

"Our Indian Princess"

Subverting the Stereotype

! "Imagine Trying to Convince
the World You Exist"

TAMMY RAHR: Oh yeah, you get frustrated. There's no doubt. I get asked the dumbest questions. I was told there was no such thing as a dumb question, but these people need to be educated. You know, if someone has a misconception about Indian squaws, well, you need to set them right. You need to let them know where it's at. You know, "Hey, I can speak English. I can speak very good English. As a matter of fact, I can even write it. I went to school. I'm not ignorant. I'm a very caring, loving person." I've had people thank me. They've sent me gifts for taking the time to talk to them.

NANCY MITHLO: Is part of that presenting yourself as an Indian artist instead of as just an artist?

TAMMY RAHR: When I am out there, I am a woman, I am an artist, I am a mother, I am Indian. I am all of those things. If I can reach someone ...we are all related somehow. If I can utilize that, I will.¹

Are images and representations central to understanding Native Americans? How do Native artists, as producers of visual culture, respond to what art critic Lucy Lippard (1990a:13) calls "the overwhelming burdens" of Indian art? Cayuga artist Tammy Rahr expresses a felt responsibility to address the misconceptions of non-Indians she encounters in her work as a bead worker and an arts educator. This impulse to "set them right" is articulated as a

humanist reaction, not simply an economically motivated response. Further, she clarifies her self-identity not simply as an artist or an Indian artist but as a totality of gender, ethnicity, and professional and communal standing. Rahr's narrative highlights the topics I will examine in this inquiry: the power of stereotypes, the utility of pan-Indianism, the significance of realist ideologies, and the employment of alterity in Native American arts. My interest is how visual referents communicate across cultural divides—how images “work” in the pursuit of certain social aims.

Although this inquiry is centrally about stereotypes, I aim to deconstruct that term's common usage. The word *stereotype* has such negative connotations that its use is inherently burdened with only one interpretation, that of insensitive, demeaning, and even racist depictions. Instead, I will be talking about a more open, nonjudgmental reference to conveying otherness. I will employ phrases such as “strategic essentialism” and “conventional representations” to describe the ways in which disparate groups tend to employ damaged knowledge in trying to communicate self values and the values of contrast groups. I am generous in my analysis, attributing the uses of such “clusters of meanings” less to malice than to a lack of other conceptual tools. I do this because I want to examine how Natives and non-Natives employ conventions of representations for similar ends.

In seeking to understand those who are unlike ourselves, do we enact symbolic injustices? Often, yes. Should we then eliminate the use of these images in order to avoid potential negative consequences, such as a lack of self-esteem or the perpetuation of racism? At times, absolutely yes. The censure of clearly malicious and hurtful images should certainly be pursued when these typecasts intend to and do inflict harm. My aim is to reorient the conversations around race and representations from victimizers and victims, to the innovative subversion of hateful images by creative image producers. Why do we tend to regard the subjects of the gaze (those minority cultures so often depicted in one-dimensional typecasts) as solely passive recipients of negative naming rather than as active constructors of symbolic icons? While I agree with critical theorists who argue that mass media advertisements of generic Indian products may result in continued colonization, including denial of political claims, I additionally seek to demonstrate that other outcomes are also available, including political mobilization in concert with these images. Image producers have the most to gain and to lose in these fraught processes of racial representations because the stock in trade under consideration is their livelihood.

Rahr's articulation of the inseparable nature of her roles in life—“I am a woman, I am an artist, I am a mother, I am Indian. I am all of those things”

—reminds us that multiple perspectives are required to understand fully the complex ways in which image politics are currently employed. Gender and race as variables, then, must be treated “intersectionally,” to use law professor Kimberle Crenshaw’s (1991) term. Intersectionality as a concept denotes the ways race and gender interact, especially for oppressed groups who experience racism and sexism equally.

The dismissal of common female attributions, including fertility, softness, and domesticity (relegation to craft), does not erase these qualities from the public’s imagination, nor does it necessarily empower women who may choose to distance themselves from overt expressions of tribal sensibilities. The cultural values of gender and economics in the arts are both constitutive of and reactive to established paradigms of knowledge. These multiple sites of knowledge have the opportunity to be contested in the social arena of arts production and consumption, thereby allowing for highly charged articulations of identity claims. Qualities such as femaleness, maleness, isolation, belonging, and community find voice in the moments when conflicting ideologies meet.

These variables and how they interact are illustrated in the following passage from my interview with Santa Clara Pueblo sociologist Tessie Naranjo in 2000. In the ten years since I had previously interviewed her, Naranjo had completed a PhD in sociology at the University of New Mexico. Our relationship was, in part, defined by our shared experience of working on graduate degrees concurrently, and I was curious as to how her academic achievements had informed her ideas of self-identity.

NANCY MITHLO: I was wondering, do you now call yourself something different, like, if you’re giving a paper at a conference and they want you to put something in parentheses, do you now choose to say sociologist, artist, tribal person, woman—how do you handle that?

TESSIE NARANJO: How do I define myself?

NANCY MITHLO: Yeah.

TESSIE NARANJO: Um... [*pauses*] It’s neat that you ask that question. And people have asked me—every time there’s a presentation to be made, they say, “How do I introduce you?” And I say, I have a passion for community, I have a passion for family. Please tell in your introduction that I am from the community and I am very much a part of my extended family. So that’s what they’ll do. In terms of the labeling, the PhD thing, I almost never use it to define myself. I just say that I’m Tessie Naranjo, and as far as a sociologist is concerned, almost never do I say that, but I do know that privately they have

impacted my life so, so significantly, but that's my private experience. For the public world, I...don't need to, I don't need to define myself in that way. In fact, I almost...well, for sure, I prefer not to. I prefer not to because it is almost as if you are [*sighs*] depending on those labels to define you and I don't need to have those labels define me. But I do need to let the rest of the world know I am from Santa Clara Pueblo and I am a woman who treasures the wisdom of our past and who treasures the wisdom of what we still have and those are the ways that I work.²

Naranjo's narratives explore the meaningful ways in which the multiple identities of tribal person, artist, and woman intersect. These connections appear to contradict prevailing intellectual trends in feminist theory, art criticism, and cultural studies. For example, although hybridity is heralded as a normative reference for contemporary arts dialogues, tribal communities claim segmented spaces. Lippard's *Mixed Blessings* claims, "Faced with the facts of nomadism and displacement, many artists are trying to form a new hybrid cultural identity and to locate themselves therein," and she adds that tribalism in its exclusive sense "is a perverted, embattled form of community" (Lippard 1990b:153). By comparison, Naranjo writes of tribalism as an organic philosophy of life:

The notion of the container is crucial to the worldview of the pueblo. The lower half of our cosmos is a pot that contains life, the womb of the mother. The notion of containment also is evident in the pueblo plaza, which contains outdoor community activities and is bounded by the house forms and the hills and the mountains. As the house forms are made of the mud of the earth, so are the pots.
[Naranjo 2000:8]

Despite the prevailing acceptance of homogenized global sensibilities in media productions, many Native American and other indigenous artists continue to articulate a sovereign, bounded, and discrete identity based on land, family, and memory. A continued sense of separateness, fully positioned in the unique status of tribal nations and their special relationship to the federal government, prevails. This boundedness, however, cannot be interpreted as static; belonging is not enforced but rather employed according to political, technical, economic, and educational developments and changes in the world at large. Both material and ideological constructs enable communal paradigms to exist simultaneously with gendered identities.

Native Identity at the Crossroads— The New Stereotype

This text follows my interest in the ways Native American women in the arts describe and define their lives as professionals, family members, tribal members, and activists. The narratives I discuss testify to the dynamic, fluid character of self-definition as Native women resolve conflicting mandates in economic, political, and personal spheres. They also expose the problematic nature of conceptualizing self-identity as static—or even as an object—instead of an active, continual process.

The active interplay of self-definitions and societal definitions of self that I document here resists standard linear structures of assimilation, accommodation, or resistance. What I hope to show is that although contemporary Native women artists are at times limited by market values, media norms, and race and gender bias, these constraints are not all-encompassing. In fact, active self-narration is often structured in reference to how external stereotyping is flawed. In other words, self-definition may stem from negating the false images others project. Utilized as one productive resource among many tools of self-expression, these counternarratives provide rich insights into how contemporary indigenous realities are conceptualized and conveyed in visual registers.

While previous academic works have often collapsed Native identity formation and Native identity expression, I seek in this text to pursue a more nuanced approach. I argue that assertions of identity formation (and here one may productively substitute ethnicity, community, or even racial identities) are too ambitious and prone to overgeneralization. A more accurate reading, I believe, may be drawn from inquiring as to how individuals express identity through cultural productions in the arts. This line of reasoning privileges the communication of self via image politics as one means of understanding self-inscription. In all, the goal is to untangle the already overly complex and sometimes circular lines of reasoning that dialogues of race and representation typically take.

The approach of privileging counternarratives as a genre draws from similar theoretical approaches of symbolic inversion, alterity, othering, or binary tensions. I find this definition of differencing to be related to stereotyping in multiple ways that I will explore here. It is important to note that the societal use of popular icons in Native communities has a certain weight and importance that illuminates, but also challenges, the type of inquiry I pursue. Stereotypes of Natives by non-Natives—such as demeaning sports mascots, cartoons, films, and other visual forms—are known to

have a negative effect on the mental health of Native peoples. Opponents of stereotypes call for the eradication of negative images of Native Americans by erasure, such as changing place-names like Squaw Peak or retiring racist sports mascots like Chief Illiniwek. In 2005 the American Psychological Association (APA) called for the immediate retirement of all American Indian mascots, symbols, images, and personalities by schools, colleges, universities, athletic teams, and organizations (American Psychological Association 2005). Proponents of Native stereotypes argue that the images are not racist, claiming either that they are harmless or that they honor Native communities.

Stereotype as a term thus generally references solely negative images by whites that exploit Native American communities. I reference the use of patterned images in less judgmental terms. What I attempt to draw from my interviews is how Native women deal with essentialized images pragmatically—as well as how their own projections of white behavior may also be viewed as a form of stereotyping or essentializing. This type of othering by those commonly perceived to be the others has largely been unexamined. My discussion draws directly from Robert F. Berkhofer's work (1979), which asserts that white images of Natives tell us more about whites' attitudes and beliefs than about Native realities. Because my interest is not in whiteness studies but in Native American studies, I will explore whether Native views of whites serve a similar purpose of defining expressions of Native identity. I hope to demonstrate the utility of these iconic constructs as a means of communicating self-definition and maneuvering in hostile environments. Shorthand knowledge evident in stereotypes is then seen as a type of currency that exists and is employed in various social worlds.

This work is largely an intervention in theory, but it also aims to solve very basic social problems of alienation, dominance, and control. Readers will find that my analysis tends less toward victimizing Native American artists as powerless pawns in an alien market and more toward capturing perspectives that demonstrate an active defiance of limiting norms and an open challenge to oppressive economic and social parameters. My study has benefited from the recent scholarship of postpositivist realism in reference to the necessity of strategic essentialism (using image categories pragmatically) for advancing political claims in the public domain. Importantly, however, as Linda Martin Alcoff (2000:323) demonstrates, the "raw" use of strategic essentialism often serves to alienate the "knowing" theorists who use identity strategically from the "unknowing" activists who still believe in unmediated, essentialist identity constructs. Theory intervention in itself can be a somewhat elitist goal, so I have endeavored to embrace an interdisciplinary approach to the literature.

I am opportunistic about the breadth of the academic works I cite, gathering together theorists and artists in unlikely pairings to find where their interests intersect and diverge. While this survey approach method may be challenging to readers who desire a more straightforward analysis, I counter that the field of contemporary Native American art has yet to be defined and it cannot be defined by one individual or in one generation. The wealth of indigenous knowledge is vast and largely incomprehensible to those viewers and listeners trained to expect entertaining and easily comprehensible messages. The arts are particularly prone to these expectations, being associated with commerce and pleasure alone. Yet it is the artists of our communities who serve as our intellectual guardians and who, in these recent generations, have been treated largely as entertainers instead.

The Context

Context, as something more than ethnographic evidence, is central in the presentation of this material. My challenge is to create a sense of the “art worlds” contemporary American Indian artists inhabit, without falling into older patterns of exoticism or timelessness. Again, I issue a word of caution. Readers will not find alluring descriptions of the sights, sounds, and smells of native homes, pueblos, and landscapes. Disappointment may reign, but I also will not convey the beauty, presence, and allure of Native women for consumption under the rubric of intellectual knowledge. Not only do I wish to bring consumers of contemporary Native American arts to a level of maturity that has been starkly absent under the sway of consumerism, but I also have an obligation to construct a conversation between myself and the reader that is ethical to the communities with which I work. I am a polite conversationalist who will not betray secrets, yet I will also address topics so unused to seeing the light of day that I am confident readers will be engaged.

I foreground Native artists as knowing participants in the employment of essentialized identities, instead of naïve subjects of such theorizing. In order to do so, I mobilize Native women’s narratives as authoritative texts, much as published works might be cited. A reviewer who read early drafts of this book criticized my use of Native women’s narratives as “disembodied.” The suggestion was made that I “flesh out” and make “alive” their personalities. I refuse to do so. Given the decades of analysis by mainly non-Native writers who treat Native American artists as specimens, a personalized appraisal (what the artist looks like, where she was born) is, at this time, inappropriate. Just as I will not describe, for example, how a scholarly theorist looks, his age, or his residence, I refuse to dissect Native women’s

lives for personal examination. Their words, their narratives will be assessed as intellectual data in a manner similar to the published works of academics.

Native American arts scholarship has traditionally been pursued according to discipline-related or commercial criteria, such as anthropological descriptions of material culture; celebratory coffee-table books geared toward the consumer; museum catalogues; and the formal, stylistic examinations of Native works as art objects. More recent scholarship seeks to understand the total life of the object by exploring the history of collectors, tourism, and curatorial practices (Duncan 2001; Steiner 1994). In this work, I have chosen to focus on the ways in which a segment of a contemporary, urban, self-inscribed Indian community challenges, changes, and adapts to social influences that it defines as barriers or boundaries to its self-expression in the arts. This manuscript finds an affinity within literature on the urban Native experience, as well as Native women's life histories and cultural ethnographies (Cruikshank 1990; Lobo 2001). Unlike standard ethnographies, this research will not present a comprehensive analysis of "a people" in reference to categories such as social organization, politics, economics, or ecology. Standard regional assessments of traditional Native arts scholarship will not be pursued—but rather internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and political mobilization (Fixico 2000; Lobo 2001).

My methodology cannot accommodate the traditional sense of ethnography in which one maintains healthy objectivity or alternatively claims to have been adopted into regional communities. In my early twenties, I searched out opportunities to learn more about my tribe by pursuing internships in museums and attending the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, under a Bureau of Indian Affairs Higher Education Grant. I was fortunate to have as mentors key thinkers in the cultural revitalization movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Important teachers, intellectuals, artists, and activists informed my thinking and gave me opportunities to learn by doing, whether that meant making coffee and cleaning the toilet or forming an archive and curating exhibits. Larger-than-life figures in the Southwest who wrote the history of contemporary Native arts are as much a part of this story as the artists profiled. People such as Chuck Dailey, Manuelito Lovato, Lloyd Kiva New, Ed Ladd, Rick Hill, Jonathan Batkin, Anna Marie Houser, and Allan Houser have been friends, relatives, and teachers throughout the years. While these individuals have been influential in how I approach my subject, because of my strong-willed nature, it is likely that I have not taken their advice as seriously as I should have; therefore, any mistakes are my own.

I have not pursued research as much as I have sought answers to social problems in the arts that often present as exercises in racism. When artists are denied entry to a mainstream gallery, exhibit, catalogue, or competition on the basis of their Native American ethnicity, the problem is not so much a debate about aesthetics as a violation of civil rights. In one of my early case studies, a male Native American artist tested his suspicions of bias by first approaching a contemporary arts gallery in person to ask whether it was accepting new artists. After he was turned down, he immediately mailed slides of his work and a résumé (carefully omitting references to his Navajo background) to the same individual and was immediately called back. Other related identity constrictions in the arts market simultaneously exist—such as the pressure to produce only nonpolitical or decorative Native-themed arts. The arts serve as objects of manifold importance, but in the Southwest, where arts production is the engine that runs the household economy, as well as many aspects of state government and tourism, these debates hold more than aesthetic importance alone.

Returning to the IAIA over the years as a graduate student, I sought ways in which to make sense of the alienation of contemporary Native arts from consideration as fine arts. As an outgrowth of my work developing the Artist Resource Files at the IAIA Museum under Chuck Dailey, I began to tape interviews with artists and formulate a dissertation topic that addressed marginalization. Some of the work presented in this text draws directly from those early interviews (1989–1991). Other transcripts were made at the request of the museum director, Richard W. Hill, for the IAIA Museum opening in 1992. I began taping conversations with Native women artists again only in 1997, when I served as a professor of museum studies at the IAIA. Since then, I have continued periodic interviews with artists in Santa Fe and elsewhere.

The Native women profiled here generally like the idea of seeing their words from a decade ago and are very curious about what the other women have said and thought over the years. In fact, we are curious about one another—about our children, our relatives, our tribes, our homes, and our careers. At one point, I remember Tessie Naranjo asking how I felt in the morning. I didn't understand her question at first, but then she clarified, "Do you wake up and jump out of bed full of energy, or are you a bit stiff and tired?" When I replied that I was more likely stiff and tired, she seemed genuinely pleased that I, too, was aging along with the women I had spoken with over the years.

The conversations with artists have occurred on reservations in New Mexico and California; in New York City; Washington, DC; Albuquerque,

New Mexico; Venice, Italy; and Atlanta, Georgia. One artist interviewed is an Alaskan native who attended school and had children in New Mexico, moved to Hawaii, and spoke to me during her gallery opening in Vermont, testifying to the global realities of contemporary Native American life. Now that the Internet is so prevalent, I often speak with the women in cyberspace. How did I go about choosing artists to partner with? The Native women with whom I have spoken shift and change over the years according to their availability, interest, and accessibility. Since completing my graduate work, I have not actively sought out a representative “sample” of people to interview but have worked organically by following opportunities as they arise and listening to what I am told is important. Critical readers will likely find the epicenter of Santa Fe influencing the flow of ideas and data and will notice a concentration on urban Indians. In terms of a relative time frame, my interest is contemporary Native American arts—meaning, roughly, the work that has been produced since 1962, the year the IAIA was established.

Readers will note that I actively embrace the idea of the “every Indian” as a pantribal construct, as well as the reference “non-Indian.” As problematic as a generic Indian construct has been in reference to negative stereotyping, I suggest that the essentialism inherent in pantribal causes is also inevitable, given centuries of active colonial practices via various legislative acts (the General Allotment Act of 1887, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program, 1948–1979). Since contact with Native North American groups, the US government has enacted specific policies that have resulted in common legacies. I have worked in American Indian contexts for decades, and I can readily anticipate the challenges facing Native American communities (poverty, substance abuse, inadequate health care) as well as the strength of their core social values (allegiance to family, attachment to land, a holistic perspective). Like other identity constructs, the category of pan-Indianism exists and is employed variously as a means of locating self, a communicative device, and a political tool.

Finally, I have not sought to cross-reference the artists’ statements against historical records or other published accounts of their work but have incorporated their stories into a wider range of cultural studies discourses, highlighting areas of congruence and exploring issues of difference. In many ways, this work reflects a contemporary employment of subjective analysis, and as such, it may be seen to fall into the category of autoethnography (Reed-Danahay 1997) or narrative analysis. My study is qualitative, in-depth, and rich with a temporal complexity, reflecting twenty-three years of work with Native American communities and the arts.

Arts, Women, and Essentialism

I have chosen to concentrate on three variables for this discussion: the world of contemporary Native American arts, the experience of Native American women working professionally in this field, and the dynamics of essentializing and other forms of referencing ethnic and racial differences. Each of these fields of inquiry carries with it inherent tensions and assumptions that I hope to expose in providing key narratives from women's lives. A brief review of these apparent binaries and their histories may be helpful as an introduction.

The Native arts scholarship I encountered as an anthropology graduate student in the late 1980s was defined in terms such as *tribal arts* or *ethnographic arts*. Studies concerned the dilemma of the individual artist within a tribal community whose creativity was inhibited by communal norms or whose creativity forced him to disrupt collective behavior. Works such as Robert Layton's *The Anthropology of Art* (1991) sought to move beyond this functionalist and static interpretation of the arts by considering the factor of social change. Layton states, "Anthropologists have come to realize how false is the assumption that societies which lack a written history of change must necessarily be unchanging, and this must apply as much to art as to other aspects of culture" (198–199). Layton argues that sociocultural relationships emerge from interaction rather than constraint by the "disembodied realities" suggested in the model of cultural constraint. He emphasizes that culture acquires meaning through the ways in which social relationships are constructed, declaring, "The dichotomy between cultural tradition and individual innovation is a false one" (199).

Certainly, the constructs of individualism and communalism are constantly at play in so-called "tribal arts" discourse, but contemporary Native arts cannot today be productively defined under the category of "ethnographic." Assumptions about the primacy of communal norms are more likely to be expressed using terms such as *identity* or *culture*—descriptives that not only are specific to "small-scale" societies but could also be applied to any social unit. The movement of Native artists in mainstream fine arts and rural reservation communities defies the dated analysis that strictly sees the tribal as separate in time and space from the modern.

Several years ago, I attended an opening for American Indian artists at the American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Arts & Design) in New York City. I was pleased to see several of the exhibiting artists attending, as we had last met in Italy on the occasion of the Venice Biennale. It was a typical formal affair with wine and cheese. In the midst of the opening, the curator took to the microphone to welcome all the Native artists who, in her words, "had traveled so far from their homes on the reservation!" This

perspective sadly exposes prevailing notions of timelessness, authenticity, and bounded geography. However, by the same token, my cosmopolitan orientation also exposes the specific class and power location from which I speak and that informs the content of this inquiry. Alison Wylie (2003) calls this a “standpoint,” and for better and for worse, it does matter.

I fully recognize the type of prestige at play in the actions and values of educated, globally aware, and mobile professional Native spokespeople. An engagement in Native arts or culture commerce from a base in Santa Fe (as most of the artists interviewed had at one point or another in their career) requires several things: political standing as a Native person; some institutional recognition as a student, teacher, worker, or gallery artist; and enough wealth to travel between cities, mount publicity, make long-distance telephone calls, and perform any of the other myriad tasks involved in running a business. I recognize that this class standing, in particular, is a limiting factor for the universal application of my analysis, and I cannot claim that my work can be applied equally to all Native American artists.

The application of key terminology is an important consideration as well. Artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Enrolled Flathead Salish, member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation of Montana) observes, “There tends to be considerable confusion about Native art and how it should be defined and what do terms mean such as *contemporary* and *traditional*... The problem is that colonists have muddled meanings to suit their purpose” (Quick-to-See Smith, personal communication, February 14–15, 2007). Quick-to-See Smith cites the 1981 exhibit and text *Magic Images: Contemporary Native American Art*, by Edwin L. Wade of the Philbrook Art Center (produced with Rennard Strickland). The stylistic descriptions in this text are historically oriented, traditional, modern, and individualistic. Quick-to-See Smith notes that the label “modernist” is misleading, because it is “out of sync with Modernism in the mainstream, which happened in the 1930s” (2007). Other labels are viewed as equally problematic, including “the label Tribal Art, which is used by French ethnographers, as well as Sotheby’s, and means all people’s art everywhere who are not white. So then it has scarcely any meaning at all” (2007). Quick-to-See Smith concludes, “Because there is so little interpretative writing about Contemporary Native Art in the form of books, monographs, catalogs or good critical reviews, there is little understanding yet in the mainstream museums or with art historians” (2007). She suggests that, “like mainstream art, with its myriad categories, we could add some descriptive terminology to delineate more precise meaning in our long history of Native art” (2007). I hope to follow Quick-to-See Smith’s analysis in reviewing commonly employed categories and terminology for their utility: often rejecting, reappropriating, or substituting more relevant understandings.

The concept of Native Americans as simultaneously mobile, contemporary, and tribal has not yet been recognized by the non-Indian public. Although most Native artists in this study would not inherently see themselves as insurmountably grappling with two foreign cultures—one traditional, one modern—their lives are still patterned and restricted by the ethnic qualifier “Indian” and the inherent misconceptions of those unfamiliar with contemporary Native cultures. Do these perceptions of others lead to self-inscription? More specifically, does the act of addressing these misconceptions fuel identity? If so, can even negative referents advance positive self-representation? On the most general level of inquiry, do images and the labels that accompany them matter?

Given that American society is challenged daily to recognize and combat racism and that bias and oppression are lived realities for many ethnic groups, it is clear that the relevance of visual culture cannot be easily dismissed as unsubstantial. This study tracks how agency is exercised by Native women via the compromises, challenges, and appropriations of both external Western societal norms and manifestations of those Western norms incorporated as internal and indigenous. Purnima Mankekar describes how resistance and compliance cannot be viewed as mutually exclusive categories because “women’s subjectivities cannot be conceptualized in terms of one or the other” (1999:29). Her analysis, like this one, seeks to demonstrate “the complexity of resistance.” Importantly, Mankekar establishes the focus of inquiry as one directly addressing popular culture as a “*site of struggle* between dominant discourses and forces of resistance” (29).

For example, the debate of “individual versus tribal” finds expression most poignantly in the economic exchanges of the arts market but is also manifested in expressions of self-identity as an artist who is Indian. At a recent conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico (“Unlimited Boundaries,” at the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History, 2007), Navajo artist Emmi Whitehorse, whose narratives are featured in this text, was questioned about her ethnicity as a label. In other words, was she an Indian artist? Whitehorse replied that, no, she preferred not to be referred to as an American Indian artist (even if the premise of the exhibit was to display works only by Native American artists). She preferred, if at all, to be known as a woman artist. While many in the audience may have assumed that the debate was centered between tribalism and individualism, Whitehorse reminded the viewers that she was a member of another, equally important community of artists—women artists. This resistance by Native women artists to be subjected to a limited analysis is an essential component of the narratives I document here.

The variable of gender in the arts calls forth parallel patterns of inclusion and exclusion, individual and communal. For women, these tensions

are often based on the perceived dichotomy of public (male) and domestic (female) spheres of interaction. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine argue against what they term “the widely held view in the anthropological literature on sex role and art...that women confine their artistry to domestic use and appreciation” (1983:123). Referencing the case of Sioux women and the production of star quilts, they maintain that for the Sioux, “unlike Western societies, there has never been a clear-cut separation between public and domestic spheres. In the Sioux scheme of things, family and community are one and the same thing. By extension, then, domestic art is ipso facto public and vice versa” (137).

The addition of gender to discussions of race necessarily complicates public perceptions of Native American women—and consequently the perceptions Native American women have of themselves. The conception of domestic and public spheres of interaction as separate and distinct carries over to my discussion of contemporary Native women artists’ responses to societal notions of their role as bearers of tradition (the squaw) or exotic others (the Indian princess). These disparate stereotypes leave little room for Native women to position themselves concurrently as art professionals and committed family and tribal members.

Like the individual/collective binary, the scholarly literature and the lived realities of the “subjects” of such inquiries may well have moved beyond these conceptual divides—if the debates impacted them at all. (For instance, I doubt that the term *domestic* resonates with indigenous women.) It is important to note, though, that societal actors still struggle under the weight of these assumptions of identity, which are perceived to be all too alive in public discourse. For example, Cherokee leader Wilma Mankiller observes that the “appalling lack of accurate information about indigenous women fuels negative stereotypes. Television, film, and print media often portray indigenous women as asexual drudges or innocent children of nature,” concluding that in the larger society, “the power, strength, and complexity of indigenous women are rarely acknowledged or recognized” (2004:8).

The narratives I have collected testify to an overriding concern with family and community. Naranjo, from Santa Clara Pueblo, articulated this clearly in my interview with her when I asked, “What is the appropriate role of an artist in society?” She replied,

My role within the boundaries of this community is...as an individual...is to be responsible—or being in support of what the community defines as its personality. And if I’m a product of that, what are my responsibilities for helping to support the community role? And by that I mean things like language, things like ceremonialism,

things like art. Santa Clara is very big on art. We're one of the few communities, probably in the whole country, that is so art focused that we live, breathe art—even when we are not making art.

The public and communal spheres of interaction within this tribal community then intersect with the private and individual in ways that do not find congruence with standard Western norms. The artist is not at odds with society but rather a component of it. Art is not separate from community but rather an integral and philosophical aspect of community.

For other Native women artists, the economic necessity of making a living in order to support themselves and their families defines their rejection of the “individual artist at odds with society” paradigm. This “Van Gogh syndrome,” as I have termed it (Mitchell 1993:58), may not inform the artist's orientation on a personal level, yet on a pragmatic level, the starving artist myth does have consequences. Jemez artist Laura Fragua Cota muses:

Sometimes, I guess, when things are going rough and selling isn't going well and it's like, “Well, I think I'll go do the old Indian in a headdress on a horse, you know, and go try and sell that.” You know, because people are stuck on that image, Indian on a horse, or the Indian in a teepee, 'cause that's what sells. And yet, it's kinda a vicious cycle 'cause you don't want to be drawn into that. You know, this is what sells, so you have to paint an Indian on a horse. If you want to make money, that's what you have to do. A lot of times...I say, “No, I don't want to paint that 'cause that's not what I feel and that's not what I want to say.” And then when you are hungry and you're out of wood and you need money to buy something...you think, “Hmm, how long will it take me to do that horse?” [*laughs*]³

A compelling aspect of this economic tension is the perceived difference Native women express about their male counterparts. Women often challenge male Native artists for their unreflective acceptance of the separate spheres of interaction in the arts, their seeming acceptance, without critique, of the market's mandates to be a rugged individual. For example, a gendered response to individual artist–versus–communal artist expectations and standards is evidenced in the following comments by Charlene Teters, a Spokane artist, educator, and activist:

NANCY MITHLO: I wonder if you could comment on how your role as a woman informs your work. And is that different, do you suspect, than what maybe other artists, male artists, are doing and how their work is informed?

CHARLENE TETERS: Well, I think it can't help but be a part of it, but I'm not really conscious of it... I think, as women, we always think about the next generation or how it impacts future generations. Where... I think it's pretty apparent to me that our colleagues who are male, you know, think more about how this is going to impact me. You know, right now, how is this going to help me or whatever.⁴

This embrace of the societal responsibility by indigenous artists indicates alternative knowledge systems at play. The legacy of colonialism thus finds continued manifestation in the choices artists make in alignment with or rejection of market pressures.

Lastly, my discussion of image and stereotypes deals with another enduring ideological tension—that of insider and outsider as perceived by idealized identities, often referenced in the literature as essentialism. Berkhofer's *The White Man's Indian* (1979) demonstrates that white images of Indians tell about white attitudes and perceptions more than they elucidate any realities of Indian life. In this “paradigm of polarity,” whites assume uniqueness as classifiers and Native Americans as classified only through the content of specific imagery that persists over time: “Since Whites primarily understood the Indian as antithesis to themselves, then civilization and Indianness as they defined them would forever be opposites” (29).

Berkhofer is concerned by how this false binary results in a generalization of Indianness rather than a recognition of specific tribes and histories. He decries the essentialized image of the Indian, stating that it poses “major dilemmas for modern Whites as well as for Native Americans” (Berkhofer 1979:195). Although the use of a pan-Indian identity for Native political expediency is recognized, Berkhofer primarily advocates for cultural pluralism in the form of recognizing individual tribal identities over generic pan-Indian typecasting.

I critique Berkhofer's stance on this issue for not recognizing the important historical impact of pan-Indian organizations nationally (Hertzberg 1971) and the concomitant sense that only individual tribal entities deserve recognition as authentic purveyors of Native identity. This divide of pan-tribal versus individual tribal recognition is a complex argument for both Native and non-Native communities to grapple with, and I hope my attention to this issue will clarify relevant points of departure.

It is important to note that in my documentation of topics defined by tension and negotiation, I do not claim to resolve the binaries in any definitive way. I also hope that my discussion of perceived oppositions does not reify these categories. My work aims to demonstrate the multiple ways in which subjectivity is exercised, despite the contradictory predicaments of

modernity, including notions of authenticity, the feminine, commercialization, and individuality. This study finds familiarity with the approach taken by Fred Myers in his analysis of indigenous ownership of copyright in the Aboriginal arts of Australia (2004). His interest in the local understandings of what he terms “object-ideologies” reveals indigenous value systems that emerge from contestation and dispute. These “social dramas” and contested evaluations allow and make more real the values, strategies, and resources that indigenous artists exercise.

Because the economic necessity of marketing Indian arts does throw these dichotomous categories (individual/communal, public/private, insider/outsider) into high relief, I do attend to the ways community and family concerns are negotiated within economic constraints. However, because racism and sexism continue despite economic success, other modes of inquiry than economic determinism are needed for examining the experiences of Native women artists. I hope to take readers into my confidence concerning my own dilemmas in conveying the play between agency and victimhood in this cultural arena. Thus, defining moments of conflict are often highlighted in the narratives as vignettes illustrating the broader issues of what constitutes the feminine and how individual actors creatively play with restrictive categories of perception.

Tammy Rahr’s 1991 interview, for example, contains a painful story of how a beaded moccasin commission was contested after the buyers refused to pay for her work (see plate 2). Her intent had been to engage in an economic exchange characterized by traditional notions of respect, but she ultimately relied upon the Western legal system to obtain her wages.

I do my artwork the same for all people...because of the techniques, the traditional techniques. I don't have any kind of patent on these things. I can't hold a patent. It's not right for me to say, "They're mine." They are not mine—[they are], you know, for everyone. Whether that person be Indian or non-Indian, if they have a certain amount of respect, they can have the piece. And whether they give me cash money, whether they give me a load of wood, whether they will do a trade for materials, it doesn't matter, because I am getting some sort of service, some sort of goods.

Even if I don't sometimes necessarily like the person that I am working for, sometimes you have to say, "Okay, this is strictly a money thing." But the work does not change. I don't sit there and say, "Grr! I don't like this person" while I'm beading. I love my beadwork. That's the way I do it. I even had an instance where I didn't like the people—I really, I really didn't like the people, and afterwards I sort

of wished that I hadn't done the work... The people got fully beaded moccasins from me for a price that I felt was a little bit low. But I needed the money...I couldn't turn it down. I had to work for these people. Which, you know, was like—you have to do things you don't like sometimes for the good of your family. You got to put food on the table. They burned me bad. They ripped me off. They didn't want to pay me when it was done. They actually accused me of doing shoddy work. They said the designs were nothing close to what they had commissioned, and they were exact! I used real good beads. I felt...I didn't know what to feel! You know, I was mad. I wanted to spray-paint their cars! They refused to pay me. I said, "Well, okay, I guess—I don't want to argue with you, so I'm going to have to look into this from a legal standpoint." They harassed me. They gave me a hard time. I finally went to court and figured out how I had to do what I had to do. I took them to court. I got my money. In fact, I got three times my money...I look at it in this way—these people have some of the best work I ever did. The medicine in those moccasins is very good. She's going to be—she is the one who wears them. And I know that people will stop her when she is wearing those shoes, and they are going to say, "Beautiful moccasins. Who did them?" Eventually, it will turn around. And she will learn, too, you know, that you can't take advantage of people, because it's not right.

Apparently, the operative ideology of the buyers was a consumer relationship in which they might strike a bargain with a Native woman crafts-person, perhaps utilizing their status to gain the greatest advantage for themselves. Rahr was engaging in an exchange that was also ostensibly defined as a monetary transaction yet was equally informed by notions of reciprocity and respect. When this traditional frame of reference broke for her, she translated the exchange into a Western legal context to gain her earnings. Tellingly, this move was not an absolute, for she additionally applied a model of respect in which the transgressor would ultimately "pay" in being forced to acknowledge Rahr's talents publicly. These multiple, and at times contradictory, contexts of Native arts production and reception compellingly expose competing paradigms of knowledge.

Debating the Power of Images: "Everyone Came to See Indians, and Everyone Got to See Some"

"Everyone came to see Indians, and everyone got to see some," columnist Hank Stuever observed of the 2004 First Americans Festival at the National

Mall in Washington, DC. Held in association with the opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), the festival boasted an estimated twenty-five thousand registered Native American participants. Confessing that a “non-Indian couldn’t be blamed for delighting in the banal details that make today’s Indians seem less mythological and quite real,” Stuever recites a multitude of observations that “Brings Tradition to the Light of Today,” the subtitle of his piece “A Family Reunion.”

Wizened grandmas scooted around in late-model motorized wheel-chairs. Traditional music came out of the sound system, with occasional modern backbeats mixed in behind it. Indian families pushed high-end strollers, drank Diet Pepsi, and wore fanny packs under their shawls. Indians in full ceremonial garb waited for the morning procession to start, and everyone seemed to be using flip phones [Stuever 2004:C1].

A large accompanying photo is captioned “Talking on his cell phone as he waits to enter the new museum, Jimmy Goins from North Carolina seems almost an anachronism” (see plate 3). Stuever concludes, “The modern, living Indian of 2004 is the best thing yet seen in connection with the Indian Museum. Imagine trying to convince the world you exist” (C1).

Images of Indians appear to be consumed by the American public in even greater frequency than in decades past, thanks to the rapid reproduction of mass-produced images, the mobility of tribal people, and increased opportunities for tribes to communicate and congregate. Whereas an analysis such as Berkhofer’s *White Man’s Indian* could claim in 1979 that the “description, interpretation, explanation, and manipulation of the image of Indian as image *and person* were and are inextricably combined in White minds” (xvi, emphasis added), can the same hold true in an age when most tribes boast their own Web pages and casinos have reintroduced Indians in the public’s imagination? Stuever’s article seems to indicate a willingness to challenge, even with a slight glee, his own formulaic notions of imagery of Natives. Does this indicate a shift in public perception of Nativeness in the new millennium? The juxtaposition of perceived modern and traditional signifiers suggests that the image clusters for Native Americans are so tightly related that they are inseparable. It is this inseparable quality that can productively be mobilized in an understanding of how contemporary Native American arts continue to be restricted in their circulation. Conventional representations dictate that “real” Indian arts are infused with traditional, communal, and crafts-oriented connotations. Contemporary Native American fine arts violate this clean division by collapsing categories of the individual and the communal, the traditional and the modern. The impenetrability of this

categorization is demonstrated when either the artist is delegitimized (“Real Indians do not make that kind of art”) or the artist’s work is (“This fine art is crap. Real Indian art—craft—evidences skill”).

Although some developments seem to indicate that Native Americans are no longer prisoners of another’s imagination of them, other problems persist and are a cause of heated internal dialogues in marginalized communities. Image production politics demand consideration of material constraints. Native North Americans in general do not have access to the mainstream media outlets that would allow for proactive self-representation. Inhibited by economic constraints and external power structures, communities are torn between addressing others’ inaccurate images of them or ignoring these in order to direct scarce resources to tribally defined concerns such as land and water rights, health care delivery, or access to decent housing. The emerging literature on indigenous media representations (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002) and notable exceptions to this generalization—including such important media venues as the Sundance Institute’s Native American and Indigenous Initiative, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), Iglulik Isuma Productions, and newspapers such as *Indian Country Today*—provide insights into the manner in which these restrictions might be addressed, given adequate infrastructure.

At an Indian arts conference in New York City, I was pushed toward a reporter collecting information on the “buckskin ceiling.” This concept draws from the feminist “glass ceiling” theory and maintains that qualified contemporary Native American artists are kept out of fine arts because of racist stereotyping. Arguing the counter position—that stereotypes should not be interpreted as a defining factor—my opinion found its way into that week’s Sunday *New York Times* Arts and Leisure section:

If you look at native tribes today, there is an office for children’s services, an office for senior nutrition, an office for housing, education, for land issues. We don’t have an office for stereotypes. It’s not on the landscape. Of course stereotypes affect us. But native people have ways to deal with that, to take control of our own destiny. If we are still complaining about stereotypes, that means we are a disempowered people. And I just don’t buy that. [Shulman 2000]

I wouldn’t change that quote today, even if its lack of nuance appears to align me against many of my professional peers. I respect and support committed efforts to overcome negative stereotypes. What I wish to do, however, is move the locus of discussion away from the actions and motivations of the oppressors and toward the experience of the oppressed. Those who

perpetuate degrading images such as sports mascots deny Native people's basic human rights. Their actions do have power and consequences. Yet this struggle to educate others about the realities of contemporary Native life necessarily takes precious resources (time, expertise, and money) away from Native communities and into (comparatively) affluent non-Native communities. It is this expenditure of resources that is rarely brought to the fore of identity debates.

In an age of global communication, clear restraints on what images are given public play do exist and are a cause for concern. A 2004 editorial in *Indian Country Today* titled "Natives Must Educate America, or Perish" indicates the depth of this concern. Citing the growth of anti-Indian propagandist efforts led by groups such as One Nation, the author threatens, "Indian country leadership dismisses it at its own peril" and continues:

In America circa 2004 public metaphor is everything. One Nation and other groups that need someone to attack, joined to the politicians of various states, are now onto something: The power of the Indian image in the American mind can perhaps be damaged and reversed: From legitimate governments comprised of the first people and rightful property owners of this land, to greedy, special-interest casino kingpins.

The campaign to dislocate the Indian image in the public mind and relegate it to the outer edges of American consciousness—along with other "troublemakers" or anti-Indian elements—puts in peril the Indian generations. Indians must do one better. We need to cover the same ground much, much, better; much more consistently, with better quality and, most importantly, with the truth.

There are positive, negative, confusing, and simply neutral media stereotypes. American Indians have suffered them all, and of all of them the one most closely tied to reality, even when romanticized and overused, is the American Indian as "caretaker" of these lands. [*Indian Country Today* 2004]

Calls for eradication of stereotypical images that are viewed as damaging are often coupled with a demand for the use of images that are accurate and more appropriate culturally. The power of images is thus recognized, and the mobilization of that power is championed. This opinion piece champions the use of a positive stereotype, that of the "Indian environmentalist," as an acceptable icon, given the manipulation of negative images elsewhere. The commentator is likely referencing the popular "crying Indian" 1971 ad campaign for Keep America Beautiful—"People start pollution. People can stop

it.” This very positive image of an Indian man as the natural caretaker of the environment was a welcome departure from earlier depictions of Native men as inherently warlike and fearless. Readers forty and older will remember how the actor (thereafter known only as “Iron Eyes Cody”) was depicted in full buckskin, paddling through polluted waters and encountering a littered freeway. As a passing motorist tosses his discarded fast food at Cody’s beautifully beaded moccasins, the actor turns to the camera and sheds a single tear. Ironically, “Iron Eyes Cody” was later exposed as an ethnic fraud; he was said to be of Italian descent and not Native American. Apparently, even a false image, if effective enough, justifies the perpetuation of positive image icons.

Contrasting debates characterize images in the arts and media as meaningless, calling for the rejection of a concern with stereotypes altogether. One recent editorial argued, “While the issue of appropriating Indian names and identities—the mascot controversy—is important, it...is a minor focus in the fundamental issue of tribal sovereignty survival and the preservation of tribal cultural integrity” (*Indian Country Today* 2006). Ironically, these dismissals of popular culture are often simultaneously paired with a longing for access to media as a potential source of political power in the form of self-representation. Certainly, one cannot deny the power of images (stereotypes) and simultaneously assert the power of images (self-representation).

A problematic dimension of the stereotyping phenomenon is the targeting of popular media (film, television, ads) as the racist culprit paired with the mandate to increase opportunities for Indian people to produce in these same industries (Mihesuah 1996). The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History issued a report in 1996 titled “Erasing Native American Stereotypes,” which cited a symposium on contemporary American Indian art at which “several Native American artists asked why their paintings and sculpture are rarely shown at fine arts museums, but are more likely to be exhibited at anthropology and natural history museums. Native American artists also question why their work is not combined with other American artists’ work in shows on American art” (Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History Anthropology Outreach Office 1996).

This sort of analysis seems intuitively to link image circulation with institutional resources—but without directly addressing the manufacturers of the images they see as redemptive. Native American image production is not a simple cause-and-effect phenomenon but entails the complexities of professional arts training; access to resources, supplies, and outlets; and the matching of perceived political aims and methods. Native American artists as image makers are experts on the meanings of stereotypes and are adept at reappropriating these images for generative ends, including critiques of white culture. Their ability to mount these critiques, however, depends

upon the accessibility of an institutional framework that will enable their statement.

Mentalist and Realist

One way to conceptualize the relative import of imagery in Native North America is to consider the material and psychological consequences of visual productions and reception. In other words, why would a study like this be of importance to contemporary Native American communities? Aren't uninformed non-Indians just naïvely trying to make sense of Native others? Isn't the field of art secondary in importance to the more pressing concerns of health and economics?

In "Anthropology and History of the American Indian" (1981), Robert Bieder describes what he terms a mentalist orientation to Native American imagery. Rather than view Indian images as the product of "social, economic and political conditions," such as judicial history or Manifest Destiny, mental constructs of savagism argue that ideology influences public action and government policies; thus, "the image of the Indian as savage provided the rationale for his extinction" (Bieder 1981:320).

Drawing from these central premises, Berkhofer constructed a related argument, wherein he proposed that one group of scholars sees imagery "as the primary explanation of White behavior vis-à-vis Native Americans" and the other understands imagery to be "dependent upon the political and economic relationships prevailing in White societies" (Berkhofer 1979:31). Whereas the mentalists concentrate on imagery and ideas, the realists emphasize "policy and actual behavior toward Native Americans" (31). Thus, mentalists and realists argue opposing orientations in terms of cause and effect. Mentalists position imagery as primary, while realists privilege political and social acts. According to these frames of reference, my *New York Times* "I just don't buy that" stance would likely place me in the realist category.

I find the mentalist/realist theory to be a powerful mechanism for a deeper understanding of the debates over what Mary Louise Pratt (1982) has termed "conventions of representation." Mentalist and realist orientations, when they privilege causality, are often mobilized in ways that distract from, rather than clarify, key theoretical positions, for ascertaining causality does not substantially alter the manner in which one can make sense of the potency of image making and consumption. Pratt's textual analysis of literary devices in eighteenth-century fiction and travel accounts similarly addresses this question of causality. She asks, Does fiction follow autobiography, or does autobiography follow fiction? Her answer is that neither form suffices independently but that representational codes should be studied

“across categories” (141). Her analysis decenters the questions of truth (travel writing) versus falsehood (fiction) and instead focuses on generalized strategies of representation that share similar core traits of employing systems of dominance (in this case, the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” scene).

The search for causality itself must be critically examined for its usefulness in understanding identity constructs and their employment. Political action for the elimination of Native American mascots premises causality as primary—racist acts follow racist images in a cause-and-effect argument. Eradication of racist images should result in greater tolerance and acceptance of pluralism, yet often racist acts continue despite these proactive measures. For example, the University of Illinois recently “retired” the problematic Chief Illiniwek mascot after decades of political mobilization by social justice groups (Des Garennes 2007). This act followed sanctions by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which ruled that mascots like Chief Illiniwek were “hostile and abusive” (Zeller 2007). The sanctions would appear to signal a new awareness of the implications and harms perpetuated by race-coded icons that mock Native American spirituality and culture and thereby create an atmosphere of intolerance for Native students. Yet other universities that have eliminated Native mascots, such as Stanford University, find that alumni organizations continue to insist on resurrecting the Indian mascot, claiming their right to the symbol (Woodward 2001). Although the most egregious acts of bias and hate are likely diminished with eradication, the production and circulation of loaded images continue. David Pilgrim, curator of the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, similarly reports on the “mammy,” “Sambo,” and “coon” collectibles recently reproduced and available on eBay (Papadopoulos 2005).

Of the many problems inherent in the Chief Illiniwek figure, one prominent issue is his configuration as a generic pan-Indian in Plains regalia, which is not congruent with Illini tribal dress or religiosity.⁵ Pan-Indian configurations are often collapsed into a critique of stereotypical imagery (including mascots) and therefore become a part of the total complex of relationships that privilege mentalist arguments. My research has identified what I term “clusters of analysis” that surround mentalist and realist arguments (see appendix two). The manner in which these clusters “work” demonstrates how a theoretical basis of Native arts inquiry is challenged. In sum, mentalist codes privilege tribally specific, historically accurate imagery. Pantribal referents are critiqued as the central element aiding the construction of negative stereotypes. Berkhofer states, “Most Whites who use the word *Indian* have little idea of specific tribal peoples or individual Native Americans to render their usage much more than an abstraction, if not a stereotype” (Berkhofer 1979:26). The understanding is that a sensitive

America will relinquish legacies of hate and discrimination once it becomes fully informed of tribal diversity. Realist concerns tend to accept modern engagement in hybrid and urban pan-Indian environments, arguing that access to material resources will hold more sway over public policy than solely mentalist ideas about Indians.

Although images are essential to communicating values and norms, what we don't know (and what is beyond my capacity to prove here) is whether images actually form identity or impact policy substantially. I argue that instead of debating the primacy of cause, a more productive route is to consider how people think of images—how these are constructed, produced, and used and with what intentions. As image producers, artists have a major role to play in this process, yet even their construction of new images may be appropriated into other prevailing norms. John Hutnyk reminds us in *Critique of Exotica* that

visibility does matter in a context where exclusion from resources and opportunities is much more than an absent-minded and myopic blindness of the dominant cultural groups, to be repaired by policy. But it is also my argument that visibility here is only one part of a struggle, as state-sponsored celebration of increased visibilities for hitherto “marginal” groups can readily be turned into market opportunism. [Hutnyk 2000:115]

Thus, it is important to consider not only the character of images, the availability of images in the public sphere, and the authors of those images but also the use to which such imagery is applied. Source communities may find that a lack of recognition could be preferable to a manipulation of visual culture that fails to advance basic socioeconomic agendas. Control and purposeful manipulation of visual imagery become key variables in examining the impact of stereotypes. Should oppressed communities reappropriate derogatory imagery for their own political ends? Does this appropriation invalidate objections to stereotypes? Self-representation may be curtailed at many junctures—the production, consumption, and employment of images and ideas depend on a careful reading of context.

Testimonials and Alternative Knowledges

I think for a long time...that I had to make clowns—that was what I was supposed to make, I guess...and I was like “No, I don't want to do that. That's like putting me in a little box and throwing away the key.” And so I really pushed for that to not be the case. Also, for a long time I didn't want to be just labeled as “Indian artist.” I just

wanted to be an artist that wasn't—again, it seemed like a box, because there was too many judgments on what it meant to be an Indian artist. Now...I was really into that for a while, where there was like "I'm not going to be an Indian artist. I'm not going to be labeled that. I'm a person first." But now I'm more "It doesn't matter. They can call me that if they want." I don't really care at this point because I am an Indian. I do have... It has affected me very deeply. And so what I make does come from how I was brought up. Which is partly Indian. And so it's okay, but I don't want to be then told what to make because of it.⁶

The introduction of a sense of history to the understanding of agency is an essential consideration, for not only do individual actors themselves mature and adjust in their negotiations with dominant ideologies, as Santa Clara Pueblo artist Roxanne Swentzell illustrates above, but disenfranchised peoples as a collective can also be said to exercise various strategies through time.

Norman L. Kleeblatt (1998:30) characterizes the cultural critique of minority artists (Latino, African American, Asian American, Native American) at the end of the millennium as "resistant," "defiant," and "radical." These "strident" discourses are programmed to "break barriers to educational opportunity and cultural authority" and to "crack systems of dominance from without" (30). This resistance is positioned opposite of models of assimilation (his example addresses Jewish artists after World War II) that were creative but generally operated within dominant paradigms. Offering an alternative model, Kleeblatt considers how minority artists may historically have spoken strategically through dominant power structures, operating somewhere between assimilation and defiant resistance.

The contemporary Native American experience that I am addressing mirrors Kleeblatt's middle space, as actors strategically position themselves both inside and outside dominant modes of artistic reception while maintaining the right to move freely between competing ideologies. While assimilation connotes victimhood and resistance signals unencumbered agency, the ability to speak through master narrative entails an active critical engagement with existing structures of reception. Swentzell's narrative illustrates how one actor may challenge societal restraints ("I'm not going to be an Indian artist") in the mode of resistance or, alternatively, allow the play of essentialist ideologies ("They can call me that if they want") in the sense of assimilation. The master narrative here is the act of labeling—"putting me in a little box and throwing away the key"—a destiny that is avoided as Swentzell refuses to be "told what to make because of it." Her statement is a testimony to the ability to speak through restrictive categorization.

Personal testimonies of oppression are thus a potential means of understanding multiple identifications enacted in certain contexts. Kay Warren (1997:23) describes the *testimonio* genre, widely used in Latin America as a means of “giving authority to subaltern voices.” Testimonies are conceived as collective representations that draw power from the act of witnessing: “On the one hand, they represent eye-witness experiences, however mediated, of injustice and violence; on the other hand, they involve the act of witnesses presenting evidence for judgment in the court of public opinion” (22).

The embodiment of collective truths in the testimonial genre expands the field of theoretical considerations for ethnographic writing. The legitimization of collective truths entails multiple concepts of authority and, as such, is a crucial component of scholarly approaches reflective of indigenous realities. In this sense, testimonials reference a unique analytical stance that stands outside prevailing academic discourses that problematize individual and group identifications. A refusal to parse individuation from collective membership or even a privileging of collective identity can be seen, then, as a radical (in reference to the academy) departure from the way in which personhood is conceptualized. This consideration of indigenous knowledge systems represents an alternative interpretation of visual analysis.

An alternative knowledge base can also be manifest in the aesthetic decisions of artists. While abstract modernist work may appear to be visually free of obvious cultural indicators and definitely not adherent to Native American aesthetic icons, the impulse of the artist may closely adhere to Native American value systems. For example, Whitehorse describes her canvas as one in which “I intentionally paint beauty” (see plate 4), but her sense of beauty is a cognitive, as well as visual, attribute:

The inequalities for Indian nations are frustratingly numerous, rarely fully understood, often outrageous, and even heartbreaking, yet I paint serene landscapes: worlds that are nonviolent, nonpolitical—whose social commentary is beauty. My works are purposely meditative and meant to be seen slowly. Light, space, and color are the axis around which my work revolves, applying principles of aesthetics and ethics to create balance or harmony in accordance with Navajo philosophy. I intentionally paint beauty, to protect and insulate myself—to keep sane. [Whitehorse 2007:70]

While Whitehorse’s statement explicitly rejects the use of political registers in the content of her work, her philosophical approach to the process of making art is nevertheless unquestionably a political stance. This declaration

of an indigenous approach to art making—communal, meditative, in accordance with Navajo philosophy—is at stark odds with notions of the artist as genius, the individual artist, the commercial artist, or even the easily readable ethnic artist creating works in the vein of a celebration of cultural diversity. This register of thought offers the viewer a glimpse into what might be available in the intellectual legitimization of contemporary Native American arts as a philosophical area of inquiry.

The following chapters will apply the critical issues of identity constructs to a specific group study. Chapter 2 explores the ways in which economic constraints and established fine arts paradigms foreground various ethnic affiliations, including the formation of pan-Indian identities. Chapter 3 considers indigenous conceptions of art practices, including political orientations and place-based aesthetics. Chapter 4 critically examines the aims and consequences of appropriated identities, asking, Is it true that when we engage in another's otherness (even in opposition), we become them by matching their criteria? I question how certain representations are privileged in Chapter 5. What do actors/image makers do with monopolized images? How do privileged "clusters of meanings" configure pantribal affiliation and activism?

I hope these forays into identity dialogues as they relate to the Native American experience in the arts may serve to expand the existing conceptualizations of Nativeness as constricted in time and space. While images are certainly essential to communicating values and norms, these same signals are also worked in unexpected ways: questioning, critiquing, and appropriating—yet never simply succumbing.

Notes

1. Quotations from Tammy Rahr in this chapter are from the author's interview with her on June 5, 1991.

2. Quotations from Tessie Naranjo in this chapter are from the author's interview with her on September 18, 2000.

3. Laura Fragua Cota, interview by the author, January 5, 1991.

4. Charlene Teeters, interview by the author, October 24, 1996.

5. See "A Challenge to the Chief," http://www.uillinois.edu/trustees/dialogue/report_files/V.html and www.retirethechief.org/, accessed January 24, 2007.

6. Charlene Teeters, interview by the author, October 24, 1996.