When the American opens a similar door in his psychology (I would say in the organism) there is a dangerous open gap dropping hundreds of feet, and in those cases where he can negotiate the drop, he would then be faced by an Indian or Negro shadow where the European finds a shadow of his own race."*

B: *Are you finding that true?*

R: *Its true for me.*

B: *We're finding that the negro shadow, the dark shadow, whether its negro or not, the black shadow is more and more. Especially in dream interpretation. I do a lot of Jungian dream interpretation. And you see that dark shadow. Here in America. But I wondered if you find a shadow of your own race instead of the dark shadow?*

R: *Well, as I come alive in my being, I have sensations which are not just coming from my head, which I actually write about here, but from my whole being, under the assumption that the psyche is everywhere, not just in the head.*

F: *Right!*

R: *Right? And I get internal feeling toned sensation with psychic images of Afro-Americans - I was raised by an Afro-American nurse - just like Laurens Van der Post was raised by a mixed Bushman nurse - a lot of people in the United States were raised by Afro-American nurses. A lot of sensations seem to emerge from this former contact that I associate not with the deepest parts of my being, rather with the middle level of my body, what's called the mesoderm.*

B: *But then you're not finding this true? You're finding also the black shadow. And you are a European aren't you?*

R: *No, I am an American.*

B: *Oh, you're an American.*

R: *I'm a Euro-American. My parent's families are originally from Europe.*

B: *Oh, OK.*

R: *Actually I tell it all right here in the letter. I'll try to finish this if it seems relevant.*

If one were to begin to translate your words or those of Jung in terms of the organismic configuration of the individual Euro-American descendant of generations of Americans who had directly or indirectly

participated in the decimation of the indigenous peoples of the continent, or simply the first-born generation, as in my case, son of an immigrant German Jew, what might we find in common? Of course there would be a sense of earthly rootlessness for the first arrivals, like my father, as the case of any first arrival on a new continent, and the unresolved pathology of the former land would lay in shadow and tend to be transmitted organismically to the new born however unconsciously... (You write some about that, that the Europeans arriving here have a lot of 'baggage' that they are bringing with them.)

It is not to be said that the European lays blameless in other encounters on other continents and on his own continent for the ruthless genocide of primordial peoples. One need only look at the story of the European encounter with the Bushman, who, Laurens Van der Post observed to me, originally ranged from Africa all the way to Europe, forced eventually to withdraw further and further south, only now meeting his end in the Kalahari Desert of South Central Africa. To say nothing of the plight of the Yanomani people of the Amazon, faced right now (1993) with the threat of mass sterilization by the Brazilian Army. And the black African is also armoured within against his own primordality - Laurens Van der Post implies, equally murderous towards the Bushman.

***Here's my question!** What is unique in the condition of the European American that leads anyone who truly contemplates our psychology to claim a 'complexity', as Jung once said, almost impossible to unravel? I want to meet with you to discuss this. I have explored within myself this great gap between consciousness and my ground of being. There seems to be a very highly polarized energy that repels my periphery, that is my ectoderm including my head, from my vegetative involuntary endodermal core - as I like to put it in bodily terms. Thus, there is a very highly charged adrenal system that maintains the illusion of life and vitality... and you write a lot about that - this drivenness. You know, once I had found a sleepy Italian mountain village to live in I began feeling totally exhausted, needing always to lie out. I had never felt so exhausted until then. I was sleeping and listening to the silence, to the stream gurgling below my window, the Church bells ringing, it seems for years. An exhaustion stemming from the great length my organism had heretofore gone through in the past, and which I was just beginning to feel to keep my psyche and body from finding a common ground. The great advantage of having had a more or less psychotic structure is that I have had to rebuild my body psyche connection from conception onwards, so to speak, step by step, and **I have done so**. I had to find the ground at the most primordial level of first connection between nervous system and tissue. It was contemplation...*

R: *Am I reading too fast?*

F: *Nooo.*

... of the first people of Africa's God, the Praying Mantis (as LVP says of the Bushman) that mysteriously served to bring together in me the first tentative awakening of a background fabric of being.

R: *Laurens writes a lot about the Praying Mantis, you know.*

F: *Yes*

R: *Laurens must have an internal connection to the Praying Mantis. He writes the same things you do, when you write of the Hopi, that the importance of the small should not be underestimated, you know?*

F: *Uh huh.*

R: *Whether it is the small group of people...the Bushman are small.*

F: *Right, right.*

R: *The Bushman God, the Praying Mantis, which is very small.*

... and then a long descent into the mystery of the frog. Which had originally been brought about by my meeting with a child psychiatrist of Luzern, Switzerland. I asked her this question: "What embryonic organ system might isolate and protect the vegetative core of an embryo facing the onslaught of an adrenalized uterus (which I think was my story)?" And so I was drawn into a long study of the embryonic kidney: which appears, induces the urogenital system and the mesodermal wall protecting the viscera, and four weeks later completely disappears. Probably the greatest enigma, for many reasons, in all of embryology... an organ system that is identical to the permanent kidney of the frog. For twelve years the praying mantis, and even more so the frog have been my constant companions. I'm not at all surprised to hear that in Hopi Indian tradition, there can appear at the moment of death the footprint of the frog Paqua. For me this is in some way the great connection between the conscious and unconscious worlds, just as the mesoderm of the body can be the great connection for the unarmoured human organism.

R: *I don 't know if you ever remember writing about Paqua.*

F: *No, I don 't.*

R: *It was in the book that described your writing **The Book of The Hopi**.*

B: ***Pumpkin Seed Point** (1969).*

R: *These footprints were actually found in the Grand Canyon and then became a legend.*

... Slowly as I make the internal bodily connections in my own being, I have feeling toned sensations accompanied by psychic images emerging not only from my head (Frank coughs) but from the entire organism, of American Indian motifs rising apparently from the endoderm, which is the core, and black American images and motifs rising from my mesoderm, which surrounds the core. This confirms what Jung has said.

*I feel much gratitude towards you, both for your confrontation of the American false self system, and for your life long stab towards flushing out the truth about America, a greater effort than anyone before you, in my opinion. Your devotion to the primordial can only be compared to that of LVP to whom you are compared in the **Book of The Hopi** in the preface. I have long wondered whether the two of you know each other's work, and have met, and if not, why not, given the extraordinary similarities in your lives, spanning this century, and in your work. I have asked LVP the same question, and I await a letter from him in response to my request to meet with him and discuss some of the questions I am posing to you! I hope you can meet with me.*

R: *That's the letter.*

B: *Had he ever read Frank's work?*

R: *What happened when I went to London, was, I had a major tooth emergency in my hotel the night before meeting him and had a doctor driving all across London on his motorcycle who drugged me up with painkillers. When I finally had the interview, the next morning, I... forgot... to... ask. (laughter all around) But he has invited me to his farm outside of London next June. There are a few things I want to ask him more about. He's fascinated by the frog.*

F: *What?*

R: *By the frog. He's been mentioning the frog more and more in his books. And in the most recent book that I've read, he's talking about the body, about touch... about working with the body. Because his son had died of cancer, and he just couldn't understand why his son had to die... someone so energetic and full of life. So he wrote this beautiful book, **About Blady**, it's mostly about a horse, but its about what happened that the male-female split occurred, that we are so far from the vegetative core - the female vegetative involuntary core. That's what I'm doing in my work, writing about it, lecturing about this split.*

*I just want to know what you mean by **embodied**, and **loss of soul**. Does anything from this letter ring a bell? There are many things I'd like to discuss with you. I'm not sure how to pose these questions.*

(laughter all around)

I'd like to see what you're suggesting to be more grounded in the body, both you and LVP. If you never lost contact with the earth and the body, why not? And if you have any suggestions for future generations of psychotherapists who have to work with this big problem... that people are living in their heads all the time.

F: *Will you answer that, Barbara?*

B: *He's asking you, not me! Don't try to wiggle out of it.*

(laughter all around)

R: *LVP claims that he never lost contact with his core. He had to fight as hard as he could from the age of seven onwards as a way of keeping in touch with his core. So he devoted himself to the Bushman and trying to find some Bushman who still had anything of their original culture.*

F: *Right!*

R: *It was like a crusade, and he couldn't even do it until he was fifty. The circumstances in which he could lead an expedition deep into the Kalahari desert didn't occur until 1950. He had been a prisoner of war in a Japanese prisoner of war camp and then after that he was finally free. He had sworn to himself when he was seven while he still had an internal connection to Bushman, because he was raised by Bushman on the edge of the Kalahari desert, that he would make the internal external connection by finding real Bushman. I'm wondering what you did to not lose your sanity in the U.S.*

F: *Well I think for a number of years I completely lost touch with the earth.*

R: *You did?*

F: *I think I did. (pause, then slowly) I worked for the Los Alamos scientific laboratory (I believe in public relations, RWN) - at the time they were doing the atomic bomb tests. And that, of course, was completely mental, by working with the scientists. This was all mathematical scientific work. And I was working with them in Los Alamos, and then every spring I would accompany them when they went to Frenchman's flat to detonate these new bombs that they had constructed. I think during that period, I had lost touch with my grounded being, but...*

B: *That was in the mid Fifties.*

F: *In the mid Fifties, yeah. But when that period was over and I had to quit, and had come back to my own life, I went to the Hopi reservation and I lived in the reservation for quite a while while I was doing research and writing **The Book of The Hopi** and **Pumpkin Seed Point** my personal experiences, and I got in touch with my own inner self, my own body, thanks to the Hopi, so I regained what I had lost at Los Alamos.*

R: *You had only lost it that far along? You had maintained an internal sense all along until you were working in Los Alamos?*

F: *I lost it in Los Alamos. Everything was geared so high, and it was so mental, and those scientists worked only from the head.*

R: *I bet.*

F: *Yeah.*

B: *Your connection stems from your father and going to the Navajo. You need to go back to that.*

F: *I'd lost it but I had it as a boy. Because I'd got that feeling for the Indians and the earth that I got from my father. And I had that before I'd left college and started working for the laboratory.*

B: *Now wait. After you left college you went to work on the desert, which made such a huge impact on you. So again you need to fill Rick in on that. And you lived on the Navajo land for a short time with your father.*

F: *That's when I was very young.*

B: *Yes, but all those things show the continuous connection... the desert in California?*

F: *Yeah. When I left school I went to California and went to work for the telephone company there and was sent to the Mexican border. I was in the desert a great deal. That is the desert country. Right in the Colorado desert. And I went into the desert in lower California, Baja California. I was down there. And I regained that feeling of the land and I had never been on the desert before. I was born and raised in Colorado in the high mountains. And I got down there on that desert, I was just fascinated by the desert, just absolutely fascinated. The desert still has a fascination for me. I love the desert.*

B: *And from that stems his first book.*

R: *I remember reading all about your experience running line on the desert. Isn't that what you did?*

F: *No. Just checked on people and places in the desert. At night I'd set down and describe the desert and its tremendous impact on me. And it amounted to quite a lengthy manuscript. And I just bundled it all up and sent it to Horace Leatherwright who was the outstanding book publisher in the U.S. then and*

he wrote back and said 'A publisher like myself doesn't usually accept the first manuscript of a new fledgling writer but our experience is that if a young writer does not see his name in print he is discouraged and quits writing so I'm going to take your book, straighten it out a bit, it won't make you any money and its going to cost us a great deal, but we're going to take an option on your next three books'.

R: *He liked it?*

F: *Right. So he published that book, which was my first.*

R: *And that book was the result of a strong reaction to the desert.*

F: *It was a lengthy book long description of the desert, but I had realized, had enough sense to realize that nobody'd want to read that unless I would tack on to it the beginning and end of the story. So I converted it.*

This cordial three hour interview rambled on. We returned to Laurens Van der Post eventually.

R: *I asked Laurens about the body-psyche split.*

LVP: *"I don't have any theories, you know, I'm just a writer", with a very heavy British accent, a beautiful accent, "I'm just a writer".*

(laughter all around)

R: *And then I'd talk to him about the Bushman, and he'd say: "All the original wild Bushmen are gone".*

F: *Uh huh.*

R: *He feels sad. There are planes flying into the Kalahari desert bringing tourists to find Bushmen, because of his writings about them.*

F: *Well, I don't know, now the hunt is on for the Aborigines in Australia, people flying into the outback. And people flying here into the Navajo country to see Indians. It's this deep rooted desire to get in touch with the land through these primordial races.*

R: *Desire to get in touch with the land, or is it desire to get in touch with the body, which is an extension of the land.*

F: *It's the same thing.*

R: *But it's not conscious.*

F: *No, it's all unconscious.*

R: *I would like to see it more conscious, you know. I have the impression, if LVP and you are right, that idealizing the primordial externally and trying to create primordial zones externally, doesn't seem to be working.*

F: *No.*

R: *The only option is that we try to ground it... I don't know exactly how to verbalize this... there is some way we have to do with ourselves. Because it's a little too late.*

F: *There aren't any places left. Not great big areas for primordial races. It's just about gone.*

We turned towards my own growing up amongst the East Coast Tribes.

R: *I have made good contact in the past with the Medicine Man of the Narragansett Indians and had long conversations with him. His name is Running Wolf Wilcox.*

F: **Good. I don't know him.**

R: *His father was Medicine Man, his grandfather was Medicine Man, and so on, going back indefinitely for generations.*

F: *Right.*

R: *He had some very powerful things to say to me. We would meet at a MacDonalds half way between his and my house, and talk over coffee. We would meet during intermissions of his dancing at the Narragansett's traditional midsummer Powwow, not far from that place first contact was made between Giovanni Verrazzano and North American primordial man.*

As we drew towards the end of our talk Frank started telling more.

F: *I use embodiment quite a bit. The US constitution embodies the virtues of courage and independence and so on. That means it's built into itself. Into the constitution. Into it's body. The body of its government. It has built into it these virtues. So when a person embodies anything, into their... (long pause) ... into their...*

R: *Into their being?*

F: *I'm trying to think of a word. They build into themselves independence and courage and all these virtues.*

R: *It seems like you're making a distinction between the idea of something and the actual embodying of that something.*

F: *That's true, because real ideas do not come from the head. When you embody it is your real character that you embody. You embody courage not in the head. That's what I mean.*

The interview ended as the Waters described to us how to find the burial site nearby of D.H. Lawrence, who both Frank and Laurens knew.