Bordering on Feminism:
Home and Transnational Sites in Recent Visual Culture and Native Women’s Art

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the home both as a theme in contemporary art by Native North American women artists and as a means to engage Native women’s art and visual culture in a critical, intercultural feminist discourse. The home is a rich and complicated site in feminist theory and women’s history; it holds additional meaning in Native cultures, where it has ties to specific cultural traditions, to homeland, and to the history of colonization. Artists working in performance, video, film, photography, and installation explore aspects of the home; of particular interest here are those works which relate to intercultural encounters between Native and non-native women.

Transnationalism is introduced as a conceptual framework for analyzing home, gender, and identity in Native women’s art and visual culture. Relying heavily on feminist interpretations of transnationalism, borders, migration, diaspora, cosmopolitanism and hybridity, this dissertation addresses the multiple contexts for Native women’s identities and homes. It explores how artists present an experience of homeland and collective identity that reflects their position as global citizens whose own experiences and identities may find points of commonality with the experiences and identities of artists from other cultural, ethnic, and national positions.

Contemporary artists discussed include Sama Alshaibi, Rebecca Belmore, Hannah Claus, Bonnie Devine, Rosalie Favell, Danis Goulet, Maria Hupfield, Marianne Nicolson, Shelley Niro, Alanis Obomsawin, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, and
Anna Tsouhlarakis. In order to consider representation and encounter between Native and non-native women more broadly, a close reading of the photographs Gladys Knight Harris took of Iñupiat women in Kotzebue, Alaska in 1949 is also presented.
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Introduction

This dissertation results from the union of two intellectual passions: a deep interest in the culture, creativity, and aesthetics of contemporary Native \(^1\) art on the one hand, and a steadfast commitment to a feminist study of women’s lives and women’s work on the other. I bring these two passions together in order to demonstrate how feminism informs the production of art by Native women, while also presenting a challenging and rigorous strategy for interpreting and theorizing art and visual culture.

At times, reconciling these interests presents as many challenges as it does rewards. Each of these areas of study, taken alone, is laden with significant historical, political, and cultural baggage. When combined, they present even further tension, at times betraying seemingly irresolvable incompatibilities. Despite these impediments, the possibilities that Native art suggests for contributing to new avenues of feminist theory are rich. Equally rich are the opportunities that feminism presents for deepening and broadening the study of Native art, especially art by women artists.

\(^1\) In Canada, “First Nations” is the term generally preferred by Native peoples to describe themselves collectively. It usually does not include the Inuit nor the Métis peoples. In the United States, “Native American” is still more commonly used. As I write about artists working in Canada and the United States, I mostly employ the more general and inclusive term “Native.” This also, thus, encompasses the Métis artists whose work I include in this dissertation, and members of the Inupiat community which one chapter relates to. Occasionally, I will use “First Nations” when discussing a context that specifically relates to Canada, and likewise “Native American” for the United States. “Indigenous” and “aboriginal” are also terms preferred by some Native peoples; I use those terms occasionally when appropriate to the context, usually when referring to Native peoples on a broader, global scale.
This oscillation between unease and possibility provides a constant thread; it marks this dissertation and my approach to it. It also gives it focus and has compelled me to approach these topics in what I consider to be an ethical and rigorous manner.

Given my desire to bring together the study of contemporary Native art, women’s culture and practices, and feminism, the *home* provides an especially fitting theme and motif around which to center my investigation. The home is of paramount importance to women’s history and to feminist theory as a site of struggle and identification. Yet the home is not a cliché; it too is fraught with tension. It can be both a prison and a refuge, a site to be refused and embraced; and in various instances, it is associated with such diverse notions as comfort, escape, activism, intellectual activity, family, love, terror, work, and creativity. It is a location that has been rejected by some feminists just as often it has been celebrated and re-appropriated by others. Importantly, this panoply of values holds as true for Native women in North America as it does for non-native women, although these values are not universal, not necessarily shared, nor experienced at the same time or in the same ways.

Home resonates in an additional, particular way for Native people, in the context of homeland. Homeland inheres struggles for sovereignty, and legal battles for territory and resource rights continue to be of importance for many Native people. Homeland maintains a central position in politics, and stands as a major negotiating field in cross-cultural relations. Over and above this political dimension, land comprises a central aspect of identity for many Native peoples. As a key component
of indigenous identity, an identification with land unites the many diverse Native peoples of North America. Conceptual ties bind up home with homeland, and together they evoke the private and public, the personal and the collective, the domestic and the political.

While home and homeland correlate in inviting ways, I wish to avoid – and dislodge – overly simplified binaries between the two concepts, such as public and private space, masculine and feminine, and Native and (white) non-native identities. To this end, I introduce transnationalism to my study of Native women’s art and use this as a conceptual framework for analyzing home, gender, identity, and visual culture. Relying heavily on feminist interpretations of transnationalism, borders, migration, diaspora, cosmopolitanism and hybridity, I address the multiple contexts for Native women’s identities and “homes.” Through the framework of transnationalism, I explore multiple turns on occupation of space – i.e., location, heritage, gender politics and identity – without reducing those complex concepts to simple binary oppositions such as “traditional/modern,” “reservation/urban,” “colonized/colonizer,” and “indigenist/feminist.”

In the chapters that follow, I analyze how Native women artists express a lived experience of home that speaks to issues of culture and gender. As well, I explore how those artists present an experience of homeland and collective identity that reflects their position as global citizens whose own experiences and identities may find points of commonality with the experiences and identities of artists from other cultural, ethnic, and national positions. The artists whose work I treat come
from different locations throughout Native America and they work in different media – performance, installation, film, video, photography and painting. Guided by multiple understandings of “home,” I tie contemporary art to feminism in order to demonstrate how feminism informs the production of art by Native women and how it can offer a challenging and rigorous strategy for interpreting and theorizing art and visual culture.

Feminism has come to hold many meanings; its pluralized spelling – feminisms – if somewhat inelegant, is nonetheless wholly appropriate, and should be understood to be implicit in my presentation of contemporary feminist positions. Yet in the context of indigenist feminism, Joyce Green lays out a definition for feminist theory as one that seeks to ‘describe and explain women’s situations and experiences and support recommendations about how to improve them’ and is based on ‘respect for women’s own perspectives and authority.’ Feminism is also a social movement fuelled by theory dedicated to action, to transformation – to praxis. Feminism is usually viewed as multiple: feminisms analyze the diversity of women’s cultural, political and in other ways specific experiences.²

This marriage of theory and praxis, of ideas and experience, as well as a move to voice and relate the particular positions of women is a model feminists from many standpoints can work with.

Sandy Grande, a scholar of Quechan heritage who addresses inter-cultural feminism in her work on Native pedagogy finds that in spite of the range of feminisms today, there is “little if any intersection among these feminisms.” She continues:

In other words, women of color tend to be the ones writing about race and feminism, lesbi-bi-transgendered women about sexuality and feminism, working-class women about class and feminism, and middle-class heterosexual women about a depoliticized feminism. Thus it isn’t that the feminist discourse has intrinsically diversified, but rather has simply evolved to be more pluralistic, “inviting” different voices at the same time the existing axes of power are retained. More pointedly, contemporary feminism is ghettoized terrain, marked by an uneven playing field wherein whitestream feminists commandeer “the center,” and subaltern women, the margins. This reality calls into question the self-proclaimed death of whitestream feminism, (re)inviting examinations of the field from a variety of perspectives. 3

This dissertation takes a feminist standpoint in theorizing Native women’s art. While I examine the limits of whitestream feminism and its critiques, especially by indigenist feminist scholars, I also seek to broach the “ghettoized terrain” that in part comprises Grande’s critique by exploring how transnational feminism applies to the work of women artists in Native America. Following the call of Chandra Talpade Mohanty to explore the “complex relationality” between women transnationally, 4 I examine how these complex relations occur around the suggestive and shifting site of the home.

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The work of transnational feminist theorists like Mohanty, Sara Ahmed and Avtar Brah, theorists whose anti-racist scholarship focuses on displacing tired narratives of First World domination, is apt, highly influential in my thinking, and invites consideration in the context of Native America. Other feminists like Sara Mills and Ann Laura Stoler, whose attentiveness to the subtleties of cross-cultural encounters between women and the feminized nature of colonial spaces, prompts me to revisit historical spaces even while looking at the contemporary moment. Insightful perspectives on indigenist feminism and Native women’s issues provided by Devon Abbott Mihesuah, Lee Maracle, and Kim Anderson guide and, at times, temper my unruly enthusiasm for making connections across borders.

The dissertation proceeds as follows. In Chapter 1, I focus on a single case study, Anishnabe artist Rebecca Belmore’s performance, *Vigil* (2002). There, I survey the feminist issues which inform this dissertation as a whole: Native women’s critiques of feminism, the possibilities and relevance of transnational feminism, and the politics of contemporary relationships of solidarity between Native and non-native women. *Vigil* memorializes the violent murders of Native women who disappeared from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside neighborhood. Through my discussion of Belmore’s street-level performance, I consider urban space as Native home space, but also, specifically, I address the blighting of this neighborhood in the public imagination and the real dangers faced by the women who live there and those who work there in the sex trade. I draw parallels between the migration of Native people to urban areas and trends in global migration to establish a relationship that links
Belmore’s expression of the experience of Native women in a Canadian city with the tenets of transnational feminism as theorized by Mohanty, Brah, and others. Lastly, I consider how Belmore’s site-specific performance about violence against women provides an arena for what Jodi Dean terms *reflective solidarity* between feminists across cultures.

The relationship between land, landscape and homeland forms the basis of Chapter 2. While land is frequently cited as constitutive of Native identity and is a recurring theme in Native art, landscape is not a tradition that has frequently been employed in terms of those artistic practices. Landscape, especially in Canada, is a genre of painting that is as bound to the idea of nationalism as it is masculinist in orientation and exclusionary to the narratives of Native peoples and non-European Canadians. In part to question the idea of landscape and in part to closely examine the relationship between land and Native women in a visual culture context, I present Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin’s documentary film, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993) as a landscape. The film depicts a galvanizing moment in Native activism in North America: the 78-day standoff at the Kanesatake Mohawk reservation in Quebec between Mohawk people (including numerous women), Quebec police, and the Canadian army. The 1990 event, known as the Oka Crisis, exploded over plans by the adjacent municipality to redevelop long-contested Mohawk territory into a golf course. In her film, Obomsawin presents a cinematic treatment of the land in question, but also presents a thoughtful, multi-valenced and culturally-specific portrait of the relationship between Kanesatake’s Mohawk people
and place, giving special visibility to the community’s women. By focusing on the visibility and status of women, I evaluate the relationship between gender and landscape, gender and Native nationalism, and gender and racial essentialisms that inhibit the investigation of Native women’s ties of land, place and political engagement. Drawing on the work of other Native artists, Maria Hupfield (Anishnabe), Shelley Niro (Mohawk), and Bonnie Devine (Anishnabe), I argue that Obomsawin presents a powerful portrait of a *homeplace* that is tied to the land. Through her use of testimonial, media footage and historical documents, she presents a postcolonial landscape that refutes and transforms the established tenets of the genre.

If Obomsawin’s *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* provides an emphatic meditation on a community’s fight to retain its home as that home relates to the land, Chapter 3 surveys the ways in which Native artists have explored the home as it relates to the house – the structure itself, the private domain, and its attendant associations with gender, family, and colonial history. I discuss the work of five artists: Hannah Claus (Mohawk), Rebecca Belmore, Marianne Nicolson (Kwakw̓ak̓’wakw), Danis Goulet (Métis) and Rosalie Favell (Métis), all of whom engage the structure of the house or the interior space of the home and relate it to the relative concept of feeling *at home*. Homeliness and unhomeliness are threads which tie these works together, pointing to the complexity and richness of the home as a site for artistic intervention. That these artists make use of the home space quite differently suggests the various ways in which Native women’s art can: critique a
narrative of domestic space that privileges white, middle-class female subjects; engage colonial history by addressing the practices of domestic imperialism and its female subjects; position the home as an indigenous space and present variations on what such a space inheres; and make public the site of private histories of families. These strategies and themes of engagement intersect in this chapter within a wider context of 20th century colonial and inter-cultural history relating to the home and to Native perspectives on it: topics include reservation housing, residential and boarding schools, and urban upbringings. Thus, practices of home-making, as well as those characterized as domicides, form the backdrop to this chapter.

The first three chapters focus on art made after 1990, and predominantly, after 2000. Each of them situates art objects and art making within a broader historical and visual culture context, providing a social and materialist context for theorizing and understanding not just art production, but the lives of women and Native people. I heed Mihesuah’s observation that female scholars who write about Native women fail to “connect the past to the present.” Thus in Chapter 4, I examine the photographs of a white, non-native photographer, Gladys Knight Harris, taken during a 1949 visit to the Iñupiat community of Kotzebue, Alaska. I pay particular attention to the photographs she took of Clara Forslund, an Iñupiat woman whose friendship made a deep impression on Harris.

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Including the work of a non-native photographer within a project which privileges the work of Native artists is intended to represent visual culture as dynamic and interconnected. Feminism’s complicated history shares much with the complex inter-cultural history between native and non-Native people. While the context of colonial history maintains importance as a critical strategy for many Native artists, I also wish to show, particularly as I strive to build a transnational theoretical framework for Native art and visual culture, that there are intercultural histories of encounter other than colonial ones. Presenting “our interrelated history” through narratives of cosmopolitanism and friendship is done, not to negate or diminish the legacies of colonial history, but rather to illustrate, in a very localized manner, the kind of transnational negotiations and relationships between women that have always occurred.

I chose the case study for this chapter to help build a transnational feminist discourse that includes Native women and their relationships with non-native women, and in so doing seek to make an important contribution to the study of women’s visual culture and art making. In her analysis of the processes of women’s art making, art historian Marsha Meskimmon emphatically claims:

Any investigation of women making art by necessity addresses history. The very fact that the work of women artists is still less well known than that of their male counterparts raises questions concerning women’s historical role in cultural production and in the construction of art’s histories. The phenomenon

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of women making art intervenes at this juncture, severing any seamless link between ‘history’ as a series of past events, people and observable facts, from ‘history’ as a process of recounting such events, evaluating the facts, and bringing them forth in the present. Both the conventional historical record and the recording process fail at the point of women’s art, the very point at which they would need to recognize and account for difference.\(^7\)

With this in mind, I draw on contemporary and historical practice in a common narrative of building an intercultural, transnational feminist visual culture, one in which Native women are active participants. Harris was influenced by Home Economics and her photographs reflect her deep interest in Iñupiat women’s work, activities and spaces. My analysis of Harris’s photographs positions the home (and its attendant discourse of Home Economics) not as a site of domestic imperialism, but rather as a site of cross-cultural friendship, cosmopolitanism, and agency which defy a romantic or colonial reading of history.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I consider home spaces in a less literal sense by exploring how contemporary Native women artists position themselves through their work as indigenous subjects in a globalized world. Diaspora, hybridity, and nationalism are treated as key themes in the identity-based practices of artists Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Diné/ Seminole/ Muskogee), who draws correlations between occupied Native homelands in North America and occupied territories and displaced peoples in the Middle East, and Anna Tsouhlarakis (Navajo/ Creek/ Greek) who, through dance, explores social interactions across cultures and identity as a Native

person with mixed heritage. I also discuss the work of Palestinian-American artist Sama Alshaibi, extending indigeneity beyond the borders of North America. These issues command special attention in a post-9/11 America. As Native artists move towards new ways of understanding what it means to be aboriginal, national and global citizens and cultural producers, these artists – all at different stages of their careers – present, through the use of their bodies in their work, a gendered perspective on these issues.

Above my desk I have pinned a postcard given to me when my resolve to complete this project was flagging. The card features the heads of two young girls, cut from a black and white stock photograph and superimposed on a brilliant red background. The girl on the right, head positioned in profile, shields her mouth with her hand as she whispers into the ear of the other; the eyes of girl on the left are wide with surprise and delight, her mouth agape, as she listens. The caption, printed across the top of the card and with an arrow pointing to the space between the girls’ foreheads, comes from feminist writer Audre Lorde: “The future of the earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference.” Lorde’s words, written thirty years ago, remain as urgent as they are compelling. Her invitation is one to be pursued through a host of creative, social and intellectual avenues and is a powerful call that I respond to here. Native women artists today create work that expresses a

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range of identities that relate to indigeneity, to gender, and to citizenship in the nation and the world and drawing on these identities is crucial in mobilizing a contemporary critical feminist project about art and visual culture.
Chapter 1

Bordering on Feminism: 
Space, Solidarity, and Transnationalism in Rebecca Belmore’s Vigil

Vigil and its Context

Feminism without borders is not the same thing as ‘border-less’ feminism. It acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent. It acknowledges that there is no one sense of a border, that lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities, are real – and that a feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division.9

Space, place, land, and indeed the border, both real and imagined, hold particular significance to Native peoples and figure strongly in the production of many artists working today. The manner in which these important themes relate to feminist concerns is not as apparent, given the complex relationship between feminism and Native art. Still, I contend that their impact only increases as they imbricate in a work with overwhelming feminist measure: Anishnabe artist Rebecca Belmore’s performance, Vigil (2002). Native art remains under-theorized from a feminist perspective; transnational feminism, however, as elaborated by feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty in the passage cited above, suggests a means for a renewed feminist interlocution into contemporary Native art. As the tenets of contemporary feminist theory, particularly of the Third Wave which has sought to be more inclusive, have not integrated cohesively into Native peoples’ cultural practices,

the trope of the border becomes an apposite means by which to negotiate such a relationship, and Belmore’s own performance space an apt one from which to begin.

Spatial occupation figures prominently in *Vigil*, as it does in other works by Belmore. The artist’s repeated use of this theme lends continuity to her artistic narrative. Her most acclaimed performances prior to *Vigil, Exhibit #671B* (1988) and *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* (1991), will be discussed later in this chapter. Space and place are central to both of these performances: both locate social and political issues in the context of the artist’s environment, the former performance as a protest against oil drilling on First Nations land and the exploitation of Native objects in a museum space and a national, psychic space; the latter as a means to connect the artist as well as many other people of the First Nations across Canada to the land, expressing both a collective will to regain political control as well as individualized expressions of the relationship of person to land and localized space.

While Belmore’s provocative, site-specific performances have brought her the most acclaim, she also creates installations which use media as varied as photography and textiles. Textiles figure prominently in Belmore’s early work, such as *Twelve Angry Crinolines* (1987) a performance in Thunder Bay featuring twelve women artists. Belmore adopted elaborate Victorian dress, dripping with souvenirs and trade trinkets to protest against a visit by the Duke and Duchess of York (of Great Britain). For *True Grit, A Souvenir* (1989), the artist made an enormous brocade and fringed cushion featuring a self-portrait in jeans and a football jersey. A photo-based
installation, *State of Grace* (2002) became the signature image of Belmore’s traveling exhibition, *Rebecca Belmore: The Named and the Unnamed*. For this work, the artist cut a large print of her sister, sleeping, into strips that fluttered according to breezes created in the gallery. *Vigil*, which took place on June 23, 2002 in Vancouver, Canada, signals a pivotal moment in Belmore’s practice. She broadens and deepens the thematic significance of space and location, but importantly, she does so by reinforcing her work’s feminist strain.

Many Native artists produce work that is explicitly or implicitly concerned with land. Here, a schism between the *Native* and the *feminist* often occurs, seemingly by consequence, as if the importance of land eclipses a feminist consciousness. Rather than reinforcing the above as distinct fields, the correlation of which would undermine their respective integrity, I propose to locate homeland as a feminist issue, a task that involves rethinking the concept of homeland itself. As ubiquitous as land appears as a theme, a thread of inquiry, and a visible subject in contemporary Native art, particularly as it informs identity and subjectivity, it presents its own set of contingencies for non-Native scholars. Land remains a difficult theme to discuss without resorting to platitudes.

Belmore conceived of *Vigil* as a response to the alarming number of women who have disappeared from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside over the past twenty years, and pointedly, to the increased numbers who have vanished since 1995. The Downtown Eastside, also known as skid row, is invariably described with pejorative
adjectives like “grim,” “gritty,” or “seedy.”\textsuperscript{10} Located just beyond the city’s affluent commercial shopping district, the neighborhood has come to signify hardship: signs of poverty, drug addiction, prostitution, and mental illness are visible on its streets and in its residents. The public, both city residents and a wider, national public, so closely identifies the Downtown Eastside with the city’s social problems that accounts of Vancouver’s drug trade, prostitution, and poverty invariably invoke the neighborhood as the nexus of these ills. This notoriety resonates with area residents, many of whom are Native, many having migrated to western Canada’s largest city from other parts of the country.

Newspaper accounts report that most of the disappeared worked in the sex trade and coped with addictions; many too were afflicted by mental health problems.\textsuperscript{11} Of the sixty-nine women on the missing list in 2004, more than half are Native women.\textsuperscript{12} For years the police did not pursue these unsettling disappearances,

\textsuperscript{10} Further to this, \textit{The Washington Post} describes the area in unequivocal terms as “a version of hell populated by prostitutes, drug addicts and pimps.” DeNeen Brown, “On Willy’s Pig Farm, Sifting for Clues; Canadian Police Think They’ve Found the Pieces of a Grisly Puzzle, and 15 Missing Women,” \textit{The Washington Post}, September 5, 2004.


\textsuperscript{12} The number of missing women has continued to grow, with this last figure being cited by the RCMP in October 2004. It represents women who vanished between 1991 and 2000, and was determined by a recent review of more than 220 missing persons cases from British Columbia. See, Robert Matas, “Missing-women list grows to 69. Police in Vancouver add 8 new names; DNA of one found on Pickton pig farm,” \textit{The Globe and Mail} [Toronto], October 7, 2004. Other statistical
leaving the loss of each woman and the attendant ambiguous circumstances to be marked only by her friends and family. Not until 2001, after prodigious lobbying by family and friends, the Native Women’s Association of Canada, and other outreach and women’s groups, did the authorities react, forming the Missing Women Task Force, a joint venture of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police [RCMP] and the Vancouver police force. In the winter of 2002, police charged Robert Pickton, the owner of a pig farm near Port Coquitlam, a small community on the outskirts of Vancouver, first with the murder of two women. As the investigation of the pig farm continued, the number of dead rose, and so did the charges against Pickton. DNA or remains of twenty-seven missing women were ultimately uncovered at this site. In 2007, Pickton was convicted in the murders of six women, Mona Wilson, Marnie and anecdotal data, particular to the missing First Nations women is available from the Sisters in Spirit Campaign, a political initiative by the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) and the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) which calls for a $10 million federally-established fund for research and education with regard to the missing Native women. Sisters in Spirit cite 500 Native women as having gone missing from communities across Canada over the past twenty years, and 50 from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. See, Sisters in Spirit, http://www.sistersinspirit.ca (accessed November 10, 2004). See also, Amnesty International, Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada. A Summary of Amnesty International’s Concerns, report published October 4, 2004, AMR 20/003/2004.
Frey, Georgina Papin, Brenda Wolfe, Sereena Abotsway, and Andrea Joesbury. The farm where the women died acquired designations as a crime scene, a mass grave, and the site of a criminal investigation. Yet the Downtown Eastside, the site of the disappearances, has a far more complex status.

Belmore locates her performance here, at the corner of Gore and Cordova Streets, a part of the Downtown Eastside where many of the women worked on the streets, also known as the Low Track [Fig. 1.1]. The Downtown Eastside is at once a place, a location, a destination, and a non-place where women vanish, where its citizens do not easily fit and, often, cannot be accounted for. During the performance, which runs nearly forty minutes, the artist marks the loss of women from this place, mourning their absence and acknowledging the violence and misogyny that their deaths reveal. The performance can be broken down into four sections. The first last approximately ten minutes, during which Belmore unpacks her belongings and cleans the pavement with soapy water [Fig. 1.2, Fig. 1.3]. During the second part, which takes approximately five minutes, the artist attempts to light a series of tea lights, first alone, then relinquishing the task to an assistant upon his entry [Fig. 1.4]. For the third part, again about five minutes in length, Belmore pulls

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13 While Pickton faces many more charges, it is not clear if he will ever be tried on these further counts.

14 The assignment of non-place pervades to the extent that the writer of one news story marvels that “[w]hile many [of the missing women] lived a street life, others still retained family connections, cared for their children, even had bank accounts,” as if these quotidian concerns are obsolete in the Downtown Eastside. See, “Public Pressure Spurred Police Probe: Police Ignored Missing Women Because They Were Sex Workers and Drug Users,” The Ottawa Citizen, February 8, 2002.
roses from a bouquet and bites at the petals and thorns, tearing them with her mouth as she shouts out women’s names written across her arms in thick, black marker [Fig. 1.5, Fig. 1.6]. The final section lasts approximately seventeen minutes. Belmore slips on a red dress, nails the fabric to a telephone pole, then to a fence, and repeatedly rips herself free until the dress is tattered [Fig. 1.7, Fig. 1.8]. She proceeds to wash herself with water from the bucket and dresses once again in jeans and a tank top. A short coda ends the performance: the artist passes through the crowd to the street where a pickup truck is waiting; James Brown’s song *It’s a Man’s World* plays from the stereo while she looks back at the performance site [Fig. 1.9].

The performance’s title, *Vigil*, sets the tone for what follows: a memorial, a watch, but at a most basic level, an occupation. Belmore establishes her presence in the street space she has selected and prepares her occupation. Belmore titles the installation she makes with the video recording of her performance *The Named and the Unnamed*. The installation toured Canada as part of a solo exhibition of the same name.\(^{15}\) The video documents Belmore’s arrival on site: she enters carrying two

\(^{15}\) The exhibition, *Rebecca Belmore: The Named and the Unnamed*, was curated by Scott Watson and Charlotte Townsend-Gault. It appeared at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (October 4, 2002 to December 1, 2002), the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (May 7, 2003 to August 3, 2003), and the Confederation Centre, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (October 5, 2003 to December 28, 2003). The videographer who recorded *Vigil* is Paul Wong. I was not present for the performance, therefore my experience of it is entirely mediated by the video, which I saw both installed as installation at the Art Gallery of Ontario in June 2003, and as video alone in DVD format courtesy of Belmore’s dealer Pari Nadimi at the Pari Nadimi Gallery in Toronto in September 2004. However, because I am most concerned with the artist’s experience of space and occupation, I choose to refer to the performance in its original context as *Vigil*,...
buckets of water and a canvas shopping bag full of supplies. The performance begins as she sets these items down and pulls out smaller bags of candles, rags, a hammer and nails, then clothing and a bouquet of flowers. These items are tossed on the pavement deliberately and with haste, for seconds later the artist pulls on red rubber kitchen gloves, picks up a small whisk-style broom, and begins to brush the pavement.

Belmore integrates the preparation of the site, a small parking lot, smoothly into the performance itself. Her efforts to establish her space are indistinguishable from the subsequent action that takes place within. As she moves through it, sweeping with the small broom, the site’s limits, effectively quasi-barriers, are defined: a tall, black wrought iron fence closes off the back, and a chain link fence defines a side. Action takes place on both sides of this fence, but the fence itself figures as a central feature of the performance [Fig. 1.10]. Her small audience, a crowd of about twenty, loops the other open sides, thus closing the artist in from the street. Belmore fixes these boundaries as she begins to clean the space inside them. In so doing, Belmore territorializes the space, exerting control over a public space, something that, ostensibly, is difficult to enact, perhaps more so in a space like the Downtown Eastside that seems to elude order and cohesion.\footnote{Ali Mandanipour suggests individuals have little control over territory in public space, and this certainly applies with regard to legal ownership. However, territoriality can be understood differently, in that individuals or groups can hold different investments in the same space, or possess different senses of territory, rather than referring to the video by the name it was given installed, \textit{The Named and the Unnamed}.} By marking off her
territory, Belmore takes control of the site as a safe space and constructs a personal space within a public one; her action suggests that these spaces are not as mutually exclusive as we might think.

As much as Belmore seeks to define her site, the border’s porosity complicates the space. She attempts to light candles in the foreground; these candles would provide another boundary of sorts but they are immediately extinguished by the wind. Despite her diligence in making her territory, people can pass through these borders: they may cut through the crowd, walk around or climb over the fences. Likewise, any outsider can cross into the Downtown Eastside, pass freely through it, and still not be a part of the taxonomic space identified for its residents. Issues of access to the area were highlighted when Adrienne Clarkson, then Canada’s Governor General (a ceremonial position as the Queen’s representative in Canada) visited the Downtown Eastside along with her husband, political scientist John Raulston Saul. Crowds, some resentful of being put on display, others incensed that the streets had been cleaned up to provide a “sanitized” tour, jeered the visitors. A newspaper photograph shows Clarkson bending over to look at a man lying on the sidewalk, a group of journalists behind her [Fig. 1.11]. The photograph reveals in patent visual language the conditions of access that complicate the area, and the sometimes something he refers to as layers of control. See, Ali Mandanipour, Public and Private Spaces of the City (New York: Routledge, 2003), 50-53. Territorialization is about more than title, an assertion that, legal claims aside, is made abundantly clear by the varied ways Native peoples have expressed and experienced relationships to land and home territories.
incompatible forms of presence that occur in this spaces.\textsuperscript{17} With regard to \textit{Vigil}, the \textit{territorialization} of the performance space, of the street itself, renders to this non-place a status of place. This is not a gratuitous transformation. The notoriety of the area coupled with the supposed transience of its inhabitants makes for a precarious sense of place. What is this place, and what is its relationship with the people who occupy it?

Space itself is a dynamic concept, bound up with and shaped by social relations and time. Place represents concepts of the local, the specific, the concrete, with space providing the arena in which to shape place.\textsuperscript{18} Difficulties in localizing and concretizing it as place destabilize the Downtown Eastside’s status. Questions about its nature, about who lives there and who goes there, questions fed by sensational media accounts, evade the human, the specific and the concrete, thus giving rise to a non-place, or, positing a place that is a synecdoche, built upon the fictions and fears of outsiders.

The Vancouver police responded sluggishly to these missing persons cases. In turn, they attributed their apparent indifference to the alleged rootlessness of the women themselves. Critics charged that because the victims were largely identified as

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\begin{enumerate}
\item For more in depth analysis of the relationship of space and place, and a synthesis of the important literature, see, Mandanipour; Doreen B. Massey, \textit{Space, Place and Gender} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Lawrence Grossberg, “The Space of Culture, The Power of Space,” \textit{The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons}, ed. Iain Chambers, Lidia Curti (New York: Routledge, 1996), 169-188.
\end{enumerate}
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aboriginal, street-level prostitutes and substance abusers, their social status preempted adequate attention or an expedited investigation. The police offered up these same identifiers to point to the difficulties in pursuing the women’s cases: many lived transiently, estranged from their families, and are therefore difficult to trace.\textsuperscript{19}

Such logic reveals the dis correspondence between the Downtown Eastside and its inhabitants. This area maintained a notorious reputation before the Missing Women’s Task Force assembled, and certainly before police charged Pickton. The Downtown Eastside is firmly and fixedly located, with mappable coordinates. Yet its notoriety and cartographic certitude does not extend to its inhabitants, whose home is repeatedly ascribed the status of non-place. The fixity of the Downtown Eastside does not cohere with the supposed transience of its population, thus the area’s troubles prohibit the status of home being granted for its residents.

As a localized concept, place shares many attributes with the idea of home; however, the features of the Downtown Eastside which are employed repeatedly to construct it, eschew those of home. Anthropologist Mary Douglas theorizes home as a

\textsuperscript{19} Daniel Girard, “Missing Women, Missing Answers,” \textit{Toronto Star}, April 20, 2002; MacQueen, “Street of Fear,” March 25, 2002. Media reports such as this one in Canada’s leading weekly news magazine note the high percentage of missing women who are Native, forming a generalized victim profile of a woman who is also a prostitute, a substance abuser, and emotionally disturbed. By contrast, specific victim profiles are most frequently of non-Native women. The occlusion of individual narratives of missing Native women against the rate of recurrence of those of non-native women diminishes the visibility of Native women. This imbalance does not necessarily represent a straightforward indifference on the media’s (or public’s) part to the Native victims. It may signal the mistrust or poor channels of communication between the missing women’s family, friends, and community and the media or authorities, a mistrust that might hinder such a profile being taken.
place that while locatable, is not necessarily fixed in space; this locating occurs by bringing the space under control.\textsuperscript{20} The Downtown Eastside seems to defy control, and home, thus, becomes a spatial status that remains out of reach. No doubt a different sense of place would be conveyed from within the Downtown Eastside. Activities of the sex and drug trade – the defining ills of the Downtown Eastside – by all accounts occur in public spaces, generating the fear that for the most part keeps outsiders away from the area, and have all but obscured the possibility of private spaces. For example, in her memoir of her sister, Sarah de Vries, one of the women who disappeared from the Downtown Eastside, Maggie de Vries frequently refers to her sister’s private spaces. De Vries describes at length the house Sarah lived in for several years in the Downtown Eastside, detailing specific rooms and its garden.\textsuperscript{21} A photograph of the house is also included, as if for verification of Sarah’s \textit{intransience}, evidence of her being grounded to place [Fig. 1.12].

Belmore’s \textit{Vigil} sanctifies this place by accounting for it. As her performance continues, she further prepares the site as its primary occupant.\textsuperscript{22} Kneeling, she scrubs the asphalt vigorously with a brush from one of the buckets, to which she has added cleaning fluid. She pulls a rag from a bag, and mops up some of the water – somewhat futile, as the wet pavement immediately drenches the rag, leaving it filthy.


\textsuperscript{22} Later an assistant enters to light more small teallight candles, this time protected from the wind by the plywood panels the artist erects.
As she cleans, the artist becomes breathless, her jeans damp, and her brow furrowed with concentration and activity. Her intense engagement with this task suggests a profound commitment to it; it resonates on several levels and sets the performance’s tone. Her actions allude to funerary preparations in many cultures, during which the body of the deceased is ritually cleansed – often by women – and prepared for burial rites. In the absence of bodies, the artist prepares the site from which the missing disappeared: the ground from which they vanished, which “swallowed” them up. Cleaning the street also serves to fix the site for its occupants, the transitory movements of whom maintain this place as one that eludes the making of home. Home and place are unseated signifiers that fail to correspond. Belmore’s actions acknowledge the site as a home worthy of respect, protection and care, but also portend how unsafe the streets where some victims did make their home actually are. This staging also signifies in patent terms domestic work and women’s labor. Belmore’s actions remind us that all the victims were women, that she mourns a group of women. At a very basic level, the act of cleaning connotes the menial work of women: work generally unaccounted for and often conducted by the poor, unstatusted residents, or new immigrants, far from their homeland.

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Homeland and Native Diasporas

Thematically, homeland reappears again and again in the work of many contemporary Native artists. Belmore’s own body of work provides a case study for the prevalence of politically-charged, land-based issues. In an early performance, staged in the winter of 1988, *Exhibit #671B*, Belmore sat cross-legged and wrapped in blankets outside the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, a location close to her own hometown of Upsala, Ontario [Fig. 1.13]. The performance coincided with the passing of the Olympic torch relay heading to Calgary, where the Olympic Games were subsequently held. Belmore’s positioned herself as a living “Native exhibit” in protest of a now notorious exhibition of Native art, *The Spirit Sings*, mounted to coincide with the 1988 Olympics. Shell Oil sponsored the exhibition, a company whose drilling on Lubicon Cree land ired the First Nations and upset difficult, protracted negotiations for rights.24 Another work, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking*

24 *The Spirit Sings* exhibition at Calgary’s Glenbow Museum brought together Native-made objects from across Canada and from foreign collections. This major exhibition was intended to showcase Native culture as Canadian culture for the huge international audiences descending on the city of Calgary for the 1988 Olympic Games. The Lake Lubicon band of Cree live in northern Alberta, and were at the time, involved in a contentious legal battle with Shell Oil (among other oil companies), over the oil company’s rights to drill on their land. Shell Oil’s role as sponsor of *The Spirit Sings* infuriated the Lubicon Lake Cree and many other First Nations people. Supporters initiated mass protests against the exhibition to draw attention to oil company’s hypocrisy and to inform the public about the legal battles over land rights that many First Nations communities face. Activists, with some success, encouraged institutions to refrain from lending works from their collections to the exhibition and called for visitors to Calgary to boycott the exhibition. The protests, including Belmore’s performance, received a large amount of media attention. See, Julia D. Harrison, “*The Spirit Sings: The Last Song?”* *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* 7 no. 4 (1988): 353-363; Ruth B. Phillips, “The Public Relations Wrap,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 5 no. 2
*to Their Mother* (1991) features a huge megaphone constructed from natural materials [Fig. 1.14]. The artist traveled with the work to First Nations communities across Canada and in so doing, collaborated with scores of individuals: the object afforded First Nations people the opportunity to speak directly, by means of the megaphone, to the land itself. This act empowered many participants, effectively redirecting their voices of protest away from dead ears in government to a different order of power and authority, the land.²⁵

Homeland proves to be a far more complicated construct in *Vigil*, as Belmore does not explicitly address land issues. Indeed, it is not uncomplicated to refer to homeland as a construct, given the political realities associated with continuing struggles towards its realization and maintenance. However, it is useful to consider the ways in which homeland is an idea, and the power that can be sourced from an ideology as a foundational aspect of identity. How one feels at home often depends

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²⁵ In spite of this political indifference, a number of politicians, including former Prime Minister Joe Clark, were photographed alongside Belmore and the megaphone when she set the work up on the lawn outside Ottawa’s Parliament buildings.
on less tangible notions of homeland. Homeland as a construct does not diminish its importance collectively or individually. Codifying homeland by these terms allows for various communities of Native people to exist in the same political territory – Canada – as their indigenous homelands.

Homeland also has an ideological value for urban Native populations, something to which the many exhibitions designed around the theme of land over the past quarter century attest. Despite the cogency of the politics of traditional land, the land-centered identity construct presents a particular set of relational conditions to urban aboriginal populations. The most recent Canadian census, conducted in 2001, found that 49% of aboriginal people live in urban areas – off reservations and out of rural settings, a number up slightly from the 1996 census. These figures suggest that large numbers of First Nations people experience their culture in ways different from those who live in reservation communities and/or on ancestral lands. Consequently, experiences of culture, community and family life may vary accordingly; a cultural identity informed by the land may not necessarily be assimilated into the urban lives of many Native people. This disjuncture, however, still holds potential for

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26 This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.


28 I am not positing that reservation life implies, unilaterally, a traditional way of life, or that all reservation conditions are the same. Rather, for the sake of my argument, and in light of how identity becomes couched in binaries, I am situating tradition/land/reservation against contemporary/urban. I do not accept a dichotomous
experiences and identities informed by an urban, North American existence to be
reconciled with a traditionally-informed cultural identity. The latter, perhaps rooted in
a lifestyle that many individuals have not had or no longer experience, need not be
surrendered to a more cosmopolitan reality, nor vice versa.  

Living space, thus, takes on a new level of significance, as many First Nations
people make their homes in urban areas, some having migrated there, others never
having lived in exclusively Native communities, on reservations, or “off the land.”
This calls for the recognition of an ideological home, one central to cultural memory
and often, political agency, while maintaining the relevance and currency of the
adopted, inhabited one. An individualized reconciliation between these two kinds of
home is indeed possible, especially if one considers diaspora as Avtar Brah does, for
ultimately, as Brah conceives of it:

Diasporas are places of long-term, if not permanent, community formations,
even if some households or members move on elsewhere. The word diaspora
often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is
certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas
are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested
cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories
collide, reassemble and reconfigure.  

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29 See, Jack D. Forbes, “The Urban Tradition Among Native Americans,”
American Indians and the Urban Experience, ed. Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters
(Walnut Creek, CA: Altimira Press, 2001), 5-25; and Susan Lobo, “Is Urban a Person
or a Place? Characteristics of Urban Indian Country,” American Indians and the
Urban Experience, 73-84; and other essays in the same collection.

30 Avtar Brah, Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities (New York:
Diaspora is not a term often invoked with regard to Native peoples, though as I have already stated, boundaries and borders – terms important to the lexicon of migratory peoples – are. It is crucial to emphasize the theme of boundaries and space in *Vigil* because these themes recur in contemporary Native art. The manner in which they function here suggests a complexity of issues correlative to these themes, and implicates them in a feminist project. The relationship between feminism and Native concerns about land and place are not always obvious. *Vigil* suggests not only that they are bound up, but also that these themes have cross-cultural and transnational importance.\(^31\)

Native peoples’ patterns of migration elude classification as *diaspora*, a term that evokes transnational movement. Migration of Native peoples throughout North America evades this assignment for several reasons, the most resounding of which finds that for the First Nations, North America is Turtle Island, a single borderless territory.\(^32\) Native peoples’ indigeneity comprehends ties to place that pre-date the

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\(^31\) This becomes particularly compelling as urban spaces change. As demographics evolve, so does the manner in which a city is divided. Historical binaries between the private sphere as domestic, feminine, reproductive spaces, and the public sphere as masculine, productive spaces are changing, in part because there is no longer a single, dominant culture designating these spaces. Patricia Collins suggests that the private is not always the domestic home. Private spaces can also be community spaces, “safe spaces” from which others are excluded. See, Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 100-121.

\(^32\) Turtle Island derives from Iroquois cosmology. Sky Woman descended to a flooded earth from another realm, beyond the stars. Some animals prevented her drowning: she dredged mud from the bottom of the ocean and built it up on the back of a giant turtle. Dancing on the back of the turtle, the surface grew until it became the North American continent. See, Doug George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois Culture and Commentary* (Sante Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000). The image of Turtle Island is
political boundaries established by North American governments and their colonial forbearers. Accordingly, Native peoples maintain their precedent rights to cross the political borders of North America unhindered. Further, diaspora usually refers to migrations across national borders, whereas migrations by Native people tend largely to be within national borders. Given that patterns of migration that most apply to the First Nations in Canada are those from the established homeland of a particular people and its corresponding reservations to a metropolitan center, the domestic context of this migration complicates the claim of diaspora as an applicable phenomenon.

The relationships that Native peoples share with other diasporic peoples point to another point of slippage in this interpretation of diaspora discourse. Many Native people insist that, because of their indigeneity, they do not share an identity with other minority or migrant populations. Their presence on this continent since time immemorial distinguishes the First Nations, despite the fact that, in kind with many emigrant groups, they are minorities relative to the dominant population with European heritage. This pre-existing, prior claim to place severs Native peoples from evocative, and has been taken up by some non-Iroquois Native peoples to conceptually describe the single continent. Further, the network of borders and territorial divisions which correspond to First Nations occupation of Turtle Island may be unacknowledged by North American governments. The Iroquois’ special relationship to the border is particularly pointed given the holistic view of the land the cosmology indicates, as they have always inhabited the territory on both the Canadian and American sides. Akwesasne, a Mohawk reservation, actually straddles the border, with its community split over both sides.

Tuscarora artist Jolene Rickard recalls that her grandfather crossed the Canada-United States border annually, without a Canadian or U.S. passport, as reaffirmation of his right as a Native American to do so.
minority populations, disuniting their experiences of difference or Othering. By the same logic that sets them apart from the population at large, all Native groups – effectively distinct nations – are united by this extant status and what amounts to a pan-Indian ideology or a “Native metaphysic,” a set of common experiences which prevail over local differences.³⁴

Yet the experiences of diasporic populations help to theorize the migration of Native people to cities, and prompt the need for a more expansive and less literal definition of what constitutes diaspora. The manner in which Brah theorizes diaspora has potential as an illustrative strategy for Native people’s experiences. By her definition, diaspora signals multi-locationality across geographic, cultural, and psychic borders, with the latter two being of particular interest.³⁵ Migrants, but equally those constructed and represented as indigenous to a place, may inhabit diasporic space, according to Brah’s conceptual category, thus rendering transparent multiple conceptions of living space.³⁶

Scholars have attended to the notion of the border in recent years, and particularly its volatility, its malleability, and even the falsity or pretension of its

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³⁴ For a more detailed discussion on the Native metaphysic, and particularly, how it translates to a First Nations position on the exhibitionary practice of their material culture, see, Michael M. Ames, “The Politics of Difference: Other Voices in a Not Yet Post-Colonial World,”*Museum Anthropology* 18 no. 3 (1994): 9-17, and specifically, p. 10.

³⁵ Brah, 194.

³⁶ Brah, 181.
fixity in an age when global traffic appears to be at an all-time high.\textsuperscript{37} Shifting borders – the political and geographic, and less plainly, those at the level of identity and subjectivity – inform discussions in which many people of the First Nations show a reluctance to participate. Land issues remain critical for the First Nations, as many nations are involved in ongoing, taxing negotiations and struggles over land rights with governments and in the courts.\textsuperscript{38} As the affirmation of borders continues to be of a dire order, addressing the possibility of borders in flux, and moreover, conceiving of such spaces as positive or enriching stands as an unstable proposition. Reconciling a cultural identity bound in so many important ways to land and borders with notions of identity forwarded by contemporary cultural politics becomes an assiduous challenge.


\textsuperscript{38} Border disputes – by means of aggregate land claims – have long been a part of relations between Native and non-Native peoples. In his book, \textit{Lethal Legacy}, J.R. Miller disputes land claims by the First Nations as a recent phenomenon, something the volume of media coverage in the 1990s would have it appear. Miller cites evidence that Mohawk people at Kanesatake, a reservation outside Montreal, and the site of a notorious stand-off between the Mohawks and the Quebec Provincial Police over rights to the land in 1990, have been petitioning non-Native authorities over claims to this site since 1781. See, J.R. Miller, \textit{Lethal Legacy: Current Native Controversies in Canada} (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2004), 170-172.
Feminism’s stake in the Native peoples’ diasporas relates not only to the changing cultural terrain but also to the economic conditions experienced by women. Migrant workers contribute to the transnational flows that form diasporas, and women, axiomatically, constitute a large percentage of that labor force. The international labor market depends on women as domestic workers, as labor for home-based piecework, and in garment or other sweatshop industries. Moreover, the economic duress experienced by many Native women because of their gender can compel their movement. Critics hold that provisions in the Indian Act, the long-standing and contested Canadian legislation that governs the First Nations, are disequitable to women and fail to provide them with adequate legal standing on reservations.\(^3\) For example, many women find themselves homeless after a divorce because their former husbands’ claims to the matrimonial home on the reservation are usually upheld.\(^4\) Economic factors, thus, often drive women from reservations to urban areas to seek employment. This flow demonstrates a resounding parity with the situations of women through the developing world and beyond.

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\(^4\) The NWAC disparages the absence of family law on reservations. Reservations in Canada are governed by the Indian Act and the First Nations Land Management Act, neither of which include stipulations to assist women and children following the breakdown of conjugal relationships. See, Sue Bailey, “Native Women’s group sues Indian Affairs minister (Jane Stewart): land legislation seen as an infringement of constitutional rights,” *The First Perspective* 8 no. 7 (1999): 6. See also Jacobs, sec. 6.4 “Matrimonial Property,” 21-24.
How does one talk about the primacy of location and of inhabitation while still allowing for the flow of traffic in the global world? How can we talk about the conditions this migration creates for women, without invoking the monolithic Woman? What is the relevance of transnational feminism to First Nations women, and how does it apply to art and visual culture? Transnational feminism presents potential as a mode of feminist ethics for cross-cultural study and scholarship. Although a tension exists in the exchanges between Native and non-native women, transnational feminism attempts to navigate this difficult terrain. Its goal, in part, is mediatory and, as such, transnational feminism offers a means to situate indigenous feminist positions that do not diminish the politics of land and sovereignty, which are often used to separate Native agendas from feminist ones. Yet despite its potential as a dynamic and multi-valenced site of engagement, First Nations women have been largely excluded from discussions of transnational feminism thus far, an exclusion that is particularly pointed given that several recent anthologies that assemble multiple feminist perspectives from across the globe originate in the United States.⁴¹ Even as scholars acknowledge – and celebrate – various national and transnational spaces, a blindspot exists as to how these same spatial overlaps and differing experiences of homeland may occur in the very geographical territory they occupy.

Feminist Occupations

If an overriding objective of feminism is to reform the social relations of power entrenched in gender, and it is acknowledged that gender inequities are found in some form in all cultures, then feminism plays a role in challenging these subordinations in all contexts, including those which concern the experiences of Native women despite claims to sovereign cultural status.\footnote{Acknowledging gender inequity is however by no means a given. Many transnational feminist scholars, like Mohanty, who disparage a universalizing model of feminism, agree that women, globally, experience inequity because of their gender, though those experiences may vary significantly. However, Paula Gunn Allen challenges the assumption that all cultures are oppressive to women, asserting that misogyny was found in some Native cultures only after Contact. See, Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987). While it is important to note Allen’s objections relative to a historical narrative of gender and colonization, there is widespread agreement that in the contemporary, global world, women experience inequity relative to their gender, often with regard to economic conditions.} NWAC, the group that lobbied for an investigation into Vancouver’s missing women, works tirelessly to challenge the institutions that subordinate First Nations women.

But not all Native women endorse alliances with feminist groups, least of all those extending cross-culturally. Writer Lee Maracle’s account of her relationship as a First Nations woman to feminism testifies to an established disconnect between First Nations peoples and the non-native population:

Before 1961, we were ‘wards of the government,’ children in the eyes of the law. We objected and became, henceforth, people. Born of this objection was the Native question – the forerunner of Native self-government, the Native land question, etc. The woman question still did not exist for us. Not then. I responded,
like so many women, as a person without sexuality. Native women do not even like the words ‘women’s liberation’ and even now it burns my back.\textsuperscript{43}

The continuing processes of decolonization that mobilize many First Nations women politically have largely eclipsed Western feminism’s interests. Furthermore, feminism as a discipline, argue many women of the First Nations, fails to account for them by providing inadequate forums for their concerns, beliefs and identifications.\textsuperscript{44}

An underlying suggestion surfaces with reference to the distinct spheres feminists and Native women inhabit. Not only do these groups come to stand for dissimilar interests, through the spatial metaphor of spheres these interests become occupational. This key word carries nuance. The force of conviction expressed by feminists or Native women with regard to their respective, aggregate causes is occupational in the sense that it is like a job. Convictions of importance are consuming, and like an occupation, they maintain a quotidian presence. With this in

\textsuperscript{43} Lee Maracle, \textit{I am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism} (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1996), 16.

mind, the gravity of Belmore’s performance – and indeed, her presence in the space – is attenuated by the force of her repetitive actions, while these actions imply, further, an affirmation of the space itself.

Here, another meaning coalesces, one that speaks to inhabitation. The ways Belmore’s occupation can be generated are manifold in that this occupation can be understood as a hostile intrusion, as a placeholder, or more generally and ingenuously as a lived space. Belmore’s presence maintains some of this ambiguity and her own complicated identity, replete with shared investments, nuances her place. Occupations as feminist, as woman, as First Nations person, as Anishnabe, as artist, as urbanite, as public figure, as stranger, as insider, and as outsider prove slippery assignments that simultaneously or sequentially ease and hinder.

Native and non-native women share interests, particularly in what arises from occupying spaces mutually or simultaneously. Despite variations in their roots (and routes), points of access, and experience, women living in close proximity actively share relationships and investments in the space in which they live, thereby mutually occupying it. By a simultaneous occupation, I mean independent occupations of a given physical space, the experience of which is so mediated by individuating factors that it becomes mutually exclusive; while occupants define their space differently, they nonetheless cohabitate the space. An occupation, further, may at times be mutual and at others simultaneous. With Native peoples increasingly calling metropolitan areas home, these assertions speak overwhelmingly to city spaces and the particular conditions these spaces imply. Shared spaces mean that women who experience
different realities often identify with divergent histories, and while adhering to
distinct cultural traditions they may also grapple with mutual experiences.\textsuperscript{45}

Contemporary Native artists are urbanites in increasing numbers and regularly
draw on complicated patterns of identity and experience in their artistic practice.
Belmore’s own migratory history speaks to this: born in 1960, she was raised in
Anishnabe territory in northern Ontario, attended art college for a time in Toronto,
and returned to rural living before relocating to downtown Vancouver. She exhibits
across the country and abroad, notably representing Canada at the 2005 Venice
Biennale. Examining contemporary Native art through a feminist lens may in part
help to parse these contexts. What is learned through Belmore’s art, and that of other
Native women artists, challenges feminism’s claims and works to strengthen the
critical discipline of feminist theory with the voices of experience previously
excluded or marginalized.

In 1997, Marcia Crosby, a scholar with Tsimshian and Haida ancestry, curated
an exhibition at Vancouver’s Contemporary Art Gallery called \textit{Nations in Urban}
\textit{Landscapes}. The exhibition considered three prominent First Nations artists and their
relationships to their urban surroundings. This theme signals a bold move for Crosby,
who rose to prominence with the publication of a powerful but strident essay in the
early 1990s about the relationship between non-native Canadians and First Nations

\textsuperscript{45} A similar notion is taken up by Susan Lobo, who writes of an “Indian map”
of San Francisco whereby Native people orient themselves by means of markers with
specific cultural value, places others might not recognize or know of. See, Lobo, 75-76.
people.\textsuperscript{46} This more recent project is not conciliatory, for the accompanying exhibition text includes some very harsh criticism of non-native attitudes towards Native peoples. Crosby does, however, recognizes hybridity as an active identity phenomenon; equally, she acknowledges that while their experiences of these spaces may prove radically different, people from the First Nations and non-natives do occupy the same urban spaces. Crosby is among the first to acknowledge identity informed by contemporary urban experience as an important theme in First Nations art. She argues in the catalogue essay to \textit{Nations in Urban Landscapes} that the relegation of Native authority exclusively to reservations and traditional land bases impoverishes the complexity of First Nations subjectivity. She writes that, problematically, “these conventions are not used as a platform for authenticating the land and resource dispute between First Nations and Canadian governments, but […] they have also emerged as a measuring stick for ‘Indianess.’ As a political strategy, this excludes the historical gaps and the hybrid individual and communal histories of contemporary aboriginal societies.”\textsuperscript{47}

While Crosby does not actively advocate feminist politics in her call for recognition of hybridity, she opens up the identity construct to allow for a subject informed by multiple affiliations, conditions, and experiences, and by so doing,

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implies the possibility of a gendered subjectivity. Crosby’s example of the manipulation of the land’s importance—so that a Native identity is diminished in the case where a person no longer physically occupies that land—compares to the denial of a feminist subjectivity, as if so identifying would negate a Native identity. I posit, following Crosby, that disregarding gender difference and specificity ultimately evacuates the richness and diversity of the Native identity and undermines its contemporary status.

Importantly, Lee Maracle, who is from the Northwest Coast’s Sto:lo nation, recognizes the need for Native women to marshal the cause of women within the cultural structure of the Native communities, but also at a macro level, against the more global structure of patriarchy oppressing all women. Non-native feminists can return this awareness by being conscious of Maracle’s claims to women’s activism within and exclusive to her own community and also, to the weight of difference that First Nations women experience. European thought spawned the idea of “difference” and categorically situated it as something that Rosi Braidotti has charged is predicated on domination and exclusion. Difference can be essentializing and fatal as it holds a tendency to “mark[] off the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native) and the naturalized other (animals, the environment or earth).” Along this axis, Native women figure as constitutively three times removed from the categorical

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48 Maracle, ix, xi.

subject: by gender, by race, and by nature – the third a status which emerges from the corresponding association of the former two categories with a closeness to the land and the natural world. Here lies, in part, the discord in incorporating First Nations thought into the European model – even one that supposedly welcomes otherness.

*Vigil* offers a case for the importance of feminism in contemporary Native art. Belmore, who is Anishnabe, identifies strongly as a First Nations person. Themes particular to this identity, and specifically land issues, predominate in her work; by extension, scholars and art critics focus on these. Tidy analogies drawn between the

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50 In his lexicon of cultural terms, Raymond Williams names *nature* as the most complex word in the English language. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Flamingo, 1983), 219. Feminist scholarship, for the most part, vehemently opposes the identification of nature with the feminine, an equation that historically dominates European thought, arguing this identification furthered and enforced patriarchal domination. See, Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

51 Anishnabe (Anishinabe, Anishaabe, or Anishinabeg are alternative spellings), meaning “First People” in the Ojibwa language, refers collectively to Ojibwa, Odawa, and Algonquin peoples. These peoples originated in the Great Lakes region, but dispersed through Ontario, into Quebec to the east, Manitoba to the west, and south to Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan. A group identity is forming between contemporary speakers of the Ojibwa language, and “Anishnabe” is the term preferred by many to describe themselves collectively.

52 Catalogue essays and exhibition reviews are important to the study of contemporary art, but particularly to work produced by people of the First Nations. This field, until very recently, has been sufficiently marginalized that there are limited published resources for scholars to refer to, thus these records provide invaluable insight that is crucial to the development of a relevant art history. Further, catalogue essays quite often provide important perspectives from Native scholars and writers, a point made by Joan Reid Acland in the preface to her singular reference guide, *First Nations Artists in Canada: A Biographical / Bibliographical Guide 1960 to 1999*. *Artistes des Premières Nations au Canada. Un guide biographique / bibliographiques*
empirical facts of Belmore’s cultural background and the iconography of the natural world or the political messages explicitly conveyed prevail in these texts. For Belmore, this relationship has been institutionalized. Her sculptural installation, *Mawu-che-hitoowin: A Gathering of People for Any Purpose* (1992) was included in the important National Gallery of Canada exhibition, *Land, Spirit, Power*, that same year [Fig. 1.15]. This major group exhibition explored the significance of First Nations and Inuit art in Canada; the exhibition’s title secures land as a focal point. Belmore’s profile as a feminist artist has yet to be afforded the same status; this neglect reinforces a divided identity.

Thinking about space may help to bridge this divide. Meditations on spatial occupations become part of continuing processes of decolonization as they relate to the particularities of location and inhabitation. Belmore’s own biography attests to the issues of location in *Vigil*. As an “urban Indian,” a term which has become prevalent in the contemporary Native cultural lexicon, Belmore occupies a living space that intersects and overlaps with multiple cultural and gender profiles. Space, a thematic constant in First Nations art, has further nuance when engaged by an urban artist who...

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54The term “urban Indian” is, in contemporary First Nations Canadian art, associated with the practice of Jeff Thomas, whose work has over two decades consistently addressed the realities, inconsistencies, and idiosyncrasies of the figure of the urban Indian. See, Jeff Thomas, *Jeff Thomas: A Study of Indian-ness* (Toronto: Gallery 44, Centre for Contemporary Art, 2004).
shares living space with people of different cultural backgrounds. Urban life, moreover, as the Downtown Eastside disappearances attest, presents a number of concerns for Native women that are shared with women of other backgrounds. This case offers one formidable example of how the urban spaces occupied by Native women are important for feminism at large, and further, how the urban experience relates to this complex but seemingly monolithic theme, land.

Land issues (including, but not exclusively related to territorial claims, resource disputes, and reservation governance) are significant for their political import, something many non-natives readily comprehend and support. However, reasons more elusive and perhaps inaccessible to outsiders also contribute to this significance, significance founded in community-conferred knowledge of spirituality and tradition, parceled by the aforementioned Native metaphysic. This line of significance remains spectral. The land’s importance, both in its iconography and its politics, may be identifiable but non-natives often have a difficult time engaging art which expresses a relationship to it in a meaningful way, or in a way which acknowledges the diversity of beliefs between First Nations, tribes, or communities.

Here, a border exists, and an important one at that, between differing metaphysical worlds that culturally-determined subjects inhabit. This creates a serious dilemma in cross-cultural work, and indeed, an ethical bind of transnational feminist inquiry as it stands today: how can scholars work cross-culturally without assuming undue authority, and how, conversely, can they “leave out” certain aspects without ignoring substantive issues?
Transnational Feminism

Transnationalism is by no means a firmly designated signifier. Varying terms, including world feminism, global feminism and transnational feminism all appear frequently and sometimes interchangeably. Deliberately, I use the latter term because in my view it implies most precisely the particular designation I would like to give it, and it offers the most ideological potential. I am most comfortable reiterating the term transnational, primarily because of its semantic insistence on the nation, and the implication of existing borders crossed or to be crossed. As an alias, it is far more suggestive of actual global realities, as well as of the nature of individuals’ own senses of (national) identity – despite global traffic – than is implied by the holistic-sounding qualifiers world or global. However inadvertently, this vocabulary may encourage the elision of specific national allegiances and the particularities of citizenship; the magnitude of borders does persist, both as geophysical or political boundaries and as psychic determinators. The very universalizations that the practice of this kind of feminism seeks to undo are ultimately reinforced by words that connote a singular community, as in one world, one globe. Though not speaking of feminism, Michael Peter Smith makes an excellent case for a conceptual distinction between globalization and transnationalism. He suggests that the discourse of globalization is born of social processes that are decentered from particular national territories; rather, globalization occupies the “space of flows.” Transnational processes exist in some sense in opposition to this non-space, for by contrast
transnational relations exist “anchored in,” as tied to a particular place while still transcending one or more nation-states. 55

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, because of her innovative scholarship two decades ago and her continued commitment to anti-racist, provocative feminism, remains the key thinker in transnational feminism. She has helped to shape it as a dynamic, collective practice of feminism, which attempts to engage in feminist issues cross-culturally while actively seeking to broach – and then avoid – the pitfalls of universalizing feminist concerns. As a result of its high-stake risks, transnational feminism produces an ethical model for feminist scholars doing cross-cultural work. In addition to its ethical mandate as a methodology, transnational feminism informs an epistemological model of subjectivity; that is, the collective models of identity it allows for speak to a subjective sense of self in the world.

While Mohanty’s work reflects her formidable experience and ability to address the most difficult ethical and theoretical quandaries of recent feminist discourse with regard to race and identity, solidarity and multi-vocality, and global politics and economies, her position betrays a certain misapprehension of the global world, and of the experiences of its citizens. Mohanty’s will to downplay political borders and reiterate other formal lines of identity-formation reflects a desire to keep the specificities of identity politics in play – something she believes recent critical

theory denies. A retrieval of identity-based bordered states undermines the political, cultural, and economic power that political borders continue to exert. The importance of this cannot be overstated, particularly as critical theory – and feminism itself – continues to promote global culture as it corresponds to diasporic populations for whom political borders supposedly have diminished importance.

In what has become the defining essay on transnational feminism, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” Mohanty proposes a working philosophy for what she terms “Third World feminisms.” She commits her model equally to the critique of hegemonies of Western feminism and to forging a new, autonomous feminism, one that emerges from – and is accountable to – geographic, historical, and cultural specificities. The former and latter aspects comprise a feminism, in Mohanty’s words, simultaneously about deconstructing and dismantling, and building and constructing. Mohanty’s contribution to scholarship can thus be recognized as a rethinking of the objectives and practice of feminist theory but also as an uncompromising critique of Western feminism.

Two decades after its initial publication, “Under Western Eyes” maintains its intellectual and cultural relevance. This status suggests, however, that much work remains to be done in the field of transnational and anti-racist feminism. Even so, by amending Mohanty’s founding principle for transnational feminism – the balance

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56 Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders, 6.
57 Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders, 17. Reprinted in Feminism Without Borders, the essay was originally published as “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” Boundary 2 12 no. 3 and 13 no. 1 (1984): 338-358.
between dismantling and building anew – the scholarship will better reflect and guide a truly contemporary endeavor. Specifically, given this project’s focus on the analysis of Native women’s art and related visual culture, larger feminist concerns can best be served by placing the emphasis on this second aspect, that is, in producing a viable feminist thought. This ordering allies itself with Mohanty’s critique of the dominance of hegemonic ideologies of feminism, hegemonies that have been pervasive for too long. Critiques of earlier or existing feminist theories are by no means dismissible: the ways in which feminism speaks or fails to speak to non-Western women testifies to what challenges lie ahead and what possibilities remain.

To a great extent, even well-intentioned proponents of transnational feminism perpetuate the construct of the singular, monolithic “Third World Woman.” The unfixed and sometimes paradoxical positioning of Native North American women in the global world challenges this figure. Geographic location – homeland – situates the First Nations in the heart of the developed world, though they continue to struggle through continuing processes of decolonization that in many ways situates them as “Third World” peoples.58 Belmore’s early performance, Exhibit #671B, works to unseat this tendency, as she inserts herself, as a living spectacle, into the dominant culture’s exhibitionary paradigm for First Nations culture.59 Resistance to, and

58 Many indigenous peoples in the First World, including the First Nations, have adopted the term Fourth World to describe their unique and separate status.

59 This strategy is a powerful and communicative one, having been used successfully by another Native artist James Luna with The Artifact Piece (1987), which I describe in Chapter 3, and Take a Picture with a Real Indian (1991) a performance at the Whitney Museum of American Art where Luna offered himself to
exclusion from, discourses of Western feminism confers outsider status on First Nations women who, like many women from the developing world, are not served by dominant models.

Feminist theory provides a basis for reading some specificities of Native art produced by women. The interests of transnational feminism can be used to theorize working models for Native women, and specifically, working models towards their visual practice. In this sense, transnational feminism offers a political mode of thinking which corresponds to the political, social and economic specificities of Native people still decolonizing in an increasingly global world. Importantly though, isolating the impetus of transnational feminism and its philosophical underpinnings figures as a distinct methodological strategy, something I refer to as the ethics of transnational feminism. In the introduction to her book, Mohanty strives to justify her title and the book’s chief conceit, *Feminism Without Borders*. In rethinking feminism and its contemporary, global objectives, Mohanty calls for the transcendence of some borders as well as the acknowledgement and acceptance of others. In this way her title misleads, for by no means does she endorse the obliteration of borders that an internationalist feminist project, understood in its most literal sense, might imply. Rather, her theory rejects the universalizing tendencies with which so many European and American feminists have previously been charged.

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be photographed in full feathered headdress with museum visitors. Another example is Coco Fusco’s notorious performance with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* (1992) during which the artists inhabited a cage as fictional, newly discovered “native” people.
Rather than insisting on dismantling borders when territory and cultural difference still carry great primacy for many Native people, “feminism without borders” allows for feminist connections to be made within and across existing borders. This feminism has the potential to exert much influence as a strategy for cross-cultural communication: its capacity for a language with which to express the relationships of a subject to space, given the particular conditions of many Native women today, sets transnational feminism apart as a site of truly dynamic engagement. As individuals and populations move through space, crossing national borders, feminism takes its cue, reflecting this reality, acknowledging multiple and varied allegiances.

The urgency with which Mohanty situates her work and its preponderant transnational directive demonstrates its philosophical, intellectual and political allegiances with a feminist project that includes Native voices. Mohanty’s scholarship and her thoughtful working vocabulary provide constructive tools for thinking through contemporary Native art from a relevant, inclusive feminist perspective and further, for understanding the feminist issues at play in Native art. This latter dimension has yet to be adequately explored in scholarly literature. The failure of feminist theory and Native art to correspond in meaningful ways is indicative of a larger disjuncture between feminism and Native women. Otherwise expressed, an apparently incommensurable rift between the belief systems and values held by non-native feminists and the issues that concern Native women blights feminist scholarship. By this line of argument, Native and non-natives cultures are so
incongruous that staking common ground – here, the experiences of women – fails to be a particularly clear-cut endeavor. Disparate experiences, realities and priorities are not easily united through discourse.

**Native Women, Decolonizing Feminism**

Towards the end of the 1980s, many feminist scholars faced exacting criticism for the parochial Eurocentricity of the theory they produced and for inadequately addressing issues of race and ethnicity. This situation has improved significantly over the past decade: not only are European and North American scholars addressing these issues and their own culpability therein, but the voices of other women – those who were previously marginalized – are being heard as well. Indeed, the ascendancy of post-colonial, anti-racist, and transnational feminisms to the fore of feminist scholarship has resulted in a dramatic refiguring of feminist concerns. While the difficulties feminism faces in order to be accountable to all women have not been resolved, progress ought to be acknowledged, particularly given the extent to which pessimism and uncertainty has mired discussion of feminism cross-culturally and with regard to race.

Much feminist scholarship over the past two decades has been concerned with identity politics and issues of difference, as has, more generally, critical and cultural theory.\(^{60}\) In spite of this, feminist theory remains for the most part at odds with the

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\(^{60}\) See, for example, Collins; Trinh Minh Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana
lives of Native women. African-American and South Asian feminists have mobilized, and their voices have been among the most critical and engaging in recent feminist theory. As a result they have influenced the scholarship of art history.\textsuperscript{61} With some exceptions, methodologically feminist scholarship on First Nations art has not followed. Though their work frequently suggests a feminist consciousness, the artists who represent some of the most ardent voices of First Nations culture practice outside the purview of feminist art. Just as borders retain pre- eminent importance, so too do the shared spaces that First Nations peoples occupy and that transnational feminism implies.

Feminists today are attuned to difference and to the layers of individuating identity. Identity politics, so crucial in the critical discourse of the past two decades, has ensured this.\textsuperscript{62} However, the will to respect difference, the sense of when to step back and away, and the acknowledgment of that which we cannot know, inheres a


\textsuperscript{62} When I speak of identity politics, I am referring to a sense of group identity as formed through identification with a group that has experienced oppression on the basis of gender, race, class or sexuality; these identifications have been the focus of much critical and cultural theory in the 1980s and 1990s.
loss and has at times been divisive. Here, feminism assumes a burden as it moves to resolve the uncertainty of its role “after” identity politics.

This moment of doubt and anxiety speaks to the divide between Native women activists and academic feminists, which has thus far been translated into supposedly distinct areas of inquiry: areas that are of interest to Native women and areas that are of interest to feminist theorists. Many Native, activist women do not believe that the concerns of (what is perceived as) mainly a white women’s movement are relevant to their continued struggle to decolonize indigenous populations of North America. Moreover, because the concerns of academic feminism have in recent years been oriented towards the individual and the resurrection of a female subject, they are viewed as incompatible with the community-based ethos of traditional Native society. Native scholars attest to the fact that the Euro-American, middle-class subject traditionally inhered in feminism emerges from an entirely different order than the woman served by the socio-political agenda of community-based, Native activism. The philosophical and theoretical questions of Euro-American feminism appear incongruous with the ethic of women mobilizing in response to what they see as more pressing issues of decolonization: the political and cultural recognition of the First Nations, the social and economic

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63 Issues around employment, health, and justice prevail as those most critical to the NWAC’s advocacy.

maintenance of healthy communities and the aforementioned political, economic, and legal status of women within Native communities, and at large in Canada.

Decolonization suggests the dismantling of some borders and boundaries, while calling for the maintenance and determination of others. Borders, as I have discussed, figure substantively in Belmore’s performance in the sense that the artist delimits a space and then occupies it. Space, her full use of it, and the importance of the location of her act all draw on the bordered, bounded space. The particular significance of borders to Native peoples has long been attributed a supreme status that transcends the political, the social, and the cultural. Borders protect and uphold the political integrity of aboriginal nationhood, and indeed many less tangible forms of cultural sovereignty and identification. This primacy must, however, recognize the volume and frequency of “cross-border” traffic, of living on the frontiers, and of individual and collective negotiations of boundaries. Not the least of these spaces are those occupied by First Nations women today: many First Nations artists have

65 Art historian David W. Penney has written eloquently on the misappropriation of the word frontier, and its applicability to Native American art. He makes a claim for the frontier as the border between nations and cultures, whereby groups are positioned looking at one another, rather than into the unknown, as the term is often construed to mean in the popular imagination. “To make ‘art’ of the American Indian visible, it is necessary to convert the notion of frontier to its second sense as ‘border’ and restore the ability to see American Indians as active agents (and artists) in an American historical narrative. The dimensions of this task are so large because America’s collective myth, based on the other meaning of ‘frontier’, is so thoroughly ingrained in American cultural understanding.” The implication that the frontier, in Penney’s sense, might be a fertile space for interaction, rather than a “no-man’s zone” or an endless expanse of empty space (as in outer space) is compelling. David W. Penney, Art of the American Indian Frontier. The Chandler-Pohrt Collection (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts; Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992), 21.
sought to express their particular spatial occupations and lived experiences specific to
gender. And yet, as scholars, we are at a loss to identify a vocabulary with which to
address in feminist terms what is being expressed.

Feminist geographers like Gillian Rose work from the premise that geography
itself implies a masculine subject position. The discipline, she argues, is founded on
the notion of a detached, rational being mapping space. This role cannot be
comfortably inhabited by a feminine subject; for this subject, by contrast to the male
subject, inherits characteristics that would disrupt the geographer’s work.66 By
contrast, Belmore occupies the performance space in an anti-masculinist manner, for
her movements defy that of the geographer, the model of masculine rationality that
the discipline continues to harbor. Belmore maps the space with her body. By use of
her body, Belmore’s practice demonstrates its ties to a feminist tradition of
performance art.67 Her body registers the signs of her labor and grief through her
actions. Literally, her body frames her communion with the missing women: their
names are written in black marker across her skin. Midway through the performance,
Belmore looks down at her marked skin, reads the names, and shouts them out, each
name, as it were, re-entering and exiting her body. Grief is felt irrationally, despite
Belmore’s attempts to manage it. Geographically speaking, so too is Vancouver’s
Downtown Eastside, as the neighborhood evades place, placement, and order.

66 See, Gillian Rose, Feminism and Geography: the Limits of Geographical
67 For example, Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke, and Ana Mendieta in the
United States, and Kate Craig and Lisa Steele in Canada.
Feminist thought and feminist work take many forms. Scholar M. A. Jaimes Guerrero, of mixed Yaqui and Juareño heritage, is adamant that the study of “Native issues” constitutes part of an ongoing project of decolonization (which necessitates addressing land and land disputes), but that such a project is a feminist one. Prioritizing decolonization and its stake in land politics does not preclude or negate the advancement of gender concerns. The activist practices of Native women call for recognition as feminist practices. Moreover, feminists need to rethink their own political boundaries for “[a]ny feminism that does not address land rights, sovereignty, and the state’s systematic erasure of its cultural practices of native peoples, or that defines native women’s participation in these struggles as non-feminist, is limited in vision and exclusionary in practice.”

Scholars and artists position land and its importance to Native women as a provocative but volatile thread of inquiry. The multiple ways women relate to land in Native cultures make it a defining but often unfixable feature in the formation of an individual’s relationship to her cultural community, her sense of self, and thus, her subjectivity: land is key for many, but not always in the same ways. It also has overwhelming resonance with regard to the changing socio-political experience of First Nations women in Canada today. Thus, I position this engagement with land and the meaning it affords to contemporary Native identities as a critical intersection with

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feminist theory, with a view to its potential as a means for working through the
diversity of identities raised by transnational feminism today. With this in mind, *Vigil*
is no less about land than is Belmore’s earlier, iconic work *Ayum-ee-aawach oomama-mowan: Speaking to their Mother*. Both probe the artist’s relationship to
place. Belmore’s unspoken call for a safe space for women in *Vigil* elects a claim to
place which resembles her direct appeal to the land in her earlier piece.

Guerrero despairs the split allegiances that Native women face, torn between
male-controlled tribal groups and a consortium of third-world women in a patriarchal
hierarchy. Unfortunately, she stops short of offering any kind of generative
suggestions on the direction transnational feminism ought to take in order to be
relevant to those it excludes. In so doing, Guerrero may falsely situate indigenism as
diametrical other to the concerns of women, a position that does not reflect, I think,
the spirit of her work. Yet the potential for feminism to be anything but categorically
bankrupt for Native women is uncertain when Guerrero states that:

> [i]ndigenism is thriving as a liberation movement inspired by our Indian
cosmologies. It differs markedly from any feminism that limits the scope of
our experiences and liberation struggles by defining them solely in terms of
sexism. One can understand why the struggle for self-determination is
simultaneously a struggle against patriarchy and a struggle for a land base that
is ecologically safe and whole.69

Certainly current feminist thought – in its objectives and practices – works from a
broader basis than one which merely counters sexism. While the specificities of
Native cultures may be outside the more comfortably established tenets of feminist

69 Guerrero, “Civil Rights versus Sovereignty,” 120.
theory, recent theorists of feminist epistemology have been giving thought to the
diversity of women’s experience and identity. Specifically, these scholars study the
bearing of cultural specificity on the kinds of knowledge women possess, and how
they collect and disseminate this knowledge. It represents, in other words, the
emergence of a kind of thought that offers access to identities that can be both
feminist and Native.70 African-American feminists have grappled with the
relationship between gender and race in visual representations of the racialized
body.71 Issues of sexuality with their attendant culturally-specific implications may
too be read through the lens of feminism, as issues of racial disparity quite often have
a prominently gendered component which calls for a feminist intervention or revival
of a feminist politic.

70 See, Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, eds., Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Jane Duran, Worlds of Knowing: Global Feminist Epistemologies (New York: Routledge, 2001). Duran writes with some insight on Mexican feminism and the influence of an indigenous worldview on Mestizaje culture, situating this discussion in a volume that explores feminist epistemologies from different parts of the world. While she does consider Chicana identity and African diasporas in the United States, Duran, an American, does not include Native women from Canada or the United States in her discussion. In the field of cultural studies Trinh Minh Ha has written that women’s storytelling comprises “the world’s earliest archives or libraries,” both reinforcing the importance of an oral tradition in the dissemination and preservation of knowledge, and the importance of relationships between women. See, Trinh, Woman, Native, Other, 121.

Still, as a central political issue for many Native peoples, sovereignty’s importance at times precludes the ascendancy of other, more aggregate identity concerns related to gender or sexuality. The politics of decolonization, made empirically manifest through persistent land disputes and treaty negotiations, are potent enough to foreclose the serious negotiation of other valences of identity. This has implications not only for the discourses of so-called Western feminism, but also with regard to more recent conversations regarding globalization. The terms of hybridity have had much currency in negotiating the cultural identity of diasporic populations, and more generally, in doing so in a changing, global setting.

My endeavor to cast homeland as feminist is not uncomplicated, particularly as feminine language has traditionally been used to memorialize the more universalizing subjects of land and home territory. Homeland can be too easily parsed as a female, feminine entity. Omitting First Nations’ perspectives is troubling, given

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72 The yoking of a feminine consciousness to the land and Native traditionalism finds favor with some First Nations feminists who are wary of the project of Western feminism. In spite of this, some caution is due, particularly when aligning the projects of the ecofeminist with First Nations traditionalists, for by no means does ecofeminism escape the difficult politics of translation in cross-cultural work. For more of an explanation about ecofeminism than I can provide here, see Karen J. Warren, ed., *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); and Greta Claire Gaard, *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993). Ecofeminism may share a relationship with Native spirituality and consciousness, but I believe this equation diminishes the profile of the gender issues in Belmore’s work, and issues specific to urban life. Suggesting that eco-feminism is the school of feminism “closest” to a Native consciousness diminishes the complicated lives of contemporary Native women; quite often, its claims of correspondence often depend on a romanticized and de-historicized version of Native culture. It denies the articulation of the complex agendas, modes of expression, and training of some of the most recognized and important artists working in Canada today.
that actual geographic territory many of these feminist scholars share; major urban centers are often directly adjacent to First Nations reservations. Many First Nations people live in cities – like the women who disappeared from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, but also like Belmore – the experience of which is colored by a culturally-defined relationship to a space that may or may not be one of homeland. Ongoing legal and political struggles to regain traditional homelands or correlative territorial rights occupy the collective imagination of First Nations, and affect the livelihood of many individuals. Finally, much urban or suburban development has occurred on spaces also flagged as traditional territories, resulting in a dual – or multiple – occupation of space. These gradations highlight a dimension of contestation, which, while possibly latent, is always primed to destabilize collective relationships to space. While perhaps a condition of all public and collective spaces, this quality is especially potent in North America, given the manipulation and often outright dismissal of the First Nations and their long, distinct, and extant relationship to spaces now otherwise assigned.

While heinous, the crimes against the women of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside are seen by many Native people as part of an extensive and ongoing history

73 In Saskatchewan, reservations can be found in urban areas, mostly due to the Treaty Land Entitlement agreement, signed in the 1990s. This agreement provided funds for First Nations to acquire lands to be converted to reservations. Some bands used these funds to purchase land or sites in urban areas, an overwhelmingly successful initiative. See, Miller, 205-208.
of oppression of the First Nations in Canada. In this sense, it follows that the brutality enacted upon women that inspired Vigil, parallel the colonial assault on First Nations peoples, thus making a case for allegiance between feminist and Native activism. The artist’s reclamation of the missing women’s “home” space reiterates the First Nations’ prior claim to (land) space in Canada, thus imbuing her use of the performance space with this double meaning. The chilling racist and sexist language used by the police, and sometimes the media, with reference to the women who disappeared renders this an especially pointed claim: repeated references to hookers, drug addicts, and (pejoratively) Indians over-determine the missing.

Yet legitimately opening up transnational feminist discourse to women of the First Nations, and moreover, productively engaging the terms of transnational feminism in the North American context necessitates a critical reflection on not only the current multicultural makeup of its population, but a historical reflection on the nature and status of the territory itself, and from that, on the current status of that territory to all its inhabitants. Maintaining both the semantic and political integrity of

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74 The Sisters in Spirit campaign makes this very clear in their mission statement, referring the large numbers of First Nations women who have disappeared across the country, and what are overall, higher rates of violence against First Nations women than the population at large.

75 A high-profile police spokesman for the investigation, who was also the police liaison with the victims’ families, was quoted as saying that the women who were addicted to drugs had ruined their looks by the time they came to the Downtown Eastside so it was hard for them to get dates. The Vancouver Police Chief initially stood by him; he was later forced to resign after complaints from the families. See, Matas, “Pickton Case Spokesman Resigns Over Comments: Police Chief Stands By Him, But Brother of Missing Woman Calls Remarks Offensive,” Globe and Mail [Toronto] November 9, 2002.
the nation as a space which codes or premises feminist thought depends on the exploration its specificity to women of the First Nations. Specifically, much of the challenge of this project is in the articulation of nation and nationhood as a feminist property, whatever the position of the subject to that territory.

**Reflective Solidarity**

Belmore’s *Vigil* is a personal response; but as it occurs in a public space, it is also a call to others, and in this respect can be seen as coalition-building. The women targeted were not all of Native heritage; further, these disappearances and murders speak to violence perpetrated against women under multiple circumstances. There is a need for a diversity of women to respond to these events and to Belmore’s outreach. The nature of Belmore’s art – a performance – creates a direct relationship with others as spectators in a way that more static media cannot achieve. Yet how might feminist scholars sensitive to the boundaries of experience respond, in spite of the many cultural allegiances that have divided feminist cohesiveness? In many ways a complement to Mohanty’s transnationalism, Jodi Dean’s work on the idea of solidarity presents a significant innovation in feminism, challenging the quagmire of inaction and incompatibility by feminists immobilized by identity politics.\(^\text{76}\) Dean’s “reflective solidarity” situates relationships between women – between feminists – of whom individuated difference has previously denied progressive cohesion. This form

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of solidarity is germane to Belmore’s performance of \textit{Vigil} and the feminist reception of it. As a performance, \textit{Vigil} depends on its audience, the medium engaging an audience more actively and directly than other art forms. As feminists struggle with the crimes perpetrated on women of the Downtown Eastside, and then struggle to find ground from which to respond to Belmore’s performance while still acknowledging the differences of class, culture, and politics that may (imperfectly) divide artist, subjects, and spectators, can solidarity be employed as an effective tool?

The term is not without a loaded history. Indeed, Dean rejects the simplistic notion of sisterhood, a universalizing fiction put forth as part of 1970s feminism that most feminists have abandoned.\textsuperscript{77} Sisterhood, she argues, allies itself with solidarity in its most conventional sense, producing a coalition based on the common interests and concerns of its members, stemming from shared traditions and values. Identity politics, self-knowledge, and varied contemporary experiences (especially those in the global world) threaten conventional solidarity, if the differences between individuals fall outside the proviso of the group. Under the purview of conventional solidarity, difference weakens the group’s integrity, and jeopardizes its symbolic space. Wary of this disruption, feminists acknowledge the difficulties in providing for a common agenda.\textsuperscript{78} The challenges that transnationalism presents with regard to


\textsuperscript{78} Questioning the nature of the shared traditions and values that bring a group’s members together may constitute a threat and furthermore, reflecting on the common interest that birthed the group may compel the group’s eventual
Native positions, challenges that I have outlined, and the multiple classification of spaces that I believe to be part of the present political and cultural order in Canada (and the United States), suggest a new turn for feminist action.

As women striving for a feminist order across a wide array of racial, cultural, ethnic, national, economic, and sexual differences, locating the nexus of a feminist identity in spite of such difference seems insurmountable. Belmore herself works from a place of doubt: she recreates a climate of solidarity with the all-too-present risk of disagreement that prefaces the interface of First Nations and feminism, disagreement that provides the basis for this solidarity. Disagreement promotes connections between groups or individuals. These tentative connections may establish the foundations of what Dean terms *reflective solidarity*, that is, a relationship representing the “mutual expectation of a responsible orientation to relationship.”

Alliance figures prominently in Belmore’s performance, with the artist extending herself—bodily through her work—to an audience of spectators. This overture, and the alliance it fosters, lays the groundwork for a more meaningful relationship between strangers. Belmore’s performance, *Vigil*, stands as an invitation.

Disintegration. Thus, Dean situates conventional solidarity as an otherworldly utopia, one that demands blind support and disallows dissent in order to sustain the integrity of the group. The consequences are severe for feminists, and Dean’s criticism is harsh: restricted communication leads members to suppress difference and limit their discussion to a hand of acceptable topics. Conventional solidarity is in this sense enormously counterproductive, as further hazards include isolation and homogenization of the group. See, Dean, 26.

79 Dean chooses her words carefully, so that the term mutual acknowledges the *we* of such a partnership, and *orientation to relationship*, allows for mutual expectations without fixing or restricting them. Dean, 29.
When the artist gathers a crowd around her at the corner of Gore and Cordova Streets, she makes an invitation: *I ask you to stand by me over and against a third.* The act of performance inheres an invitation: spectators who gather curbside to watch, whether by premeditated intent or because they happened upon the performance, exert a response to Belmore’s invitation. Their presence, exacted through spectatorship, comprises solidarity with the artist and solidarity with the feminist tenor of her performance. As *Vigil* continues, Belmore takes a rose from the bouquet she left on the ground at the start. She looks at her arms, on which are written in heavy, black marker, women’s names, which we can only presume are the names of the missing. “Sarah!” she yells, “Helen!” The invocation is also an invitation, a call to the spectators, and perhaps to those beyond on the street to carry the mantle of those names. By writing the names on her arms, she grounds these women to the site from which they disappeared through her own body; by calling out their names, in what has thus far been a silent performance, she implicates the spectators in their absence: *I ask you to stand by me over and against a third.*

The nuance attributed to the category of “we” means that an alliance is dynamic, active, and rendered through interaction; alliance may be understood dialogically. The “we” in Belmore’s work operates on multiple levels. A “we”

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80 Dean, 3.

81 Dean explains “we” as “a form of communication. We don’t have to understand ourselves as ‘us’ against ‘them’; we can recognize each other as belonging to ‘us.’ Through language we establish a relationship, creating a common, social space. With our ‘queries’ we challenge each other, letting our space, for a time, be one of negotiation. Neither ontological nor teleological, this internally designated,
emerges from the performance, the product of the artist’s invitation to the spectators to share in her work. Less immediate though still forceful, this “we” has another life in the gallery space, as mediated through the video screen in the exhibited version of *Vigil*, the video installation *The Named and the Unnamed*. Contained by the intimate quarters of the gallery space in which the video is shown, a “we” is initiated as each new spectator breaks into the continuous video loop. This break, triggered by entry, creates another level of noise and of counter-presence towards the formation of an active “we.”

Watching a performance, or a video, is not a passive act. Belmore’s performance commands an incredibly distressing subject matter – violence, racism, and misogyny – that the spectator must confront with her. We flounder in our grief and our incapacity in the face of this enormous loss. Tacitly, to be moved, we must acknowledge the disturbing circumstances that motivate Belmore’s performance, chiefly that dozens of women disappeared from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside to so little public outcry. Women died, tragically and violently. We are disturbed by the circumstances of many of these women’s lives, their vulnerability, and what we

communicative ‘we’ does not deny that the term ‘we’ often refers to a relationship among a limited number of members. Instead, it stresses the possibility of an inclusive understanding of ‘we’ whereby the strength of the bond connecting us stems from our mutual recognition of each other instead of from our exclusion of someone else. Most importantly, because it is created through communicative utterances, this ‘we’ cannot remain fixed. It is constantly created and renewed by the ‘query’ as members confront and challenge, accept and reject, the claims raised by each and all.”

Dean, 75.
imagine to be their private despair. Highly upsetting and overwhelming, we gain solace by uniting ourselves, silently, with Belmore’s outcry.

Naming maps the women to the place from which they vanished. By naming individual women, Belmore’s solidarity takes its form by the recognition of others. Naming centers her performance by means of a most basic reference to another person, her name. Naming gestures, in this sense, at both the overwhelmingly general and the specific. Specific in that that these women disappeared or died “nameless,” in obscurity, and without large public outcry. General in that the name is just that, the casing of an individual we do not or, as in this case, cannot know. A name, further, can always belong to another, be claimed entirely and legitimately by another. Thus Belmore’s act of naming is both felicitous and frustrated as she draws herself – and the spectators – closer to the disappeared only to find that very propinquity thwarted.

The video’s title, *The Named and the Unnamed*, comes to stand not just for those who have been named and those who remain unaccounted for, but the futility of knowing another, in this case, others truly now without voice.

The actions Belmore offers in support of the missing are far more specific to the artist herself. As she calls out the women’s names, Belmore bites at roses, taken one by one from the bouquet. She tears at the soft petals and thorny stalks with her teeth, taking all into her mouth and then, sometimes gagging, she spits the matter onto the street. Later, Belmore puts on a long, red dress. With a hammer, she nails the fabric to a telephone pole, and then tears herself free, each time ripping the dress more. Repeatedly, she nails and tears, to the pole and to the wooden plank at the base
of the fence, tattering the dress until most of it is left, shredded and hanging from nails.

These acts, while referential, evocative, and moving, ultimately gesture to the integrity of the artist’s subjectivity, distinct from the localized, individuated women around whom Belmore created this performance. Belmore’s “body language” is in part her own, for as a performance artist, she has distinguished herself by her refined corporeal communication. This language belongs to a performance art tradition: Belmore’s act is not random. She has gallery support, and performs using a language shared by those with a fluency in contemporary art, performance, and discourses of the body. In this way, Belmore uses her tools as an artist to communicate the tragedy of the missing women. She approaches her subject with a shared sensibility with the missing women, undoubtedly as a resident of Vancouver, as a woman, and a First Nations person. However, calling her own differences to mind – and here, her identity as an artist has the most primacy – is a useful reminder about the dangers of the generalities of identity politics.

“Bordering on Feminism,” the title I have given this chapter (and dissertation as a whole) conveys a very useful rhetorical image for the issues Vigil evokes, but also more generally, for Native feminist practices and feminist perspectives on Native art. Belmore’s performance signals an act of reflective solidarity with the missing women; her actions are both acts of solidarity with the missing and an appeal to others to stand with her in her action. An implicit “we” girds the work of many Native artists. This collective implies the bonds that unite, in solidarity, the diversity
of Native peoples in North America. It enables aboriginal peoples of varied backgrounds to stand together on certain fronts of common concern. But the feminist “we,” with its potential for cross-cultural positioning, lends new optimism to the contemporary transnational feminist project. As spectators alone, as witnesses, or as scholars, we can offer reflective solidarity, an offering that difference previously denied. This offering represents a kind of active stillness, where individuals may remain in their own respective spaces, but also suggests the crossing of certain borders that heretofore divided.
Figure 1.1. Map of Downtown Eastside, Vancouver. As reproduced in Leslie Robertson and Dara Culhane, *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2005), 15.


Chapter 2

The Testamental Landscape:
Framing Homeland in Alanis Obomsawin’s Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance

…a landscape is not unlike a book – a compilation of pages that overlap without any two ever being the same. People open the book according to their taste and training, their memories and desires: for a geologist the compilation opens at one page, for a boatman at another, and still another for a ship’s pilot, a painter and so on. On occasion these pages are ruled with lines that are invisible to some people, while being for others as real, as charged and as volatile as high-voltage cables.82

Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture.83

Land and Landscape in Native Art

In Native art and visual culture, an understanding of home requires an understanding of homeland. Homeland – and for many, territorial sovereignty – is an important aspect of identity formation. Land informs indigenous identity, and struggles for sovereignty ensure the land maintains a central place in cultural and political relations between Native and non-native peoples. This chapter focuses on homeland as an aspect of home, and does so within the realm of Canadian art, where representations of the land, landscapes, have been powerful components in Canadian identity formation and where a landscapes of a limited scope assume that important role. To

offer a broader reading of landscape, Canadian art, and identity, I take as my case study the documentary film, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993)\(^{84}\) by Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, and consider how this film, through its treatment of home and place, presents a powerful landscape that transforms the genre itself.

Obomsawin is a senior filmmaker with the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). Since joining the NFB in 1967, initially as an advisor on aboriginal issues, she has made upwards of twenty-five documentaries that relate to Native peoples. *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* focuses on what is referred to as the Oka Crisis, the explosive dispute over a tract of land that occurred in 1990 at the Mohawk reservation of Kanesatake, Quebec, between the Mohawk people and non-native authorities.\(^{85}\)

As a 120-minute documentary film, *Kanehsatake* seemingly does not resemble in medium or style what is commonly understood as a landscape, for landscape is predominantly conceived of as a genre of painting. As I will develop, the history of landscape painting has been hostile or exclusionary to Native peoples, for its ethos promotes a view of the land at odds with the many Native cultures tied in close and specific ways to the land. Moreover, in North America it is often associated

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\(^{84}\) Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993.)

\(^{85}\) While Kanehsatake and Kanesatake (among others) are both accepted spellings, Kanesatake is the official English-language one and more commonly used. Therefore, when referring to the title of the film, I use *Kanehsatake*, but when referring to the community, I use Kanesatake.
with a colonizing mentality. As such, while Native artists consistently revisit land as a theme, landscape is not an attendant genre. I explore several meanings of landscape in this chapter. The first sense of landscape is the art genre, the second is the view of the land itself, and the third is the verb, the action by which land is cultivated and shaped by human intervention. This third sense evokes the colonization of the land and, implicitly, of the land’s inhabitants. Positioning landscape as a transformative process of representation, I draw on the notion, further elaborated on below, that land becomes landscape when it acquires a narrative and a frame. Viewed in this sense, landscape becomes a more viable means through which to investigate Native art practice.

What Indian writer Amitav Ghosh suggests in the passage quoted at the outset – that one’s own position, outlook, and intention play a vital part in the interpretation of landscape – puts into question a rigid, singular view of what constitutes a landscape. Ghosh writes about landscape in its sense as a vista, a view of the land. I use his eloquent phrasing as a point of departure from which to examine the divergent views of the specific piece of land at issue in Obomsawin’s film. To the Mohawk people, the land belongs to them, it has a sacred past, and is a place to gather; to the Oka town council, it is a site for development, a source of potential profit; to the Sûreté du Québec [SQ] (Quebec’s provincial police force) and the Canadian Armed Forces called in to confront the Native protestors, it is the site of their day’s work; and to the Canadian government it is a headache, one of many in its ongoing disputes with First Nations peoples. To paraphrase Ghosh, Obomsawin looks at these real,
charged and volatile high-voltage cables for the Mohawk people. In doing so, she produces a landscape in its cultural, material, and art historical sense. This is the transformative process by which land becomes landscape. Drawing on the culture and context surrounding the Oka Crisis, Obomsawin’s film becomes a case study for what I describe as a testamental landscape.

Given the history of First Nations peoples post-Contact, the term landscape resonates with meaning in all senses of the word. If, in response to this history of colonization, asserting rights to homelands and staving off further colonization (cultural or otherwise) remain of a high order, land will continue to be tied to decolonization and the expression of First Nations identity in the postcolonial context. While landscape, as a genre of painting with demonstrable European roots, may be understood as specific and disengaged from Native cultural expression and from struggles for sovereignty, the connection between land and landscape is deeper than that most basic semantic correspondence implies. It is these other levels of correspondence that I explore. Further, I wish to identify why landscape matters in Native visual culture. The art of landscape has a particular relationship to nationalism and identity in Canada; here, I locate Obomsawin’s work both as part of that tradition and as resistant to it. Finally, given the close associations in both European and Native belief systems between women and land, I explore gender in landscape in relation to Obomsawin’s emphasis on the experience of Mohawk women and their visibility in *Kanehsatake*, and discuss Obomsawin’s work in the context of other
treatments of women and landscape by Native women artists, Maria Hupfield, Shelley Niro, and Bonnie Devine.

Land is one of the most prominent themes addressed by Native artists in Canada and the United States. The consistency of this theme’s importance should not, however, be mistaken for consistency in its treatment, as artists have found a myriad of tangential issues to address and have undertaken to do so in a range of practices, over time and across locations. Group exhibitions centered, thematically, on land reflect this interest and demonstrate the breadth with which it has been explored. Most notably, this was the case with the watershed exhibition, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*, the 1992 exhibition which marked the first exhibition of contemporary Native art at the National Gallery in Ottawa. This being said, these practices remain largely disconnected from land-centered representations by non-native artists, representations that might broadly be considered landscapes. Saulteaux artist Robert Houle, who was one of the curators of *Land, Spirit, Power*, wrote in the exhibition catalogue that “There is no word for ‘landscape’ in any of the languages of the ancient ones still spoken. In Ojibwa,

86 Following *Land, Spirit, Power*, other exhibitions organized around the land theme include *Staking LAND Claims* at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta, in 1997, and *Our Land/Ourselves: American Indian Contemporary Artists* at the University Art Gallery of SUNY Albany in 1990. Very recently, this theme has been revisited by Mohawk curator Ryan Rice in *Anthem: Perspectives on Home and Native Land* at the Carleton University Art Gallery in 2008.
whenever the word *uhke* is pronounced, it is more an exaltation of humanness than a declaration of property.”

Recently, the art historical term *landscape* was invoked for an exhibition of contemporary Native art assembled for the George Gustav Heye Center, the Manhattan campus of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. The 2007 exhibition was titled *Off the Map: Landscape in the Native Imagination.* Kathleen Ash-Milby, the Navajo curator responsible for the exhibition, states that while all the participating artists are inspired by the landscape, none represent it directly. Rather, landscapes are conceived as “imaginary constructs” not bound to a specific location or temporal moment. She also offers:

> If it is possible to slip a definition around the idea of a Native landscape, it may be with the words ‘multiplicity’ and ‘ambiguity.’ These concepts encompass the complexity of contemporary indigenous experience with land and the idea of landscape, as well as the futility of attempting to delineate its borders. The traditional understanding of the land is far more nuanced and multidimensional than can be expressed through simple representation. It is not just the earth and the sky, but the totality of the universe from the underworld to the heavens above. It is color and light, sounds and smells, the past and present. It is, as Peter Nabokov describes, what ‘lies within or beneath what the eye can see.’

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89 Ash-Milby, 45.
Ash-Milby’s characterization of landscape, though different from how *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* will be positioned here, supports a claim that landscape has relevance as an art form for Native artists; however, it calls for a transformation from its Euro-centric traditions.

Land, when interpreted by Native artists, is rarely landscape; the reasons behind this are manifold, if ambiguous. Land-based traditions unite Native cultures, and struggles over sovereignty add a further dimension to the land’s importance for many Native peoples in the present day. The landscape genre originates in European art history, and Native forms of visual expression originate from their own traditions. Even as, post-Contact, and more pointedly in the last century, Native artists have adopted or integrated many Western ideas, techniques and materials into their practices, landscape has neither been extensively explored, nor critically engaged as a Native practice.\(^90\) By reading the filmic representation of land in *Kanehsatake* as the production of a landscape, I mean to draw attention to and displace some of the cultural legacies of the art historical term in the context of Native and non-native relations in Canada. Second, my focus on the visibility and status of women in

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\(^90\) One of the few art historians to tackle this question is Kate Morris, who surmises that representations of land are categorically different than European ones in terms of form, content, and ideological intention. I do not disagree, but question why the understanding of landscape as a genre should remain fixed and only relevant to those with European heritage. See, Kate Morris, “Picturing Sovereignty: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art,” *Painters, Patrons and Identity: Essay to Honor J. J. Brody*, ed. Joyce M. Szabo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001) 187-209. See also, Morris, “Picturing Sovereignty: Land and Identity in Contemporary Native American Art” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2001); and Morris, “Places of Emergence: Painting Genesis,” *Off the Map*, 47-63.
Obomsawin’s film seeks an evaluation of the relationship between gender and landscape, gender and Native nationalism, and gender and racial essentialisms that inhibit the investigation of Native women’s ties of land, place and political engagement.

**Landscape in Canadian Art History**

Art historians have shown how landscape painting has been harnessed to rouse feelings of nationalism amongst the citizenry and bolster a national culture. In Canada, a nation obsessed with its identity, its sense of place, and particularly its geographicality, landscape became an important and highly Canadian mode of pictorial expression. Canada was confederated in 1867. As a young nation, developing a national identity was a vital concern well into the twentieth century, and scholars point to landscape as a site keenly exploited to build the sense of who and what Canada was. Even prior to this, landscape painting played a hand in the colonial

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interest in the “new world.” Nineteenth century painters like William Armstrong, Robert Whale, and Lucius O’Brien reflected in their canvases the colonial appetite for territorial acquisition as settler expansion extended further west. From a postcolonial standpoint, three functions characterize landscape painting of this period: landscapes were descriptive and provided illustrations of unknown territory; the paintings themselves were status symbols, objects to be desired and acquired; and finally, they held a psychic function, as paintings of this nature conveyed, materially, the desire to possess the scenes represented.\textsuperscript{93} Landscape paintings form a mediating barrier separating viewers from a harsh and potentially unknown environment just as the act of looking indulges the viewer’s scopic possession of that very terrain. These imperializing sentiments are powerful, so much so that they remain, however latently, associated with the genre to the present.

While the frenzy to acquire and settle land that defined the previous two centuries had subsided by the early twentieth century, the country’s enthusiasm for representations of its wilderness had not. During the first half of the twentieth century, Canadian art focused on wilderness painting: a painting tradition that underscored Canada’s northern and wilderness character and helped to form a national identity. Art historian John O’Brien coins the term \textit{wildercentric} to describe

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{93} Morris, “Picturing Sovereignty: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art,” 190.
\end{flushright}
the emergent tradition. As urban areas grew, so did nostalgia for the “unspoiled” parts of the country, and representations thereof bolstered national character. The Group of Seven, the eminent collective of Canadian painters, capitalized on this hunger and continued to produce landscapes in their signature bold, painterly style well into the 1930s. These artists experienced an unprecedented popularity and the effect of the images they produced on the Canadian public was recognized as a power that could be institutionally harnessed. Group of Seven landscapes were co-opted into a national process of mystification that sought to unite Canadians through this supposedly revolutionary form of painting reflecting the unique Canadian landscape.

Eric Brown, the first director of the National Gallery of Canada, championed Tom Thompson and the Group of Seven during the 1910s, providing the artists with annual exhibitions, acquiring their canvases for the permanent collection, and initiating a progressive loans program that allowed a public beyond Ottawa to see works in the Gallery’s collection. In the 1920s, the National Gallery of Canada sponsored a poster program that saw reproductions distributed to schools nation-wide, familiarizing

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95 The Group of Seven consisted of the central Canadian painters, Lawren Harris, Franklin Carmichael, A. Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Frank Johnston, J.E. H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley. Also associated with the group was Tom Thompson, who died in 1917, before the Group of Seven was officially formed, and Emily Carr, who worked in British Columbia. The Group became very well-known for their Impressionist-inspired paintings the Canadian landscape. These painters have been more than adequately studied, and it is not my intention to provide new insight into their work nor to properly summarize the existing scholarship here. For a comprehensive overview, see Charles C. Hill, Group of Seven: Art for a Nation, exh. cat. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada) 1996; and David P. Silcox, The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson (Toronto: Firefly Books, 2003).
generations of Canadians with the work of these painters and more pointedly, entrenching these landscapes as the look of Canada. In a further twist to the association between Canadian landscape and Canada, the Department of National Defense sponsored a campaign of reproductions during World War II, using the by now-iconic images of “Canadianess” to promote patriotism.  

Even today, the Canadian public’s appetite for Group of Seven landscapes remains unabated. High-draw blockbuster exhibitions, escalating prices at auction, and the popularity of lavishly illustrated publications all demonstrate that the Group of Seven still captivates the national imagination and perpetuates a legacy of a country founded on landscape. As cultural theorist Robert Wright points out, as representations, these landscapes are so indelible in the popular imagination that the Canadian landscape, real or imagined, now evokes that which is depicted in the paintings: it is not, for example, uncommon to hear a beautiful landscape described as looking just like a Group of Seven painting. The McMichael Collection, a public gallery near Toronto, holds an extensive collection of Group of Seven works. The gallery hosts 30 000 school children annually and maintains a website which receives 10 000 hits a week. This suggests that, at least in this highly urbanized part of

Canada, more Canadians have greater access to paintings of the Canadian landscape than they do to the land itself.\textsuperscript{97}

This mythologized wilderness as the iconic Canadian landscape is perpetuated in very public ways.\textsuperscript{98} A retrospective of Arthur Lismer’s painting held at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1985 evidences this. The exhibition, \textit{Canadian Jungle: the Later Work of Arthur Lismer}, curated by Canadian art historian Dennis Reid, takes its title from Lismer’s 1947 painting [Fig. 2.1].\textsuperscript{99} The choice of \textit{Canadian Jungle} as the title work (in name and in image) from the dozens exhibited suggests a deep attachment to the attendant evocation, with all of its colonial implications. The painting is an impenetrable tangle of trees, roots, and underbrush just as the Canadian landscape is a dark, wild, unruly place that remains to be reined in.

Traditionally, landscapes often include human figures or evidence a human presence with the inclusion of markers like paths, haystacks, shelters, or ruins. Significantly, the Group of Seven distanced themselves from their European predecessors by eliminating the human dimension from the landscape. Landscape interpreted in this way came further to be defined as Canadian. Part of the Group of Seven mystification is thus of a vast Canadian landscape untouched by time and unspoiled by human encroachment – a omission of human life that ignores the First

\textsuperscript{97} Wright, 23-24.

\textsuperscript{98} However, Peter White points out that while the wilderness myth has been grafted to Canadian identity through painting, art historians, artists and art critics, have also reflected on and questioned this legacy since the 1960s. See, Peter White, “Out of the Woods,” \textit{Beyond Wilderness}, 12-13.

Nations presence on the land. Such erasure has serious consequences given how ubiquitous those landscapes became and how the “unspoiled” Group of Seven landscape came to represent a kind of moment of origin in Canada’s visual culture. Previous landscape painters, such as Thomas Davies, Paul Kane, and Cornelius Krieghoff in Canada, or Thomas Cole in the United States, used the Native body to further illustrate their renderings. In contrast, the erasure of the First Nations presence by the Group of Seven marks the absenting of the First Nations from Canadian visual culture, and significantly, the incremental retraction of the Canadian land from the First Nations – even if here, this marginalization takes a symbolic, representational form.100

Prior to the Group of Seven, Canadian landscapes were frequently peopled, and peopled with Native figures. Earlier Canadian landscape paintings, those in the English and particularly the Dutch traditions from which artists working in Canada liberally borrowed, bore the visible signs of an inhabited land. Davies, an English lieutenant and accomplished watercolorist who lived from 1737 to 1812, painted the Canadian landscape over the course of four tours of duty, marrying a British sense of

100 Frances W. Kaye points out, “For the settler society, the goal of art is to establish an identity separate from the mother country, either without an acknowledgement of an indigenous culture or with its acknowledgement in the form of cultural appropriation, in which the indigenous culture becomes the “universal” heritage of all Canadians, without requiring any obligation on the part of settler heirs to the living inheritors of the indigenous culture.” Frances W. Kaye, *Hiding the Audience: Viewing Arts and Arts Institutions on the Prairies* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003), 5. For more on the absence of Native people in Group of Seven landscapes, see, Jonathan Bordo, “Jack Pine: Wilderness Sublime or the Erasure of the Aboriginal Presence from the Landscape,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27 no. 4 (1992-1993): 98-128.
the picturesque with that “new world” desire to tame the wilderness. His 1791 watercolor, *View of the Great Falls on the Ottawa River, Lower Canada* [Fig. 2.2], executed in muted washes of grays, greens and browns, owes its visual impact to the addition of Native people. Clothed in bright blue and red, these human figures bring color and texture to the rocky outcrop in the middle ground while those portaging canoes file across the far shore establishing a focal point in the background with their activity. Davies liberally indulges in what art historian R.H. Hubbard only somewhat ironically describes as, “the ornamental use of Indians.” Staffing the landscape with representations of Native people continued to be a commonplace technique until the end of the nineteenth century.


102 Art historian Maureen Ryan writes about the frequent appearance of Native people in the landscape paintings exhibited by the Ontario Society of Artists in the 1870s, Canada’s premier artists’ society of the time: “Many reviewers simply subsumed these images under generic labels as ‘landscape with figures’ or ‘native scenery,’ implying thereby that the human figures stood as staffage designated to animate the geographical forms. One critic went so far as to argue in 1875 that these ‘Indian’ subjects served to demonstrate that even the ‘homely aspects’ of Canadian scenery could be transformed by art – suggesting thereby that seeing both nature and the land in aesthetic terms stood as a sign of culture and civilization itself.” In her analysis of Lucius O’Brien’s painting *Lords of the Forest*, Ryan further ventures that Native peoples were so closely associated with the natural world that their representation and representation of the tall, deciduous trees O’Brien painted alluded equally to their romantic designation as “aristocrats within the woodland domain.” Maureen Ryan, “Picturing Canada’s Native Landscape: Colonial Expansion, National Identity, and the Image of a ‘Dying Race,’” *RACAR* 17 no. 2 (1990): 140.
Interventionist Landscapes: Jin-Me Yoon and Maria Hupfield

The Group of Seven’s reinvention of landscape pervaded so deeply that Canadian landscape painting became a genre without obvious traces of human life. The impact on Canadian culture by the Group of Seven is significant. Yet part of their legacy is in how contemporary artists have addressed this history of landscape, and its hold on Canadian culture and identity. For some artists, the legacy of the Group of Seven is an invitation for intervention. For her well-known series, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996) [Fig. 2.3], Jin-Me Yoon, a Korean-born Canadian artist, posed and photographed members of Vancouver’s Korean community in front of (with the subject’s back towards) *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park*, a painting by core Group of Seven painter Lawren Harris and *Old Time Coast Village*, a canvas by Group of Seven contemporary Emily Carr (with the subject looking on to the painting).

The project interrogates how naturalized the Group of Seven landscape has become with regard to Canadian identity and citizenship; when those images are obscured by a visibly Asian figure, this established narrative of history and identity is destabilized, re-opened. The number sixty-seven in the title refers to 1967, the year of the Canadian centenary but also the year in which immigration restrictions in Canada were lifted for certain Asian nationals. This change in policy allowed Yoon and her mother to join her father, who was already in Canada; the project’s sixty-seven participants also came to Canada that year. Installed in a gallery, the bank of photographs of the Harris paintings face the Carr ones, across a corner. Some scholars have read the “geography” of Canadian art history into this placement and how it
positions Yoon’s subjects, bracketed in the space between the east (represented by an Ontario painter, Harris) and the west (represented by Carr, who worked in British Columbia). Suggestively, these subjects find themselves and can find their place in that broad stretch between, just as the Group of Seven tradition and the fictions it upholds are dismantled.

For Maria Hupfield, who is Anishnabe and a member of the Wasauksing First Nation, intervention takes the form of an installation, *The East Wind Brings a New Day* (2006) [Fig. 2.4]. This work consists of a huge painted mural, executed in the style of a Group of Seven landscape. While a painterly brushstroke and use of color is a Group of Seven hallmark, the lines in Hupfield’s mural are controlled and the washes of color flat, producing a highly “designed” surface. The heavy outline and flat surfaces also evoke the paintings of celebrated Anishnabe artist Norval Morrisseau. Equally though, the effect of the white spaces which remain between sections of color in Hupfield’s mural generates a “canvas” that resembles an

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104 Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007) founded the Woodland School of painting (more recently known as the Anishnabe school), whose hallmark graphic style of bright colors and outlined shapes incorporates figures and scenes from Native cosmology of the Great Lakes and Métis traditions. Morrisseau and members the Woodland School received popular and critical acclaim in the 1960s. Morrisseau was also a founding member of the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporation, popularly known as the “Indian Group of Seven,” See, Greg A. Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist*, exh. cat. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006).
enormous paint-by-numbers kit. This effect comes to make further sense: on a small table to the right of the mural the artist has positioned a glossy brochure from a prominent paint company detailing its new line of interior latex, the “Group of Seven Colour Collection” [Fig. 2.5]. A paint manufacturer, Para Paints, collaborated with the McMichael Gallery in 2002 to create a line of paint inspired by the Group of Seven’s landscapes, producing shades with names like “The North Country” and “Passing of the Maple.” The company’s press release positions the Group of Seven landscape as commodifiable but also as a landscape to which Canadians are entitled:

Inspired by select works from the Group, this collection of 30 new, exclusive colours is designed to capture the colours of the Canadian landscape as depicted in the brushstrokes by the artists and to allow Canadians to get the Group of Seven on their walls, easily and economically. Para Paint is proud to be Canadian. The introduction of Para Paint’s new Group of Seven collection of paint colours reinforces the company’s commitment to Canada and reflects its efforts to preserve the Canadian landscape and heritage.

In so doing, landscape, art, and citizenship (as well as commerce) are aligned.

Just as the Group of Seven’s painting came to commodify the Canadian landscape, Hupfield makes use of the commodification of the Group to address her relationship to that legacy. The image of the Indian has been used to sell commercial products since the late nineteenth century, on the basis of that image’s “exotic appeal.” This racialized framework was also born of nineteenth century stereotypes of age and gender, where the natural world was evoked by the eroticized image of an

105 Not unrelated, Morrisseau’s works have been heavily imitated, copied, and to the consternation of collectors and his estate, forged.

Indian woman. Gentle, beautiful, yet wild, she served as the ideal metaphor for the “new” land. At the far right side of Hupfield’s mural, the silhouette of a First Nations woman looks out over the lake, a crown in her outstretched hand. She remains blank, without color, just as the landscape and the female body have both been appropriated and commodified as vessels for colonial and masculine desires. The artist suggests that the Indian Princess, that tired stereotype with which First Nations women have been represented, is as ubiquitous and commercialized as a Group of Seven landscape.

Women and Land: Maria Hupfield, Shelley Niro, Bonnie Devine

The strongly heterosexist association between Woman and nature, historically, in European thought complicates serious contemporary engagement of this topic. This entanglement is so normative and pervasive that despite the obvious fact that Native women position themselves outside of this tradition when they speak of their own ties

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to the land, this privileged, feminine relationship to the land is received with some unease by non-native – and particularly, feminist – audiences. Attempts to politicize nature as a feminine space have not always been successful, as the tepid reception of the ecofeminist movement by mainstream feminist audiences has shown. This cool response further evidences a chasm between academic feminism and those feminists committed to social action.109 This divide, whether real or imagined, is one which has also perpetuated the disinterest of many indigenist feminists committed to social issues from realizing their work within feminist parameters.

Mohawk writer Beth Brant affirms Native women’s special proximity and insight to the land with the reminder that “Native women write about the land, the land, the land. This land that brought us into existence, this land that houses the bones of our ancestors, this land that was stolen, this land that withers without our love and care. This land that calls in our dreams and visions, this land that bleeds and cries, this land that runs through our bodies.”110 Kim Anderson, a Cree and Métis scholar who writes on women’s issues, concurs that “the land is something through which we define ourselves [as Native women], and is essential to our creation.”111 Native women who do articulate their special gendered relationship to the land may do so from an entirely different cultural position as compared to non-native women, and difficulties in reception by non-native audiences speaks volumes on Eurocentricism.

109 Alaimo, 8.
and a kind of racial paternalism that inhibits the claims of Native women from being heard. In some respects however, ecocriticism presents some spaces of cross-cultural engagement between feminists over environmental issues, as reflected in some recent scholarship.\footnote{See, for example, Janet Catherine Berlo, “Alberta Thomas, Navajo Pictorial Arts, and Eco-Crisis in Dinéhā,” \textit{A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art}, ed. Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, forthcoming); and Allison Steele, “Touching the Earth: Gloria Anzaldúa and the Tenets of Ecofeminism,” \textit{Women Writing Nature: A Feminist View}, ed. Barbara J. Cook (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 95-108.}

A second arc of signification with regard to the natural world presents itself for Native artists in the context of reception of their work in a pluralistic and not exclusively Native art world. Land holds, as I alluded earlier, special cultural, spiritual and historical significance to many Native peoples and is central to the belief systems of Native cultures. However, this association with the land becomes, for many non-native people, a trope of Native identity that overwhelms a particular or subjective engagement with the subject. Thus the node at which these two arcs meet makes a number of demands on both the artist, who must work within this determined, socially informed space, and the viewer, who must work harder at accessing the particulars of the landscape being presented and at circumventing the persistent racial and gender stereotypes land has come to inhere.

While women, or more accurately, \textit{Woman}, is tied to and identified with land, women are not, historically, those who create or mediate landscape. With far greater frequency and ease, men in the European tradition have been the “negotiators of its
visuality.\textsuperscript{113} Hupfield’s \textit{The East Wind Brings a New Day} makes patently clear that First Nations women are a part of an extremely figurative and stereotypical Canadian landscape. Hupfield has painted an aboriginal woman into the landscape: a woman represented in an imaginary Canadian landscape as an imaginary Native woman, the Indian Princess, or to use the Indian Princess’s filmic analogue, what M. Elise Marubbio calls the Celluloid Maiden.\textsuperscript{114} In a gesture that reads as both graceful and defiant, Hupfield’s Indian Princess has removed her crown. With this, Hupfield takes possession of the space of landscape, acknowledges the tropes of its history, and refuses it as a space that prescribes the conditions of representation for Native women.

Though she references these renderings, the image of Native woman and landscape that Hupfield produces differs from the cover of a dime novel or a box of Land O Lakes butter, a commercial product featuring the image of a kneeling Indian Princess. Hupfield’s work attests just how mutually implicated landscape and gender are: if perceptions of landscape have been filtered through a lens of nationalism and popular culture, rife with racialized stereotypes, that lens has been also colored by gender. Moreover, Hupfield interjects herself, as an artist, into that field of representation by staging a performance piece with Blackfoot/Saulteaux artist and member of the Blood tribe, Terrence Houle, with whom she shared the exhibition


space at the site of her installation, in which she dons the outfit of an Indian Princess. Hupfield passes in and out of this landscape, decommissioning her assigned place in it as female and Native, and with this activity, disrupting the landscape as something to be viewed. Hupfield insists the performance is germane to the meaning of her mural installation, as it animates the gallery space for the viewer and implicates the viewer in the act of looking. Her gender is central to this and has implications over and above her self-styling as a female stereotype. Historically, women are of course, the objects of vision, and not those who set the terms of that vision or negotiate visuality. Hupfield calls her mural “anti-painting painting” for its physical and gendered response to the painting’s patriarchal history; this comprehends a response to the Group of Seven and Tom Thomson as it does to the Woodland School and Norval Morrisseau.116

Shelley Niro has taken up the theme of land in her practice, challenging how meaning has been cauterized from the site by exploring it in innovative and nuanced ways. Niro, who is Mohawk, has made numerous works and series which relate, often quite specifically, to the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario, where she lives, and more generally to land and the representation of First Nations women. Typically, humor punctuates Niro’s work and is consistent with her treatment of representation and stereotypes; however, beyond the lightheartedness is a sharply focused view on the occupation of space, the land itself being an integral part of this

115 Maria Hupfield, e-mail message to author, March 26, 2007.
116 Maria Hupfield, e-mail message to author, March 26, 2007.
examination. Her video, *It Starts With a Whisper* (1993), is an especially significant contribution to her body of work in this regard.\footnote{Shelley Niro with Anna Gronau, *It Starts With a Whisper*, VHS (New York: Women Make Movies, 1993).}

*It Starts With a Whisper* is a loosely constructed narrative about a young Iroquois woman, Shanna, who lives and works in a large, urban area, presumably, Toronto. Shanna’s aunts – the exuberant and flamboyantly attired women, played by Niro and her own sisters, are characters which reappear in the artist’s work – pick up Shanna in the city in their enormous old sedan, and take her back to Six Nations territory to celebrate New Year’s eve at the casino. Shanna learns of the near-eradication of her ancestors, the Tutelo people of the Grand River/Great Lakes region, and tries to reconcile the past with the present. The 28-minute work, which features an appearance by Cree leader and then Canadian Member of Parliament, Elijah Harper, addresses issues around understanding the past, the experience of the present, and the future for Native people, using strong female characters as well as humor to convey these complicated issues. Niro made *It Starts with a Whisper* to coincide with the quin-centenary of Columbus’ arrival in North America, an anniversary which came just two years after the Oka Crisis (*It Starts with a Whisper* and *Kanehsatake* both date to 1993). Here, I focus on the film’s opening sequence, which presents a beautiful and provocative landscape.

The opening sequence is significant in that it claims the landscape as both female and Native, while avoiding the problematic associations outlined above. The
sequence is shot in color and Shanna, who is dressed in a beaded skin dress, walks along a ravine, following the rocky stream that passes through the dense woods [Fig. 2.6]. The roar of flowing water competes with the sound of women’s voices, rhythmically call out the names of different First Nations: Cayuga, Onandaga, Oneida. The scene abruptly ends as urban noise and a city skyline – traffic and honking horns – replaces sounds and views of the wooded landscape and the scene is revealed to be Shanna’s daydream. The “uniform” of a young, female office worker replaces the beaded dress in the previous scene. The voices calling to Shanna, and the change in scene translate as the young woman’s loneliness and longing for a life “on the land” that she may not have experienced, or cannot foresee returning to. However, it also suggests the possibility of a simultaneous occupation of space in dream and memory, enacting land in the sense expressed by curator Lynn Hill, as “a memory bank of information.” Niro successfully conveys that land has a central place in the imagination of a young, urban First Nations woman but also, that that individual maintains her control over land as a space to be imagined. Land, in other words, is not just the receptacle for the imaginings of non-natives, projecting stereotypes about an indigenous and feminine closeness to the land. Niro, through her characterization of Shanna, seizes control of the landscape as an indigenous space.

Reclamation Project (1995), a performance work by Bonnie Devine, works to a similar effect [Fig. 2.7]. Devine, who is Anishnabe, rolled and unrolled a bundle of

sod through numerous locations including down University Avenue, a major artery that bisects the downtown core of Toronto, the city in which she lives. The green swath layered over concrete and asphalt not only adds color and a natural element to the hard, grey surfaces of the city, it also traces a path into an urban space that alludes to a different understanding of space. The green path evokes a trail marking the migration of Native peoples into urban spaces, but it also issues a reminder as to what lies beneath (or within) the built-up city space. Devine emphasizes a pre-existing Native claim to place at this site. Reclaiming urban space as Native space is to reconcile an ideological homeland with the lived-in space; Devine performs this here just as Niro does in *It Starts with a Whisper*.

**Oka: Context and Crisis**

Respectively, Devine, Niro, Hupfield, and Obomsawin all successfully engage landscape as a verb, as an active category, and as a cultural practice. If Hupfield’s installation addresses the cultural and representational legacies of nationalism, Obomsawin’s filmmaking addresses its material and political manifestations as they played out in a momentous and devastating series of events that occurred in 1990. For forty years, Obomsawin has been making socially-conscious films that foreground the subjective voices of Native peoples as well as her own voice. She has also made cultural contributions as a singer, songwriter and storyteller. Obomsawin was born in Lebanon, New Hampshire in 1932, but returned to her mother’s home reservation of
Odanak, Quebec as an infant. When Obomsawin was nine years old, the family moved off the reservation, to the francophone town of Trois-Rivières.

The Oka Crisis remains a definitive moment of Native nationalism in the contemporary age, and not solely for the Mohawk people. Native people from throughout the continent traveled to the Kanesatake area in solidarity with the Mohawk people during the summer of 1990. The Mohawk community abuts the town of Oka, a suburb of Montreal. This territory has been a contentious part of relations between Mohawk and settler populations since the Mohawk people first petitioned authorities over land claims in 1781. The 1990 controversy began when the Oka town council ventured to expand a private golf course and construct condominiums on a site known to the Mohawk people as the Pines, a historical burial site and gathering place, and part of a larger tract of disputed territory, expropriated from the Mohawk people. The town council designed the plans without consulting the Mohawk community, a move that outraged the people of Kanesatake. Exercising their responsibility to protect the land, women in the community established a peaceful protest camp in the Pines where they remained, steadfast, through the spring.

On July 11, 1990, with the women’s resolve unabated, the mayor of Oka, Jean Ouellette, ordered the SQ to clear the camp so that work on the Pines development could begin. That day, during the ensuing confrontation, the SQ fired tear gas at Mohawk protestors, bullets were exchanged, and an SQ officer was fatally shot.

Using an abandoned police car and some land-clearing equipment, protestors erected a barrier and a 78-day standoff followed. Inside of the barriers, facing off with the SQ, were men and women of Kanesatake, members of the Warrior Society from the nearby Mohawk reservation of Akwesasne and other reservations, and supporters from other communities such Kahnawake, another Mohawk reservation.\textsuperscript{120} In mid-August, as tensions escalated and negotiations fell apart, Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa called in the Canadian Armed Forces to replace the provincial police. Warriors, community members and supporters remained behind the barricades under increasingly difficult conditions for another month. On September 26, 1990, those still on the inside – thirty men, sixteen women, and six children – voluntarily left the barricaded community. The unanticipated exit caught the patrolling soldiers off-guard and a melee ensued. Most were arrested, and a fourteen-year old girl, Waneek Horn-Miller, was stabbed by a soldier’s bayonet [Fig. 2.8].\textsuperscript{121}

In the early days of the Crisis, Obomsawin abandoned the project she was working on in order to take a film crew to Kanesatake. Obomsawin remained behind the barricades for the duration of the Crisis, providing the only First Nations-...

\textsuperscript{120} Feeling increasingly threatened by the SQ, the camp protestors had accepted the offer of assistance from the Warrior Society, who had more experience in these confrontations. While many of the First Nations men behind the barricades were members of the Warrior Society, not all of them were.

\textsuperscript{121} For important details on the unfolding of events at Oka from the perspectives of, respectively, two journalists, the Minister of Native Affairs for Quebec at the time, and a Mohawk scholar and educator, see, Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera, \textit{People of the Pines: The Warriors and the Legacy of Oka} (Toronto: McArthur and Company, 1991); John Ciaccia, \textit{The Oka Crisis: The Mirror of a Soul} (Dorval, QC: Maren, 2000); and Donna Greenleaf, \textit{Entering the War Zone: A Mohawk Perspective on Resisting Invasions} (Penticton, BC: Theytus Books, 1995).
generated footage of this event. The insight she brings, as a Native person, to the
Crisis is key to its chronicling and to mediating the experiences of the Mohawk
people in the community. Her work fulfills an important archival and communicative
function. From the footage she collected over those many weeks, Obomsawin also
made My Name is Kahentiiosta (1995), about a Mohawk woman’s arrest and defiance
after the Crisis; Spudwrench: Kahnawake Man (1997), the story of a Mohawk
ironworker involved in the defense of Kanesatake during the Crisis; and Rocks at
Whiskey Trench (2000), in which she explores corollary events at another nearby
Mohawk community, the reservation of Kahnawake.122 In all of these films, she
deftly weaves Mohawk culture, the politics of community, the history of Native/non-
native relations and the experience of trauma with a unique lens on setting, the land
itself. Her films are political statements and they are visual texts with land as a
setting, background, and object. Obomsawin’s work reflects the fact that at its core,
the Oka Crisis was a fight for Native sovereignty. Land was central to this fight.

Kanehsatake is a complicated test case for the mechanics of landscape in
contemporary Native art because it is a filmic representation. Landscape and its
rhetoric heavily impregnates the discipline of art history, and is associated with
artistic eras that predate the use of film, video and other post-studio, artists’ media.
Yet Obomsawin has had a long association with the visual arts. In addition to being

122 Alanis Obomsawin, My Name is Kahentiiosta, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1995); Alanis Obomsawin, Spudwrench: Kahnawake Man, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1997); Alanis Obomsawin, Rocks at Whiskey Trench, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 2001).
shown at film festivals, Obomsawin films have screened in galleries – a visual arts context – notably, the National Gallery of Canada. Eight of Obomsawin’s films, including an early version of *Kanehsatake*, were included in *Land, Spirit, Power*, the exhibition referred to earlier in this chapter. Not to be overlooked is the status of this particular gallery, and the significance of this exhibition: the National Gallery is Canada’s premier public gallery, prestigiously located just a short walk from the Parliament buildings. *Land, Spirit, Power* was the first exhibition dedicated entirely to Native contemporary art in the institution’s 125 year history. Obomsawin’s inclusion implicated her work into a context of national culture. Specifically, together with the works of other important Native artists, her film propelled Native artistic expression – at least temporarily – to the forefront of Canadian culture.

While this exhibitionary context for Obomsawin’s films is relevant, my reading of *Kanehsatake* as a landscape does not hinge on the institutional acknowledgement of her work as art. Rather, my argument rethinks the passages between the art history and critical theory of landscape and also, rethinks the categories, concepts, and vocabularies used to critically frame representations of land by Native artists. As historical, political and social documents of a visual order, Obomsawin’s films are landscapes that evoke those proposed by the genre’s most

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important contemporary theoreticians, even if they seem at odds with the landscape paintings that historically defined the genre in Canada’s cultural imagination. Obomsawin’s landscapes both continue and undermine a uniquely Canadian tradition of landscape that is bound up in national identity.

**Landscapes of Resistance**

If Obomsawin’s landscapes do not resemble those of Canada’s popular cultural imagination, perhaps this evidences just how fictitious those landscapes are. Such discord affirms how existing traditions of landscape have failed to include present-day views of Canadian land and to accurately reflect the experiences of the land of more Canadians. While it is certainly not Obomsawin’s intent in making a film to critique a tradition of Canadian painting nor engage with such paintings directly, her landscapes are heavily peopled and as such refuse the tradition of vacant landscape that came to stand for the whole country’s vision of itself. The human presence, and the centrality of this presence to the representation of land, sets Obomsawin’s landscape apart from that Canadian tradition which colonized and nullified the existence of First Nations peoples. This inclusion wrests a Canadian landscape from the nostalgic fiction the Group of Seven perpetuates.

The Pines, that sacred and historical parcel of land that ignited the Oka controversy, is not represented unpeopled: *Kanehsatake* repeatedly stresses the relationship between the land and the Mohawk people who occupy it. As a filmmaker who makes documentaries, Obomsawin insists on the primacy of her subjects’
accounts, and considers their stories to be of first order of importance. Affording subjects the opportunity to speak may be a more common feature of documentary (though by no means one to be assumed), given the history of silence and exclusion of First Nations peoples, this feature is a significant addition to the body of Canadian visual culture.

Compared to the use of Native figures in the paintings of Davies, the peopling of Obomsawin’s landscape serves a purpose more complex than his “ornamental” one. That being said, like the figures in the painted landscapes, people in the film do participate in the cultivation of nationalism. Mohawk people occupy the landscape in a way that is antithetical to the placement of Native figures, figures meant to convey the very power of the colonizing presence exerted upon Native people. While Obomsawin and many speakers in the film attest to the spiritual and historical importance of the Pines, she resists a romantic rendering of place by refusing to divorce this dimension of the land from the contemporary people for whom it retains this significance. If anything, Obomsawin’s challenge is to maintain the tenor of the land as a special and calm retreat amidst the chaotic assault by the SQ, the Canadian Armed Forces, and the armed Warriors. She achieves this by means of a combined effect of the camera trained on the land itself and reiterations by the protesting residents of Kanesatake as to why they are engaged in this action and what value the land holds to them. In a scene shot at a press conference, Mohawk negotiator Minnie

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124 Alanis Obomsawin, “Records in Our Heads” (Panel discussion with Zacharias Kunuk and Jesse Wente, ImagineNATIVE Film and Media Festival, Toronto, October 21, 2006).
Garrow calmly states, “We are Native people to this land. We’re not trying to take your land or anyone else’s property” [Fig. 2.9].

The medium of this landscape, film, as crucial to its power becomes apparent: not only is it significant that the landscape is peopled, but the people speak, a crucial factor in the landscape’s animation. The shift from painting to film is crucial, even if the former has documentary aspirations. Denis Cosgrove finds that in landscape painting, “[s]ubjectivity is rendered the property of the artist and the viewer – those who control the landscape – not those who belong to it.”¹²⁵ Yet the active mode of film allows Obomsawin to restore subjectivity to those who “belong to” the land, thus reuniting states of control and belonging.

Peopling the landscape also serves an important political function, one that furthers the notion of this film as a landscape of resistance. The Mohawk people featured in the film are active participants in the standoff. In the film, in the realm of representation, that participatory role intensifies as they activate and reinforce the complex nature of this landscape. While the landscape’s physicality has an effect on the viewer, the presence of active people reinforces the landscape’s historical importance and ideological dimensions. In stark contrast to the “ornamental Indians” of an art historical past, the people in this landscape bear witness to and participate in the events of the standoff. Furthermore, their testimony and participation in

Obomsawin’s project links these events to the Mohawk history that Oka ignores and the history of territorial rights that governments obscure.

Throughout the film, Obomsawin features women speaking to the camera in interviews with the filmmaker, or records them in confrontation with an opponent, be it a police officer, a soldier, or an antagonistic member of the surrounding community [Fig. 2.10]. The message the Mohawk women articulate resounds with clarity: *We’re here. This is our land. We’re not going anywhere.* These repeated assertions of presence, proprietorship and self-actualization shape what Jonathan Bordo terms a *testamental scenography*. Bolstered by the women’s unflagging commitment, the film “…is an avowal – declaring that something took place to which there was a witness at the site of wilderness.”126 These subjects become tied to the represented place. Just as 18th century portrait painters set their subjects in vast landscapes to reference the extent of their estate, or to situate sitters in *their rightful cultural domain*,127 picturing Mohawk men and women in the land that they call home asserts that space as their rightful cultural domain.

The film’s subtitle, *270 Years of Resistance*, quantifies and reinforces the tenor of that resistance and suggests, in effect, that the landscape at Kanesatake is the product of an anti-wilderness nearly three centuries in the making. Bordo’s testamental scenography draws on presence at the site of wilderness; this scenario can

126 Jonathan Bordo, “Picture and Witness at the Site of Wilderness,” *Landscape and Power*, 300.

more sagely be construed as an anti-wilderness. In the realm of representation, conferring a status of anti-wilderness to the Mohawk land establishes the space as an engaged and inhabited one, and not a part of an exploitable imaginary. Culturally, the term wilderness is more troubling than landscape. Rebecca Solnit, a writer and art critic, equates the term wilderness with erasure; thinking of the forest in this way is to deny the occupation of that land by “original Americans,” and it is to relegate the landscape to an “unsocial place, an outside.”¹²⁸ Landscape, by contrast, provides a space still to be recuperated and occupied. Arguably, a traditional pictorial landscape advocates a solitary experience. In North America, and especially in the Canadian tradition, this solitude is born from that experience of wilderness the artist is first to articulate. As an interloper with a pre-possessing, colonizing appetite for acquisition, or as a voyeur, the visual consumer of the landscape is rarely interrupted by the presence of another. Thus the majesty of wilderness must be acknowledged as a single view, one executed by the artist and appropriated by a notional spectator who assumes the footprint of the artist. The level of human activity in Obomsawin’s landscape of resistance necessarily interrupts the illusion of passivity. In addition to bearing witness, to testifying, Mohawk people participate in the landscape’s construction; collectively, they take part in the conditions of its making.

Golf and the Paradisal Landscape

Conversion to a golf course is not an anomalous threat to Native land. The Mississauga Golf Club, a private club in suburban Toronto, is built on land that once belonged to the Mississauga First Nation, land which had become farms for English immigrants at the start of the nineteenth century. A mural in the clubhouse foyer, *Governor and Mrs. Simcoe Paddled Up the Credit River* (1908), painted by John Beatty, shows the couple on the banks of the river, having just disembarked from a canoe. Native people sit placidly in the sunshine, apparently indifferent to the arrival. The effect on the mural’s viewers – members of the golf club – art historian Marilyn McKay surmises, is that Mississauga people never challenged the takeover of their land for agricultural use by settlers. During the Oka Crisis, the image and its message of concession or indifference may have (falsely) comforted non-native members aware of the history of the land upon which their golf club is built.

Reminiscent of the Ghosh quotation at the outset of this chapter, the landscape of the Pines showed itself to be volatile and *landscaped* in a myriad of ways. The persistent irony at the Crisis’ core is that the development for which 20 hectares of the Pines was to be leveled was a golf course. Garrow, again speaking at the

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130 The golf course becomes a symbol of the effects of power inequity: the ire the golf course plan inspired at Kanesatake is not an isolated incident. Nor are such controversies limited to North America. The documentary *The Golf War* (1999), written and directed by Jen Schradie and Matt DeVries, follows the struggle of some
aforementioned press conference, expressed her frustration at stalled discussions with the government: “We’re here to protect our burial grounds and the Pines from a nine hole golf course. You must keep that in mind. Have you forgotten?” Not a car factory, not a hospital, not a pit mine, all galling transformations to be sure, but metaphorically not nearly as visually tenacious. The image of the golf course, with its dense, green lawns, gently rolling hills, and sculpted water features evokes a paradisal landscape. But it is a tedious version of paradise, and a profoundly and unapologetically de-naturalized one.

The link between the landscaped golf course as a paradisal space, free from the “earthly” conflicts of daily life, and the production of landscape as a colonizing activity is made patent in a 1918 publicity brochure released by Canadian Pacific Railway. The brochure’s author muses on the origins of golf in Canada, venturing, tongue in cheek, that Scots settled the Canadian west by golfing their way across the prairies: “[t]hat the first feather ball on this continent was teed up on the limitless prairie or at the foot of the grim old Rockies with a Buffalo head for a ticklish hazard, a Bison Wallow for a generous putting hole and an untutored savage mayhap as a caddy primeval….”\(^\text{131}\) This phrasing certainly reflects the racism of the time but over and above this, however humorous its intent, the supposition of settlement through sport – this sport – reinforces a relationship between landscaping fantasies of the farm families in the Philippines to prevent the government from converting their land into a golf course.

\(^\text{131}\) Cited in, L.V. Kavanagh, *History of Golf in Canada* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1973), x.
“unsettled” west, and those achievable by carving out a space for golf. First Nations peoples are not excluded from this landscape, but colonized and cast – in the highly racist language endemic of the times – in the supporting and subservient role of caddy.

This auxiliary role to the sport exists, incidentally, elsewhere and in another sense: in the 1970s, the Canadian Open sponsored by the Peter Jackson tobacco company, awarded a trophy that was, curiously, an Inuit soapstone sculpture set atop a wooden plinth and flanked by a pair of golf clubs. This pairing is made all the more bizarre because there is an inverse relationship between the land represented by the golf course – the raison d’être for the trophy – and land inhabited by First Nations peoples, particularly the northern tundra Inuit peoples. The golf course represents a highly determined image of a colonized landscape. Landscape in this context implies the active sense of the word: to landscape the Pines effectively means to colonize this territory.

**Warring Landscapes**

William J. T. Mitchell premises his influential anthology, *Landscape and Power*, on the power that insidiously colonizes populations through the imaging of land. Notably, in the second edition he tempers his claim, acknowledging the relative impotence of power of this nature in contrast to the far more aggressive forces exerted
by armies, police, governments and corporations. Given how obvious this assertion seems, Mitchell hardly needs to articulate it. Multiple orders of power exist alongside and within one another. The existence of those more violent and pernicious instances need not prohibit the discussion of the more subtle workings of others. His caveat is, however, a relevant reminder: the landscape Obomsawin produces exemplifies how a landscape implicates within it multiple forms of power. The power landscape capably exerts, and exerts in these manifold ways, proved explosive in the case of the Oka Crisis.

The framing of Obomsawin’s film as landscape concerns how art history relates to Native visual culture and also, how government, media, and the general public relate First Nations land claims to identity and tradition. Obomsawin evokes the former by challenging the threshold of what it means to make a landscape from a First Nations standpoint and also what a landscape should look like, what form it should take, and what image or feelings it should project and incite. The latter relates

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133 Peter Atkins, Ian Simmons, and Brian Roberts write, “It is also possible to argue that landscapes are not just passive objects that lie silently waiting for successive human imprints. In a sense they are active participants in channelling [sic] socio-economic evolution because they set the physical and psychological constraints within which people must act. […] The suggestion of this approach is that all landscapes transmit messages of power subtly in most cases, that reinforce and reproduce existing cultural norms and class structures.” Peter Atkins, Ian Simmons, and Brian Roberts, People, Land and Time: An Historical Introduction to the Relations Between Landscape, Culture and Environment (New York: Arnold Publishers, 1998), 224.
directly to her subject matter, the land dispute at Kanesatake. Solnitt acknowledges the link between aesthetic and territorial orders of landscape when she points out that we often forget that battlefields are one kind of landscape and that most landscapes are also territories. That is to say, they have political as well as aesthetic dimensions; on the small scale they involve real estate and sense of place, on the large scale they involve nationalisms, war, and the grounds for ethnic identity.\(^{134}\)

In other words, those multiple designations are always already at work, and often in collusion. Elsewhere, Solnit argues that denying that politics and landscape (in kind with those other cultural binaries nature and culture or city and country) are “inextricably inter-fused […] makes politics dreary and landscape trivial, a vacation site; it banishes not merely certain thought – chief among them that much of what the environmental movement dubbed wilderness was or is indigenous homeland, a very social and political space indeed, then and now.\(^ {135}\)

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams famously wrote that “a working country is hardly ever a landscape.”\(^ {136}\) He explains this assertion on the grounds that separation and observation, key components to landscape formation, are absent from working spaces. Williams might say the same about spaces of war, and that a *warring country* is hardly ever a landscape. In 1990, Kanesatake, as a contested space under siege, can be likened to a site of civil war. However, this condition neither precludes for Obomsawin the distance – if indeed Williams is correct –


necessary to produce a landscape, nor diminishes for the Mohawk people the land’s other meanings of home, of sanctity, of refuge; thinking otherwise would limit the ways in which the landscape genre can be exercised by the imagination as a valuable category of representation. During this time, Obomsawin gained access to a site off-limits to many others. Her sense of nuance as a filmmaker, and her cultural empathy for the Mohawk people, allow for this particular and intimate view of the landscape.

The pall of war, here conveyed through visual and auditory utterances, lays claim to a landscape that may be unstable, at least in its recognizable forms. War blights the land, but this blight is a mediation that is part of landscape formation, too, especially in Mitchell’s sense of it – landscape as nature mediated by culture – quoted at the opening of this chapter. The warring landscape also has a metaphorical function. War may be visible on the landscape that Obomsawin presents, but her document (her documentary) also intervenes in and disrupts the norms of representing Native issues and claims to the wider public.

**Land Becomes Landscape**

Some insight comes from shifting the onus away from the history of the genre itself to the transformative process of representation. Michael Shapiro situates pictorial works as modes of symbolic action that facilitate the conversion of land to landscape. In making this assertion, he cites an argument made by art historian Malcolm Andrews that land becomes landscape when it acquires a narrative element and a
The claims made by Shapiro and Andrews are compelling and highly suggestive in the context of Native representations of land. This logic is helpful in so much as it facilitates a conversion from the geographic to the cultural, from the physical to the ideological, categories which previously kept land and landscape at opposite ends of a spectrum of meaning. Emphasizing the act of representation and, further, emphasizing the conditions of that representative act, suggests a correlation to be made with the transformative power of Obomsawin’s project and also specifically that of her medium.

Obomsawin’s landscape is cinematic. Adopting the definition of landscape of Mitchell or Andrews, landscape also possesses, inherently, a cinematic quality. By contrast to the fixed pictorial landscape a painting presents, landscape so-defined “circulates as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity.” Just as the Oka Crisis served as a consciousness-building event for indigenous people across North America and globally, so too did Obomsawin’s landscaping of the Crisis effect this identification and promote this very circulation of landscape as a site of identification. The active nature of her medium negates the fallacy that the First Nations are historically located in the past. Equally, the political exigency that Obomsawin captures visually by means of film and renders with her journalistic style enforces the dynamics of the medium.

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this emphasis on the capacity of the medium, the staid landscape-as-genre takes a
back seat to the potential of landscape to be a dynamic and kinetic site of
engagement.

Movement, too, is suggested through the passage of time. The landscape of
the Pines evokes a temporal mapping of place. The aforementioned emphasis of the
270 years of settlement – and resistance – at this place backstretches the view of
landscape, articulating a horizon line, a vanishing point, at an identifiable moment in
the historical past. The narrative of the Mohawk peoples’ occupation of Kanesatake
and their resistance to yet another relocation or reduction in territory weaves a
narrative that landscapes the passage of time in this place to the moment of
Obomsawin’s view upon it in 1990. Obomsawin anchors her view on Kanesatake
with its history of contention between the Mohawks and non-natives.\textsuperscript{139} She devotes
several minutes in the film to detailing the Mohawk expulsion from Hochelaga, the
settlement that became Montreal, their relocation to the Kanesatake area as part of a
Jesuit settlement established in 1717. She describes with care the wampum belt made
as a record of this acquisition of territory. Maps and drawings, both historical and
contemporary illustrate and locate the spaces at issue for the audience. Obomsawin
uses maps to show historical markers of territory, some actual archival documents,
others recreations. She includes portraits and photographs of historical players who

\textsuperscript{139} For a more detailed account of the history of the conflict from 1717 to
1990, see Linda Pertusati, \textit{In Defense of Mohawk Land: Ethnopolitical Conflict in
and James S. Friderer and René R. Gadacz, \textit{Aboriginal Peoples in Canada:
Contemporary Conflicts}, 6\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2001), 337-350.
over time left their mark on this landscape, and paintings of historical scenes of this place’s development.

These images in themselves may have further shaped the landscape as they are reflected back to Mohawk people, First Nations and Native peoples more generally, or the Canadian public at large. As a technique, the inclusion of historical, visual material creates a temporal landscape, a narrative of place that moves back in history, just as the filmmaker’s lens pans the contemporary scene, a landscape of a place in crisis. Obomsawin’s active engagement with the history of place, effectively, her narration of the history through maps and documents, has been criticized as “awkward,” “static,” and far less dynamic than her own footage of contemporary events.140 Yet this critique overlooks the politics of reconstructing the history of place, particularly if we recall that reservations – those territories parceled out to Native groups – are themselves places mapped, named, numbered, gridded, and surveyed, places to be classified, looked up, and verified.141 This form of landscaping, used in the service of power and control, has a moral component. When programmed, scheduled and produced, landscapes become what Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia and Bonj Szcygiel poetically call the “palette of a specific moral agenda.”142

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140 Randolph Lewis, Alanis Obomsawin: The Vision of a Native Filmmaker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 102.

141 See, Cole Harris, Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia (Vancouver: University of Vancouver Press, 2002).

The capacity for language to be coded through group membership also implies moral dimensions, those of belonging, and in this way landscape becomes a moral landscape. The Pines becomes coded as the moral landscape of the Mohawk people of Kanesatake, a cultural space claimed and framed through its inhabitation – pointedly so, during the 1990 stand-off – and again through Obomsawn’s film which through a series of interviews, historical explanations, and visual imagery knots the Mohawk population to the land, entwining group and place so as to form a moral landscape.

It is further entrenched as a moral landscape through the landscaping of what it is not. The landscaping of this territory by the Jesuits, a history carefully explained by Obomsawin, is portrayed as a history of broken trust and treaties, of relocation and re-territorializing. In this way the Jesuits – and the colonial powers they represented – shaped their landscape by exerting control over the territory and its inhabitants. In doing so, the Jesuits created their own moral landscape, one far more in line with the values that seat European landscape painting. In the contemporary moment, where the Mohawk people of Kanesatake are pitted against the Oka’s municipal administration (and some of its townspeople) morality takes the form of the shaping of the land itself: the relative moral implications of a land landscaped as a golf course versus the morality of maintaining the territory’s historic, cultural, and spiritual significance.

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Fixing themselves to the land, the Mohawk women who occupied the Pines in the early stages of the standoff refine this landscaping by grafting their bodies, histories and beliefs onto the land, creating what is, indisputably, a moral landscape for which, many testify, they are prepared to die.

**Indigenous Spatiality**

One of the consequences of colonialism in North America is the way in which non-native belief systems are imposed on Native cultures without allowing due negotiation of those systems or room for ideas by Native people themselves. An example of this is the failure of non-natives to grasp what Sara Mills terms *indigenous spatiality*: the specific relationships to space held by indigenous cultures and by extension, the indexical position of land to those relationships.\(^\text{144}\) It follows that landscape, and queries about its prevalence as a Native form, functions as the imposition of a European spatial and representational model onto representations of land by Native artists. The danger here lies with that other persistent aspect of a colonial past, that Native peoples are held to very tightly bounded versions of their own cultures, and that venturing outside of those versions de-legitimizes their own rightful claims to their heritage. Thus, positioning landscape as a form that can be articulated by means of the expression of an indigenous spatiality is a compelling idea, and one that resonates very strongly with Obomsawin’s project.

Photography has become an effective means of cultural and self-representation for Native peoples, an especially significant adoption given their long history of being photographed by outsiders. Film shares a common past with photography as a tool of often inaccurate representation; the history of narrative film has also portrayed Native people in inaccurate and clichéd ways. Thus, the engagement in either of these mediums by Native artists today signifies in much the same way. Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (of mixed Diné, Seminole and Muscogee heritage) asserts that:

It was a beautiful day when the scales fell from my eyes and I first encountered photographic sovereignty. A beautiful day when I decided that I would take responsibility to reinterpret images of Native peoples. My mind was ready, primed with stories of resistance and resilience, stories of survival. My views of these images are aboriginally based – an indigenous perspective – not a scientific godly order but philosophically Native.\textsuperscript{146}

Applied to \textit{Kanehsatake}, Obomsawin’s positioning as a filmmaker adds another layer of nuance to the context of landscape: not only does her work gesture to a genre that – in kind with film and photography – has mythologized or iconicized Native people, then excluded them completely, but she does so using a medium that has in recent years come to signify the post-colonial control of image-making.\textsuperscript{147} A number of the techniques Obomsawin employs within this form could too be termed as exemplary expressions of indigenous spatiality.

This spatiality is evidenced not only in the description of the land but also in the people’s occupation of it. The people’s \textit{telling} of that space amounts to what Huron-Wendat philosopher Georges E. Sioui calls an “Amerindian autohistory,”


where the people tell their story from a Native point of view. Obomsawin’s care to share in the film’s narration by including the testimony of her interviewees evidences the presence and experience of the Kanesatake Mohawks within this landscape. Her voice-over is heard throughout *Kanehsatake*, but her telling of the story is significantly enhanced by the inclusion of many subjects contributing their perspectives. Not only does this film represent a First Nations view of the Oka Crisis, Obomsawin deftly constructs it as one in which many people have a voice in the narrative. In this way, film becomes a site for the expression of Native experience, a gathering place for a community to share stories and exchange thought.

This aspect of indigenous spatiality, or Amerindian autohistory, is enabled by what Vincent Descombes, in the context of defining homeland, calls “rhetorical territory,” that sense of ease an individual feels in the company of those who share a space, where common assumptions, history, and values are held and that individual experiences have little difficulty in being understood by others. Just as many Mohawk individuals that Obomsawin features in her film express their frustration at the lack of understanding for their situation outside of Kanesatake and other Native communities, the film highlights Kanesatake as a home comprised by a rhetorical

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territory (as well as a geographical one), just as the film itself becomes a rhetorical
territory by uniting and framing these common, united perspectives.

Scholars have pointed out that in Canada, where television broadcasting and
film production has been shepherded by policy, government programs have also
supported production by Native peoples. The NFB, for example, established the
Challenge for Change program in 1967 to support Native filmmaking so that Native
people could tell their own stories. Obomsawin has said that she considers her
work to be in the service of the people, all people, but first, the First Nations. In
making films, Obomsawin finds a means of continuing the oral tradition, a tradition
that is central to many First Nations cultures. She contends that if television has taken
the place of storytelling in many First Nations households and communities, then
Native people need to make television a place from which they can be heard.

The narrative and journalistic style of Obomsawin’s film reflects the will to
follow, tell, and record a story. She affords her subjects the time to tell their stories,
often first recorded just as audio, without the distraction and intrusion of the camera
and crew. The active nature of her medium reinforces this positioning of film as a tool
for storytelling; film handily allows for action to be transmitted and as such inheres a

150 See, Singer, 55-60. See also, Lorna Frances Roth, Something New in the
Air: The Story of First Peoples Television Broadcasting in Canada (Montreal and
Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), for the author’s accounts of
Television Northern Canada and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network and the
relationship between Native peoples broadcasting and policy.

151 Alanis Obomsawin, “Records in Our Heads” (Panel discussion with
Zacharius Kunuk and Jesse Wente, ImagineNATIVE Film and Media Festival,
Toronto, October 21, 2006).
strong potential for narrative. The oral tradition, furthermore, refers not only to a history of unwritten discourse but to a founding tradition, a way of thinking and relating to culture that today can take written or visual form, claims Leslie Marmon Silko, the widely-read Laguna Pueblo writer who also uses photography to tell stories.\(^{152}\)

**Language and Place**

A scene shot in late summer emphasizes the importance of place and the manifold status of the Pines. Under the constant drone of military helicopters, Loran Thompson, a Warrior, leads a group of young children through the Pines, teaching them the Mohawk language and familiarizing them with their environment [Fig. 2.11]. This lesson is also, presumably, an attempt to maintain some order and normalcy in the lives of the children living under siege. It demonstrates, further, how the daily life of the community, despite the disruption, continues to be practiced through the land itself. Despite the long shadow that war casts on the site, it does not eclipse the place or the community’s relationship to place entirely. As Thompson points out a maple and asks a child to identify another tree, the roar from above nearly drowns out the teacher’s voice. He plugs his ears with his fingers and invites the children to do the same. “War is really annoying,” he says in Mohawk.

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That Thompson makes this remark in Mohawk emphasizes the important connection between language and land. The battle over the Pines was in some respect a battle for the recognition of the Mohawk people’s integrity and the integrity of all Native peoples. Language exposes a common bond between a people and audibly differentiates them from outsiders, in this case, those who would deny their claim to this place. At many points in the film, people communicate in Mohawk, and where these communications are not subtitled into English, they act as those “high voltage wires” (to invoke, again, Ghosh’s image) that extend over a landscape: communicative as well as communicating links. The scene described above demonstrates this dimension of the relationship to land in that it synthesizes a lesson in Mohawk language and in Mohawk land in a single, coherent relationship to place. Home too, is not always symbolized by a physical structure; language and culture provide the ultimate mobile home, as David Morley sagely points out.153 Yet here, these aspects are grounded to territory, even as it is under siege. The lesson reinforces for the children – and the film’s viewer, whether that viewer is Native or not – that a sense of belonging is achieved through identification with language and with land. Reasserting the relationship of language to place works to undermine the way English and French, the languages of the colonizers, inscribed themselves on the land, what

153 Morley, 46.
Cree art historian and curator Richard W. Hill describes as the “matrix of colonial language that overwrote [the] landscape.”

Yet language, and its importance as a conduit tying people to place is not one that exists in this context just for Mohawk people; language plays a larger role in establishing the context for relations between Native and non-native peoples in this film. While the events at Oka came to stand for the struggles, generally, of aboriginal peoples for sovereignty, these events did occur in Quebec, a setting where, for many, place is always defined by language. While spoken Mohawk evokes the cultural difference and specificity being marked on the Pines as a claim to the space, the linguistic mapping of this place also occurs by virtue of the Mohawk people’s historical and contemporary adoption of English, rather than French, in Quebec.

Language in Quebec has political implications above and beyond its communicative function, so that audible English evokes a history of identification, and the parsing of territory.

The film acknowledges this climate, and further reinforces the relationship of language to place in a particularly tense exchange, in English, between some Mohawk women and some soldiers. The women berate the soldiers for encroaching further into the community and for the confusion at the barricades. The soldiers become frustrated and nervous. A woman shouts at them, “This is what you call peaceful negotiations?”

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The words have barely passed her lips as one soldier turns his head away from her, snapping at the others “‘kay, continuez à avancer,” (“okay, keep going”), effectively shutting down communication with the women and pushing past them. Another scene shows English-speaking journalists struggling to correctly transcribe the spelling of a French name, as uttered by a francophone military spokesperson. It is a humorous exchange, but its presence in the film is a reminder of the language politics that have defined Quebec for generations, politics from which the Mohawk people have certainly not been immune.  

Tensions escalated at Oka not only over relations between Native and non-native people, but also between speakers of English and French. The community at Kanesatake is predominantly English-speaking and this identification may have caused further friction with the French-speaking SQ early in the conflict. Historically, the Mohawk people have held a position of antagonism with regard to the French in Quebec, with a specificity that goes beyond a polarization between settler and Native populations. The Huron people were allied with the French, whereas the Iroquois had ties with the English. Through these historical loyalties, the

155 Lewis Randolph reads this scene with the journalists differently, suggesting its importance is in how it demonstrates the press’s “obsequious, spoon-fed relationship to the military.” See, Randolph, 104. However, his interpretation does not take into account the important linguistic dimension to the Oka Crisis, where high tensions were fed not only by bigotry and cultural misunderstanding, but divisions also entrenched along linguistic lines.

156 The linguistic identification of Mohawk people with English rather than French is addressed in Tracey Deer’s film, Mohawk Girls (2005), where some of the young people profiled express their difficulties at communicating off the Kahnawake reservation in French, and at times, their reluctance to do so.
Huron came to stand for “the good Indian,” and a French symbol for their own perception of their good relations with – generally – Native people. By contrast, the English-speaking Iroquois were the aggressors and the instigators of conflict with the French. In this sense, the weaving of spoken French, English and Mohawk coalesce in the formation of an audible dimension of the landscape, a dimension that is in no small part a piece of its formation.

**Gender and Representation**

Most mainstream media depictions of the Crisis were of men, either Warriors or Mohawk men presented in the media as Warriors. Ronald Cross, known by his Crisis code-name, Lasagna, was frequently photographed and, because of this enhanced visibility, came to be thought of as a media darling during the Crisis [Fig. 2.12]. This is an ironic designation given Cross’s simultaneous vilification as a violent

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157 The linguistic dimension to relations between Mohawk and Quebec society, as well as the how the Crisis relates to conflicts between French and English Canada is explored at length in Amelia Kalant, *National Identity and the Conflict at Oka: Native Belonging and Myths of Postcolonial Nationhood in Canada* (New York: Routledge, 2004), especially 87-125, 190. See also, Gerald R. Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17. Alfred writes that francophone Quebeckers equate the Mohawk population’s lack of support for Quebec’s political goals towards sovereignty from Canada as an alliance with the anglophone population.

and a fraud: one newspaper cited his mother’s Italian heritage as point of aboriginal de-legitimation and garrulously “revealed” Cross to be “un Blanc de Brooklyn.” Multiple identifications suggest the extent to which the Native body exists as a site for the projections of others; that Cross, like the other Warriors, frequently covers his face, only heightens the potential for a “blank canvas” effect [Fig. 2.13, Fig. 2.14]. The image of the masked man projects a visual drama that appeals to the media and links the Warriors by gender and dress to the threat of guerrilla terror globally. Camouflage pants and faces covered by kerchiefs or ski masks evoke a globalized uniform of masculine insurgency (and civil disobedience and even terrorism), one that recalls most handily the Zapatistas in Mexico [Fig. 2.15], but also Hezbollah to whom the media compared the Warriors.

The opacity of a mask is a sign of refusal: a refusal of the order of the State, communicated through the paramilitary gear and the consequent obscuring of identity, and a refusal to communicate, suggested by the figurative “gag” covering the mouth. Obomsawin reveals the Warrior’s outsider status and his positioning as a terrorist in a scene in which a Warrior, unannounced, participates in the signing of a peace deal between the government and the Mohawks, breaking a government stipulation that they will not negotiate with “terrorists.” The Warriors, whom the government considers terrorists, are unwelcome. Though the communicative force of

\[159\textit{Kanehsatake} \text{ contains footage of graffiti allegedly scrawled by soldiers to intimidate, “Lazagne – Dead Meat.”} \text{ \textit{The incident of this particular epithet is also cited in, York and Pindera, 375.}}\]

\[160\text{Cited in, Kalant, 187.}\]
this uniform may have eradicated any residual assumptions about the quiet passivity of Native peoples in the public imagination and drawn attention to the seriousness of the Mohawk resistance, the Warrior-style of dress conversely gave the government further license to dispute the tenacity of the Mohawk claims, for “if they act modern or consume modern products, then they are no longer Indians.”

With the easy oscillation between stereotypes of violent thug and cultural imposter used in the service of de-legitimizing the Mohawk cause, it is not surprising that the media diminished women’s visibility during the Crisis. Given the ubiquity of the Warrior as the face (and a masked, “faceless,” one at that) of the Mohawks during the Crisis, Obomsawin’s attention to the women behind the barricades becomes all the more significant; she records the women’s presence and gives them the opportunity to speak. Men – warriors and others – are present too, but this by no means diminishes the importance of women to Obomsawin’s work. Woman, no matter how that contestable term is defined, is a relational category, and presenting a more complete picture of gender during the Crisis helps to more deeply nuance the experience of the Mohawk women, and by extension demonstrate how Obomsawin reveals a landscape shaped by culture and gender.

The visual association of the masked warrior with the conflict at Kanesatake, and therefore with the place itself, reinforces the easy correlation between the masculine and the nation. Art historian Petra Halkes, in writing about Call (1994), an

\[16^{1}\] Kalant, 187. This claim was made by Quebec prosecutors in the post-Crisis trials of some of the warriors: if they were born in a city hospital, how could they truly hold traditionalist values?
installation by non-native Canadian artist Susan Feindel that engaged the Oka Crisis, describes the para-military dress of the Mohawk warriors as “costumes that foiled all efforts to identify their gender.” Halkes suggests that identifying the warriors as male would be an assumption that could not be backed up because no sexual characteristics are revealed. Therefore, in Halkes’ view they remain “gender neutral.”\textsuperscript{162} This assertion of gender neutrality is overstated, especially given the obvious distinction between gender and sexual difference. This dress quite clearly signals masculinity for reasons already described, and thus sutures the masculine on to the Mohawk nation when this imagery is repeatedly used as a visual cue to describe the conflict for a broad Canadian audience.

Joanne Sharp raises a similar discussion in relation to war monuments. Sharp questions the gender inclusiveness of tombs of Unknown Soldiers, monuments which supposedly represent “any member in the fraternity of the imagined community.” She continues, “But surely the Unknown Soldier is not entirely anonymous. We can all be fairly certain that the soldier is not called Sarah or Lucy or Jane….”\textsuperscript{163} The monument claims an inclusive neutrality but, in fact, it represents the nation through the \textit{male} soldier whose gender it need not specify even if it is not apparent. The same can be


said for the dress of the warrior himself, and the relationship this notionally anonymous figure comes to play in the media formation national imaginary.

Defending the Pines was clearly an issue that involved more than just the women, it was an issue for the entire community. Yet given the way that gender is mapped to the home in terms of public and private, exterior and interior, and male and female it is especially significant that in this work women are visibly positioned defending their home, a home conceived and understood outside of the domestic arena. Women’s visibility in *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* is two-fold and concerns message and form. First, whereas other media obscure it, Obomsawin foregrounds the investment the women have made in their community and their participation in the Crisis. Second, and by comparison to the Crisis images of the Warriors, the women are predominantly *unmasked*, and thus, their representations are far less mediated by signs of violence, machismo, and guerrilla tactics. This is not to suggest that Native women are not the objects of gendered stereotypes and fantasies, however, in this instance those projections cannot be manipulated to discredit the cause in the same way that the masculine ones are.

The first excerpt of an interview to appear in the film is with a woman, Kahentiiosta (also the subject of Obomsawin’s film *My Name is Kahentiiosta*), who lives on the Kahnawake reserve but who came to Kanesatake to lend her support during the Crisis [Fig. 2.16]. In this scene, she laughs as she recalls her impression of the blockade when she first arrived, amazed at how small it (initially) was. She goes on to reveal her preparedness to do what it would take to stand up for her beliefs.
Obomsawin follows this up by introducing Ellen Gabriel, a woman who, as the Kanesatake spokesperson during the Crisis, did maintain media visibility [Fig. 2.17]. Gabriel’s statement, at this point in the film, sets the tone for women’s involvement.

Describing the day the SQ arrived at the Pines, she says:

… the Tilden trucks rolled in and the SWAT team came out. And there was three of us that just looked at each other and one of the women had said *holy shit they’re here*. Our instincts kicked in and we said the women have to go to the front because it is our obligation to do that, to protect the land, to protect our mother and I can remember looking at the faces of the SWAT team and they were all scared, they were like young babies who had never met something so strong, who had never met a spirit. ‘Cause we were fighting something without a spirit. There was no thought to it. They were like robots.

By positioning of these remarks early in the film Obomsawin situates women at the forefront of the confrontation. She also privileges their role in the telling of the conflict, connecting those women on a deeper level with the land itself.

The role of women in the film is also relevant with regard to gender and the inhabitation of space. Much of the film concerns public space, as the conflict questioned who, collectively, had rights to the land in question. Almost all of the scenes are shot outdoors, keeping land as the central focus and, as I have argued, framing it as a landscape. However, even outdoors, certain scenes convey an intimacy that betray spatial norms of interior and exterior as private and public arenas, and further, as those spaces read as female and male. By early September, the soldiers were tearing down the barricades and encroaching further on the Mohawks at the Treatment Centre, where those who remained in the community were gathered. Obomsawin describes one particularly tense evening, with soldiers setting off flares
to distract and aggravate the Warriors. The Mohawk people worried the flares might ignite the Pines, adding to the strain. Obomsawin explains this in the voice-over narrative and shows a group sitting around a fire, singing Mohawk songs, outside the Treatment Centre. Helicopters drone overhead, spotlights shine down, casting ominous shadows, and flares periodically launch. The camera pans to the casing left by a flare that landed nearby. Kahentiiosta cradles her young son in her lap and they have the following exchange:

‘Mom. What’s that thing? I know it’s a bomb, Mom.’
‘Yeah, it’s some kind of bomb.’
‘What happens if you touch it?’
‘It’s poison, I guess. It makes us sick.’

The scene projects a remarkable, quiet intimacy, a moment of reprieve in the midst of a palpably stressful night, late in the Crisis [Fig. 2.18]. This intimacy works on several levels. The audience becomes privy to some private, “downtime” inside the barricades, a place from which most are excluded.\(^{164}\) While the scene still occurs outdoors, the fact that it is private and its access is restricted lends an interior feel to it – this despite the barrage of noise and light that come from beyond. Kahentiiosta’s exchange with her child further enhances the intimacy. Her calm explanation of the flare – at once tender and honest, reassuring and plain-speaking – followed by her singing read as nurturing and maternal. Women, especially mothers, are often positioned, discursively, as responsible for the transmission of cultural patrimony to

\(^{164}\) Much consternation during the Crisis arose from the policing of the barricades by the police and the military. Native supporters and spiritual leaders, journalists, Red Cross observers were all turned away, and securing passage for food and medical supplies also proved difficult.
the next generations. It is not just the home that is coded as feminine, but the realm of tradition that is associated with a homeland. This is particularly the case in cultures of migrant or displaced peoples, where cultural continuity is threatened. Here, the immediate threat to Mohawk home territory is clear; the role of women in passing on a cultural legacy to subsequent generations has special weight in a matrilocal and matrilineal society such as the Mohawk one.

Spatially, these references are incredibly confusing, but they enforce two critical aspects about the shaping of home spaces in contemporary Native culture. One, that the homeland is so deeply wed to home itself that the boundaries between interior and exterior spaces are blurred. Two, women’s participation in the defense of their land was equal to that of the men, so that even this private show of tenderness and comfort between mother and child appears in the same context as other actions in the film, outdoors and on the land. Again, use of the term rhetorical territory is helpful in understanding the nuance of homeland as home. Those who share a home depend on solidarity enough to collectively protect it. Within this territory, members assume different roles in working towards the common good of its members, as in the successful running of a household. Home and homeland, women in the film

165 Here the relationship between home and homeland as explicated through the closely related German terms of Heim and Heimat is especially relevant. I discuss these terms in Chapter 3.

166 Morley, 65.

emphasize over and over again by their presence, actions, and affirmations, are here equivalents.

Recharting and Transforming the Landscape

“No one believes in landscape anymore.” With that phrase, Ginger Strand opens a catalogue essay accompanying a recent exhibition of landscape art.\textsuperscript{168} Strand’s irony, given the context of her essay, is intentional, but her statement is nonetheless astute. By reframing Obomsawin’s film as a landscape, I seek to highlight the strong postcolonial nature of her work, and its capacity to critique a form of representation closely tied with nationhood just as it presents a particular representation of a Native homeland. The notion of employing and subverting this established form is a strategy which, in the words of Edward Said, seeks to “rechart and then occupy the place in imperial cultural forms reserved for subordination, to occupy it self-consciously, fighting for it on the very same territory once ruled by the consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior Other.”\textsuperscript{169}

Demonstrably, Obomsawin’s work is especially important with regard to landscape practices because of the specific significance of \textit{Kanehsatake} to all Native peoples in Canada and beyond. Through her medium, her politics, and her sensitivity


to gender, Obomsawin shapes a landscape that challenges, excites and *transforms* the conventions of established practices of landscape in Canada, and presents a multi-valenced picture of homeland. This transformative aspect is perhaps the most significant, for as the late Chippewa scholar Gail Guthrie Valaskakis points out,

> In transforming narratives, representations of oneness move from spiritual and communal experience that is local and place-centred, to experience that transcends personal, cultural and national borders. These stories that reclaim people and place, reconfigure land as territory, terrain that represents not only shared spiritual experience but also common colonial experience.  

By this means, *Kanehsatake* stands as Obomsawin’s testamental landscape.

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Figure 2.1. Arthur Lismer, *Canadian Jungle*, 1947. Oil on canvas, 44.8 cm x 53.7 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg 1966.16.107.

Figure 2.2. Thomas Davies, *View of the Great Falls on the Ottawa River, Lower Canada*, 1791. Watercolor over graphite on wove paper. 34.6 cm x 51.4 cm. National Gallery of Canada no. 6287.
Figure 2.4. Maria Hupfield, *The East Wind Brings a New Day*, 2006. Installation, 9’ x 25.’ Latex paint, video projection, table, canoe, and paint sample booklet “Group of Seven collection.” Photograph courtesy of Maria Hupfield.

Figure 2.5. Maria Hupfield, *The East Wind Brings a New Day* (detail with figure and table), 2006. Installation, 9’ x 25.’ Latex paint, video projection, table, canoe, and paint sample booklet “Group of Seven collection.” Photograph courtesy of Maria Hupfield.
Figure 2.7. Bonnie Devine, *Reclamation Project*, 1995. University Avenue, Toronto. Sod. 18” x 20’. The Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, Canadian Art Database. www.ccca.ca
Figure 2.8. Fourteen year-old Waneek Horn-Miller is stabbed by a soldier’s bayonet. Still photograph as reproduced in Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).

Figure 2.9. Mohawk negotiator Minnie Garrow at a press conference. From, Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).
Figure 2.10. Lorraine Monture, a Mohawk woman, struggling with soldiers at the barricades. From, Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).

Figure 2.11. Loran Thompson teaching a group of children the Mohawk language. From, Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).

Figure 2.13. Masked Warrior Brad Larocque, aka “Freddy Krueger.” From, Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).

Figure 2.15 Masked Zapatistas in Tlatelolco, Mexico, September 20, 1997. Photograph by Jaime Boites / Reforma.
Figure 2.16. Kahentiiosta, the first person interviewed in the film, talks about arriving at Kanesatake. From, Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).

Figure 2.17. Ellen Gabriel, negotiator and spokesperson for the Mohawk people at Kanehsatake speaks to the media. From, Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).
Figure 2.18. Kahentiiosta comforting her child. From, Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).
Chapter 3

The Home and the Unhomely: Women, House, and Home in Contemporary Native Art

Re-establishing the Home as a Site of Feminist Scholarship

Gender and feminism may inhere different values and find different expression in Native and non-native cultures in North America, but these differences are not immutable, nor are they necessarily defined exclusively by the cultural demarcations that separate Native and non-native people. Like non-native women, Native women ascribe multiple meanings and values to gender, feminism, and female identity; the same applies to the spaces in which these identities are experienced, negotiated and understood, including the home.

Despite cultural difference, and often because of it, the home presents a dense node of engagement for women artists. Here, I examine the home and attendant values of domesticity, colonialism, gender, family and community, as these concepts have been treated by five different contemporary Native artists. Works by Hannah Claus (Mohawk), Rebecca Belmore (Anishnabe), Marianne Nicolson (Kwakwaka’wakw), Danis Goulet (Métis), and Rosalie Favell (Métis), testify to this range and nuance. No single view of the home is ascribable to these artists, but each of them considers the space or structure of the home in a manner that invites a discussion of colonialism, the family, nation and identity, themes that are intensified or complicated when dovetailed with gender, femininity, and feminism.
Variably, the home can be understood as a “building, a style, a form of representation, an ideology, a material object, a symbolic representation.” These turns, and the many possibilities which exist for the home’s analysis, serve as a reminder that there are more “faces” to the home than the “four square walls” of a typical, North American house. Further, the home is a location and symbol laden with significance in women’s studies, feminist culture and attendant art and visual culture. However, the home contains more nuance than might be suggested by its positioning as a site of idealized domesticity, especially with regard to the experiences of Native peoples and specifically, of women.

A seemingly intractable association with separate spheres ideology and related critiques often limits discussion of the home and its creative or discursive potential. This ideology codes interior, private, domestic space as female, and exterior, public, and political space as male. Feminist scholars like Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir showed how the home conceived by these terms created an environment that restricted and confined women, critiques that powerfully mobilized (or occurred in tandem with) popular Second Wave feminist movements. Subsequently,


however, scholars have shown how the constrictions the ideology represented pertained to a limited community of white, privileged middle-class women. This same critique was leveled at other feminist attempts to salvage the home as site of comfort and refuge.\textsuperscript{174} Even so, scholars have made use of the model of gendered, binarized spaces of public and private to study other antagonistic relationships. Amy Kaplan points to the relationship between domestic and foreign as one which keeps many of the oppositional values of separate spheres alive through its inclusions and exclusions.\textsuperscript{175} Others have, for example, usefully considered how separate sphere ideology functions as an arm of imperialism in colonial settings,\textsuperscript{176} in terms of transnational migrancy and the global workforce,\textsuperscript{177} and with regard to the imbrication of race and ethnicity with gender in the pursuit of public (or other high status) office.\textsuperscript{178}


\textsuperscript{175} Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” \textit{No More Separate Spheres!}, 183-207.

\textsuperscript{176} Inderpal Grewal, \textit{Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and Cultures of Travel} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).


\textsuperscript{178} Nirwal Puwar, \textit{Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place} (Oxford: Berg: 2004).
While scholars have largely abandoned the home as a site of feminist engagement because of those well-founded critiques that detailed the extent to which this association between the home, the domestic and the feminine had been naturalized, others, like Iris Marion Young, have sought to resurrect it in this way.179 From her standpoint as an African American feminist and relative to her own family history, bell hooks writes about how, despite the domestic labor that many black women expended in the service of white families, their own homes, homeplaces, were sites of refuge, sites that “belonged to women, were their special domain, […] places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls. There we learned dignity, the integrity of being….”180 Homeplaces became sites of black, female resistance, according to hooks.

Using the home, especially as it relates to the image of the house, as a focal point for analysis complements an important materialist bent of feminism. If a materialist-feminist analysis is one that “takes the critical investigation, or reading, in the strong sense, of the artifacts of culture and social history, including literary and artistic texts, archival documents, and works of theory, to be a potential site of


political contestation through critique,” then the home, with its vast reach over family and women’s lives should be central to a materialist-feminist analysis. When examining how a complement of Native women artists explores, critiques, or evokes the home, the social histories and visual culture that influence, support, or contextualize the work of these artists form a relevant part of the discussion. Accordingly, I draw on aspects of important social history, such as the history of residential schools for Native students, and visual culture, such as the photographic record of women’s activities at those schools, to position a critical framework around the artists’ work. Thus by examining different aspects of the home’s meaning in relation to the work of Claus, Belmore, Nicolson, Goulet and Favell in this way, I seek to reestablish it as a dynamic and influential site, and one upon which the feminist gaze can be trained.

**Colonialism, Domesticity, and Mohawk Identity: Hannah Claus**

Hannah Claus’s installation, *unsettlements* (2004), takes the peaked-roof house form as its focal point. The artist conceived of *unsettlements* as her Master of Fine Arts thesis project at Concordia University in Montreal, but the installation was more widely seen as part of *Au fil de mes jours*, the exhibition of eight First Nations artists at the Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec in Quebec City in 2005, and at the

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Canadian Museum of Civilization [CMC] in Gatineau, Quebec, in 2007-2008.\textsuperscript{182} Claus is a member of the Bay of Quinte Mohawks [Tyendinaga], whose home territory abuts Lake Ontario in Eastern Ontario. Like many Native people in North America, Claus also has some European heritage and, while she identifies as First Nations, her work reflects this mixed heritage. She was born in 1969 in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada and spent her adolescence in nearby Saint John. Prior to her graduate studies at Concordia University, Claus trained at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto. In her art practice, Claus draws on her mixed cultural background, just as she draws on the relational and colonial history that her mixed heritage represents.

In \textit{unsettlements}, the artist uses the house form, wallpaper, and allusions to beading and quilting to examine the meeting point between cultures in North America and position the inter-related histories of colonialism and domesticity with Native women’s art and culture. In this installation, one hundred miniature houses, each only a few inches high, dot the gallery floor [Fig. 3.1]. Peaked roof houses such as these are a populist symbol in North American iconography, a symbol seemingly devoid of nuance or specificity. House forms invite a host of readings around ideals of home life such as safety, privacy, security, warmth, and containment. Claus draws on these associations for the enigmatic hyperbole they suggest, yet the houses she produces are not cartoonish. Rather, by drawing on the ideal form and the cultural history of that

\textsuperscript{182} At the CMC, the exhibition’s title was translated as \textit{In My Lifetime}. 
ideal, she handily produces a reflection on experience and history mediated through a recognizable touchstone.

The artist represents the house a hundred times over, essentially identical in form and size. The miniature form, here in teeming multiplicity, connotes a collection to be admired or studied, inviting a consideration of the values and meaning of house and home that the installation suggests. A house symbolizes acquisition as it may be a benchmark of success; indeed the volume of structures in this piece underscores the notion of the house as a currency of consumption and status. Where the idea of the actual house intersects with ownership, it presents the status of the individual or the family to the public, just as it conveys those intangibles of warmth and safety. However, while the house may stand in for material success, when conveyed as a reproducible form and as part of a cluster of identical forms, it ceases to be a marker of distinction.

The house as a symbol of shared history comes clearly into focus in *unsettlements*. It harkens to both the archetypal model of housing introduced by the European settlers – Claus grew up in a Victorian, brick house – as well as the model of housing commonly found on reservations, those regulated spaces designated for Native people by colonizing government bodies. The single family home the Mohawk artist presents here formally and spatially differences the multiple family dwelling of the Haudenosaunee longhouse.\(^{183}\)

\(^{183}\) The Iroquois Confederacy, or Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse), is made up of five allied nations of the Eastern Woodlands, Mohawk, Oneida,
Claus clads the exteriors of the house forms in the “walls” of the interior; that is, she constructs the house forms from paper she screen printed by hand with pink and blue wallpaper designs. A spatial inversion occurs, where the houses are turned inside out, where the private and habitually unseen becomes public. Claus also initiates a temporal destabilization: she resurrects wallpaper designs from three moments in European and Canadian history. In so doing, she integrates a historical narrative into the contemporary (and often atemporal) moment presumed by the context of the art gallery. By invoking through design the mid-nineteenth century, the early twentieth century, and the mid-twentieth century, Claus stresses history as active, visitable, and negotiable. To this end, exhibition curator Lee-Ann Martin analogizes the rise of mass-produced wallpaper as a product which rapidly circulated through the British empire and the history of the printing press, the advent of which “not only spread word of indigenous cultures but also contributed towards the proliferation of maps, treaties and legal documents that have threatened to supplant Indigenous oral history, traditional knowledge and community.”

More pointedly, wallpaper evokes the Victorian period in which it was popularized. Referencing this era raises issues of order, colonialism and domesticity.

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Onandaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, joined later by the Tuscarora. Large, multi-family dwellings, longhouses, were constructed from posts and arched poles through which bark was woven. While no longer used as housing, the longhouse remains central to Iroquois identity.

184 The patterns, drawn from the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, are a patterns by Owen Jones (1852-1874), Cole and Son Ltd. (1938), and Arthur Sanderson (circa 1950).

because of the pressure exerted in this period on Native people to conform to Victorian expectations. The trappings of middle-class, Victorian bourgeois spaces were thought to reflect the family’s moral state, and Native families were encouraged to shape their interior spaces to reflect these attendant values. As well, the final decades of the Victorian period (1837-1901) coincided with the start of the reservation era (1880-1960) which saw the home territories of Native people greatly diminished.

As paper forms, the houses convey a feminized quality: paper is a delicate, corruptible medium which can easily be altered or disintegrate. Stretched over the tiny bass wood frames fabricated by the artist, the paper’s fragility is further emphasized. Finally, the delicate small-scale patterns creeping over the paper evoke the female hand, just as they evoke the feminine interior. The visible is undercut by that which is barely so: delicate beadwork patterns pierce the paper surfaces of the houses but the busy, patterned surfaces of the wallpaper prints subsume these pinpricked designs, rendering them almost indiscernible [Fig. 3.2]. However, with this patterning, Claus references her Mohawk identity, the shared history between Native and non-native people in North America, and her own mixed heritage.

By alluding to beadwork into her depictions of the home, Claus references Mohawk culture, largely a women’s pursuit, and inter-cultural history. Beadwork is a

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traditional activity for Mohawk women and an activity that became an economic mainstay of the cross-cultural tourist trade in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Ruth Phillips has shown, bead workers often made design concessions to the tastes of the market and the innovative, hybrid forms that emerged demonstrate the tenacity of the artists to maintain craft practices during times of economic hardship. That Mohawk designs imprint this house form indicates the Mohawk presence as always there, inscribed and “stitched” to site and place, even when visibility is compromised. The beadwork designs recall the well-known work of Shelley Niro and Jolene Rickard. Niro is a Mohawk artist who has incorporated beadwork patterning into her photography. For her series *Mohawks in Beehives* (1991), Niro photographed her sisters, posing, comically, in theatrically feminine ways, often in public spaces; the images are often framed with pinpricked beadwork designs. For example, *The Iroquois is a Highly-Developed Matriarchal Society* (1991) mounts three photographs of a laughing woman sitting under a beauty salon hair dryer in the kitchen on a black ground, pierced with curvilinear designs [Fig. 3.3]. Framed with Iroquois patterning, the kitchen and the beauty salon, both spaces gendered as feminine, are thus codified as Iroquois spaces as well. Rickard, an

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artist and scholar who is Tuscarora, has also referenced beadwork in her photography. In *Cew Ete Haw I Tih: The Bird that Carries Language Back to Another* (1992), Rickard incorporates a family photograph picturing her grandmother and great aunt with the beaded objects they made to sell to non-native consumers, layering the image with a close-up of the beadwork itself [Fig. 3.4]. All three of these artists link an Iroquois artistic activity with women’s culture and with relations with non-native people.

Just as the beadwork designs insinuate a Mohawk presence onto the house form in Claus’ *unsettlements*, so too did Mohawk beadwork find a place in the homes of many non-native people, a history to which Rickard’s work directly alludes. In the late nineteenth century and in early decades of the twentieth century, many middle class Canadians acquired articles of Native beadwork and incorporated them into their décor. The style was fashionable and remained so in part because identifiably Native-produced crafts showcased the cosmopolitan tastes of collectors. The archetypal house form in Claus’ installation presents itself as an acultural structure, even if its roots are in a European tradition rather than an aboriginal one. Yet Claus emphasizes how ambiguous this kind of ownership is by clearly denoting the overlap of cultural signs and traditions.

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189 For the artist’s explanation of this work and its context, see Jolene Rickard, “*Cew Ete Haw I Tih: The Bird that Carries Language Back to Another*,” *Partial Recall*, ed. Lucy Lippard (New York: The New Press, 1992), 105-111.
As raised dots veining the houses, the beadwork patterns appear Braille-like. The tactility of the designs invites touching. Knowledge here is transmitted not by sight nor through orality, but through touch. However, if the suggestion of this transmission is there, its occurrence is not, at least in the installation’s gallery setting.190 Untouchable, unsettlement’s houses remain, as Martin describes, objects of beauty, desire and contemplation, wrapped gifts: “At once decorative and political, the houses become sites that embody the history of conflict between European and Aboriginal cultures. At the same time, they offer many possibilities for a new politics of identity.”191 Shadows are cast by the house forms – and indeed so too are long shadows cast over the installation by visitors craning down for a better look – dark shadows that cross and layer one another. The artist, too, has made shadows, siting each house in a small pool of white seed beads. Shadows can be a metaphor for history, but here, when signified by a pool of unused beads, perhaps waiting to be worked, the shadow implies a state to be undone, a place from which to move ahead to the future just as it is a look cast back. Nestled in the bed of beads, each house takes the beads as its foundation, a nod to how the home, no matter what form it takes and where it is located, is built on Mohawk history, identity, and women’s skill, labor and artistry.

190 At the Canadian Museum of Civilization where I visited unsettlements, an alarm sounded – repeatedly – when I moved my body too close to the work as I attempted to discern the patterning on the houses.

191 Martin, “In My Lifetime,” 63.
A second component of the installation also evokes women’s handwork. Adjacent to the houses, a worn and faded patchwork quilt lies rumpled on the floor [Fig. 3.5]. The quilt signifies in ways similar to the house, as it also evokes comfort, security, and a female gendering. Inversely, it can also conceal or smother, and when associated with a bed, a quilt may signal illness or death. The houses, covered in patterned paper, recall the calico prints typical of many quilts. Also like the houses, this quilt invites touch and evokes the human hands which made it and those that later grasped it as a cover for warmth, protection and care. Unlike the miniature houses however, the quilt is full-sized and as such appears functional rather than representative. If house and home have failed in the actual lives of many to fulfill the idealized roles for which they stand metaphorically, and if here, the homes are represented as pretty but presumably empty boxes, the quilt strays less into the realm of unfulfilled fantasy. The beadwork patterning denotes a presence – a female and Native one at that – on the house, but in a more obvious way so does the quilt. Perhaps, the quilt, and this quilt in particular, disheveled and seemingly frayed and faded from actual use, can do what the houses fail to: offer protection and warmth while also signaling women’s handwork and space.

Like beadwork, quilting is largely a female pursuit. As a textile, quilting suggests a narrative form. At times it evokes narrative through the stories signified by patterns and images, and at times by the narratives implicit in its making, conveyed through the labor of one or more makers. The quilt can reference the individual – she who designed it, or made it, or used it, and whose body the rumpled textile on the
gallery floor now absents. However, the quilt can also reference groups, as it may have been produced collectively, have been in the possession of a family, or represent the art and history of a particular culture, and cross-cultural relations. With regard to this last point, Janet Berlo, who, in her discussion of African American, Native American, Amish, and Hawaiian traditions in American quilting, indicates that much can be learned through the study of quilts and quilting about women’s social and economic interactions across class, cultural, and national demarcations.192 While quilting was likely first introduced to Native communities in the nineteenth century through mission schools and churches, Native quilters adapted culturally-specific patterns from beadwork, basketry and rug weaving to this medium. Historically, but especially today, Native quilters draw on a range of influences, often from other Native cultures, for their design inspiration.193 Thus an art form which may have originated from women’s mission and acculturation efforts became another outlet for Native women’s creativity, innovation, and cosmopolitanism.

Quilts have been made as objects of memorial, the most cogent example of this in recent years is the NAMES Project, the massive quilt project spearheaded by


activist Cleve Jones in 1985 to commemorate those who have died of AIDS (while also politicizing the need for further research and funding). Claus has created a memorial of sorts, not solely through the quilt, but the installation as a whole. She describes the painstaking process of embossing paper with the beadwork patterns as “lengthy, tiring, and redundant,” but also a “personal act of condolence, [her] means of marking and remembering, and ultimately [her] willingness to reveal to those who wish to see and acknowledge that presence.”

While Claus acknowledges her work’s “feminist undercurrent,” she prefers to let viewers interpret the work rather than being too explicit about its meaning. With unsettlements, Claus draws on the relationship between domesticity and colonization, however, her art evidences how Native people continue to find expression in spaces that bear the signs of cultural interaction. Analogously with aspects of feminism, the experience and legacies of colonialism have had the effect of distancing Native women from a discursive association with the domestic sphere. Inés Hernández-Avila finds that

for [N]ative people, any notion of ‘home’ within the domestic sphere was largely and intentionally disrupted by the colonialist process. Considering how we were seen literally as the enemy by colonial and then (in the United States) federal forces, [N]ative people were and have been forced historically to address the issue of ‘home’ in the ‘public sphere.’

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195 Hannah Claus, e-mail message to author, March 11, 2009.
Much Native-authored discourse about home, as well as that produced by non-native scholars, is actually about homeland; this is also true of contemporary art practice produced around this theme.\textsuperscript{197} Under colonial governance, Native homelands were seized, greatly diminished, and populations relocated. Public celebration or expression of the collective was often discouraged or denied as such gatherings were viewed as counter to the assimilationist goals of those in power. The reiteration of the home in the public sphere, therefore, becomes a necessary claim and strategy of resistance, and in this sense, the public and collective take priority over the expression of the private and individualized. Furthermore, many private and domestic practices engaged in by Native peoples were discouraged or prohibited as a result of direct or indirect intrusions by colonial forces and agents. The “domestic sphere” became a cultural space defined and dominated by Euro-American women, rather than a space understood as having various meanings across different cultures. Houses and housing may indeed provide a spatial context in which to reproduce the social order,\textsuperscript{198} but Claus’ close view reveals multiple orders and traditions at work, including women’s artistry and creativity.

\textbf{Investigating the Home, Rethinking Colonial Space: Rebecca Belmore}

\textsuperscript{197} As I discussed in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{198} Daphne Spain, \textit{Gendered Spaces} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 140.
More forcefully, Anishnabe artist Rebecca Belmore brings to light and contests the home’s colonial history through her installation and performance, *Wild* (2001) by making use of the interior space of a historic home and drawing on the intersection of that space with her own Native identity. Scholars explore imperial sites with increasing frequency as contact zones and spaces of encounter. Still, this space of encounter tends to be parsed in abstract terms; the experience of the encounter is more of a priority than the specific site at which it occurs. But the site itself is important and warrants greater attention. Given that the home has been positioned as white and middle class, either in its Victorian valorization or later, when recuperated by Second Wave feminists, exploring how this site may integrally inform a cross-cultural encounter is key. The encounter does not always necessarily occur in an embodied manner, between Native and a non-native persons. The encounter may occur implicitly, as the home, at times so steadfast in its designation as white and middle-class becomes the site of experience, site of investigation, or site of exhibition by a First Nations artist.

The Art Gallery of Ontario [AGO] owns a historical Georgian house in downtown Toronto, adjacent to the site of its main pavilion. In 2001, the museum invited seven artists to prepare works related to the house for a site-specific exhibition. The house, known as the Grange, was built between 1817 and 1820 and has the distinction of being the oldest surviving brick house in the city, and the fourth oldest building still standing. It initially served as a private residence for D’Arcy Boulton, who built it, and then for his son, who was for a time mayor of Toronto. The
house passed into other hands, and in 1910, it was bequeathed to the gallery. At that time, it ceased to be a lived-in space, but rather housed the first galleries of the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the AGO). In more recent years, the AGO used the Grange site predominantly as office spaces before revamping the house as a “historic home” for visitors. An exhibition of this nature at this site, however, was a first for the museum.

For this exhibition, *House Guests: Contemporary Artists in the Grange*, curator Jessica Bradley invited each artist to work within a chosen room in the house and prepare an installation specific to that room. The intension was for the artists to mediate the house’s history with their own experience. Belmore worked in the master bedroom and in *Wild* she engages both the history of the house and the specificity of the room. This work, in keeping with the artist’s practice generally, had a performance component, with the artist working her own body into the display as part of the installation [Fig. 3.6]. In her practice, the artist often renegotiates or redefines the space in which she works.¹⁹⁹

In *Wild*, Belmore focuses the intervention on the bedroom’s heavy, four-poster bed. She re-dresses the bed, replacing the existing green damask bedding with a satiny red and blue canopy, the scalloped edges of which appear to drip over the sides, heavily laden with beaver pelts and human hair. The appearance of human hair is even more arresting on the bedspread itself: blood-red panels of the glossy fabric

¹⁹⁹ As I discussed Belmore’s biography and practice at length in Chapter 1, I will not do so again here.
are trimmed with rows of black fringe, made of hair pinned down by rows of red piping. The effect is unsettling, as the hair evokes both the luxurious and macabre. A symbol of female health, sexuality, and fecundity the meaning of these “curtains” of hair changes when they are removed from the living body. Especially as it is hung alongside animal pelts, the hair becomes a relic, a trophy, and signals death, rather than the life and vitality it holds on the body. Beneath the bedspread hangs a frothy white bedskirt of ultra-feminine tulle, into the folds of which the strands of dark hair fall. The swatches of hair evoke scalping, a practice attributable to Native and non-native peoples in the colonial period. As a violent practice and a custom with a disputed history, the allusion to scalping in *Wild* introduces the violence of the public sphere to the supposed protected space of the (white, colonial) bedroom, just as it elicits a reminder about the unreliability of certain mythologies.200

The conflux of fear and safety, violence and refuge that *Wild* suggests permeates this room and is consistent with Freud’s theory of the uncanny and its positioning within the home. Freud identifies the uncanny as the familiar transposed

200 Though scalping was, during the colonial era, practiced by both Native and non-native Americans, its history has been mythologized and contested. Scalping has been represented in popular media to prop up the image of Native men as violent and brutal. A contrasting narrative was popularized in the 1960s and 1970s suggesting that Europeans introduced the practice to Native peoples. Ethnohistorian James Axell dismisses this narrative as revisionism, though he concedes that non-natives may have spread the practice more widely amongst Native peoples. Practiced by both Native and non-native people, by the mid-eighteenth century, “scalping was as Anglo-American as shillings and succotash.” James Axtell, “Scalping: The Ethnohistory of a Moral Question,” *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 232.
onto its opposite.\textsuperscript{201} Thus the \textit{Heimlich}, that which can be described as belonging to the home, as “homey” and familiar, can also become \textit{Unheimlich}, that which is kept out of sight, concealed, fearful. The attributes of \textit{Unheimlich} are always at the heart of the more benign \textit{Heimlich}; David Morley summarizes their relationship as one of “inverted replications,” rather than opposites.\textsuperscript{202} Belmore’s room evokes the \textit{Unheimlich} – the unhomely – in that the bed suggests luxury and eroticism, but also menace and death. Soft fabrics in the home suggest the feminine, but here, the uncanny quality of the hair and the blood-red satins offset the comforting dimensions of the bedclothes. This bed, and the room, are at the heart of the home and function as a metaphor for the uncanniness of the home itself: a site of fear just as it is one of safety and shelter.

Also unsettling is the presence of Belmore herself. During her performance, the artist lies in the bed, at times as if asleep as visitors to the house pass through the room. Belmore’s presence demonstrates how very inorganic her (in)action is; she acknowledges in her accompanying artist’s statement how unlikely, historically, her

\textsuperscript{201} It is not my intention to dwell on Freud or to present a psychoanalytic reading of this work. Rather, I want to acknowledge this context for terms that have been used by other scholars outside of this context. See, for example, Anthony Vidler, \textit{The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Young; Rebecca Bowley, “Domestication,” \textit{Feminism Beside Itself}, ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York: Routledge, 1995), 71-91; and Fiona Carson, “Uneasy Spaces: The Domestic Uncanny in Contemporary Art,” \textit{Motherhood and Space: Configurations of the Maternal Through Politics, Home and the Body}, ed. Sarah Hardy (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 243-260.

presence as a First Nations woman would have been in this house. But the tension Belmore creates extends further than this. Her body suggests how very natural it is to have a person in the house, in the bed, but how unnatural, how strange it is when the house ceases to be a private residence, ceases to be inhabited. The appeal of the conventional historical house lies in the opportunity the visit presents to imagine actually living in the house: with all the period details and trappings in place, only a small leap of the imagination is required to insert one’s self into the setting. The set up of the historic home intentionally evokes this form of transference so that it occurs almost without thought. In the Grange’s case however, the interloping artists alter the house’s context. In the context of contemporary art (with equal emphasis on the contemporary and on art), the conventional function of the historic house all but disappears. Marjorie Garber finds eroticism in the house tour, evoked by the fantasy of occupation and the free passage through a forbidden (or notionally private) space. Here, that eroticism is curtailed as, ironically, the artist’s body will not allow it. Belmore’s body is a living, breathing testament that seizes control of the room. “Sleeping” here, whether real or mimed, is not a passive state.

Belmore’s (in)action in *Wild* evokes James Luna’s historic and influential performance, *The Artifact Piece*, first staged in 1987 [Fig. 3.7]. In the performance, 

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Luna installed himself as an exhibit in the San Diego Museum of Man by lying, supine, in a sand-filled glass case positioned amongst existing exhibits of Native peoples. Bare-chested and wearing a loin cloth, textual keys mapped Luna’s body, informing visitors, for example, that the subject’s scars resulted from “excessive drinking.” Other glass cases placed nearby contained objects and ephemera specific to Luna, such as his divorce papers, and to the Luiseño reservation where he resides. Using his own body as an interventionist display, as Belmore does here, his performance intended to disturb unsuspecting visitors to the anthropological museum voyeuristically consuming Native cultures as historic, dead exhibits, as well as to unseat the regime of the museum itself.205

A decade later, Erica Lord, a young artist of Athabascan, Iñupiaq, and Finnish-American heritage, restaged Luna’s performance.206 Artifact Piece, Revisited (2008) differs from the performance that inspired it in several ways, notably, that spectators were likely familiar with Luna’s work and not startled by the “live” exhibit [Fig. 3.8]. One of the more significant differences between the two performances is the effect of Lord’s gender on the more recent work. Lord is a young, beautiful
woman and her performance works at unsettling the spectator’s experience of looking at a female subject, an experience of looking so evocative of Laura Mulvey’s notorious cinematic trope of the *gaze*. As with Luna’s, the textual keys to Lord’s display (as well as the diverse and contemporary objects themselves she includes in the case with her) serve to contemporize and individualize her as a Native person and cosmopolitan citizen. Yet they also draw on her gender and female sexual characteristics.\(^{207}\)

Gender informs the experience of looking in Belmore’s *Wild*, as it does in *Artifact Piece, Revisited*. However, the site of Belmore’s performance creates further layers to the context of gendering. Gender also informs Belmore’s presence as a “wild,” “natural,” and “alien” force; these terms present as a double bind when considered in conjunction with the artist’s gender. That Belmore is a woman, together with her presence as a First Nations person, complicates the assignment of the domestic as automatically female. Generally, the house would be considered a female domain. More specifically, the bedroom, as the most private living space within the house, is coded as female, by contrast to those spaces in which one might receive outside guests, like the parlor or dining room. Yet this particular bedroom does not handily convey the feminine, for the heavy, masculine furniture suggests otherwise.

\(^{207}\) For example: “The pigment on her finger and toenails may be part of a ritual in which females try to attract or gain attention from males in society. Women will also often wear facial pigment, a practice believed to stem from traditional facial tattooing or painting practices.” Objects that speak to her gender include a blond wig, and teal colored high-heeled shoes. Other objects placed in the case include some beadwork, a hip-hop cd and a punk rock one, and Barack Obama’s memoir, *Dreams of my Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance.*
The wildness that the artist injects into this space may therefore also be read as the femaleness: the “wild female body” can be read as impressing the same embodied abandon onto the space as the “wild Native body” does.

Just as the artist raises issues of belonging and place, her use of “wildness” alludes to a world beyond the confines of this interior. Larger home spaces of the nation are particularly relevant given the colonial backdrop to this site. The concepts of “home” and “nation” have come to represent generalized terms: understandings of “home” and “nation” are thus often quite abstract and these abstractions allow for sweeping, associative nuance. The same applies when the two concepts merge. The German vocabulary for concepts of home is helpful in making these distinctions, and scholars have made good use of them. Heim refers to the domestic, interior and private space of the home, whereas Heimat binds together the home with the homeland, encompassing the community and the collective. Eric Hobsbawn succinctly positions these terms in relationship to one another: “Home, in the literal sense Heim, chez soi, is essentially private… [and] belongs to me and mine and nobody else.” However, “Home in the wider sense, Heimat is essentially public… Heimat is by definition collective. It cannot belong to us as individuals.”208 Yet just as the home as private, domestic space seems diametrically positioned against the home as public, collective space, the German terms of Heim and Heimat demonstrate how

two terms with differing meanings can hold meanings that are so mutually
imbricated.

If the nation can be metaphorically aligned with home, then so too can the
inverse be invoked. Implicitly, Belmore taps into the home as nation in *Wild*, drawing
particularly on the concept of nation-as-process, whereby Canada becomes a nation
by colonizing its wilderness and implicitly, Native peoples. This is not unlike some
scholars’ views on domesticity, whereby domesticity is not a static ideal but a *process*
of domestication, one that necessitates the conquering and taming of the wild, the
natural, and the alien.²⁰⁹ If these elements are those which are to be shut out of the
domestic space – and the Grange itself, with its habitual mandate to preserve and
display a bygone era, memorializes in bricks and mortar the domestic ideal – then
Belmore’s re-introduction of those elements into the bedroom strikes back at this
process of domesticity. *Wild* achieves this undoing by means of its title; by its
presentation of the natural, with the layers of hair and fur; and by the positioning of
the alien, that is the artist’s body, which is unexpected, incongruous and, at least in its
relationship to the original household, uninvited.

Ultimately though, the installations at the Grange were to be dismantled and
the house returned to its established purpose. The title of the exhibition, *House
Guests*, is a telling reminder of the temporary nature of such interventions. Through

²⁰⁹ See, Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*
her intervention, the artist can provoke thought in visitors about the history of a given space, but cannot change the history itself.

**Domestic Imperialism in Boarding and Residential Schools**

Claus’s installation and Belmore’s performance are tacit reminders that under certain circumstances imperialism bolsters domesticity. Throughout the history of the expansion and diversification of North America, the middle class employed domesticity as a measure of control; the desire to impose order in the private sphere reflected that greater will to control public space in colonial society. As the non-native population spread further west, the middle class sought to secure its position by reinforcing its values and practices against the threat of the land and against the Native inhabitants themselves.

The system of residential schools in Canada, operational from the mid-nineteenth century through the late twentieth century, succinctly represents the machinations of domestic imperialism as enacted upon Native people, the effect of which was ethnocide. In the United States, where they are known as boarding schools, parallel institutions were operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) or privately run: two well-known examples are the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia, founded in 1868, and the Carlisle School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania founded in 1879.

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The Hampton Institute was initially an industrial school for former slaves, both men and women. In 1877, it began to admit Native American students as well. The mandate of the Carlisle School was always to educate Native students in industry and housekeeping, so as to assimilate them into the dominant society through service work. The school’s founder, Richard Henry Pratt, is remembered for the ideology he espoused in the form of the infamous slogan, “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” Before the school closed its doors in 1918, only 8% of its 10,000 students graduated, and many, many ran away. One individual closely associated with Carlisle is Zitkala-Ša, the Dakota Sioux writer and activist also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. She spent six years at a Quaker boarding school, White’s Manual Labor Institute in Wabash, Indiana, and after her schooling, she eventually went on, in 1897, to teach at Carlisle. Ultimately, however, Zitkala-Ša could not reconcile herself with the practice of “Indian education.” It was, she concludes in her 1900 article for *Atlantic Monthly*, “An Indian Teacher Among Indians,” tantamount to cultural genocide.²¹¹

Boarding schools run by the BIA comprised a central component in the plan to assimilate Native people into American society at large. Especially with regard to Native women, the training they received at boarding school prepared them for little more than domestic service. Frances Benjamin Johnston, a studio photographer (of European heritage) based at the time in Washington, D.C., received considerable attention for a series of photographs she was invited to take at the Hampton Institute

in 1899. At the time of Johnston’s visit, its population comprised seven hundred African American and two hundred Native students. Johnston’s photographs, which mostly depict the activities of the school’s black students, were intended to illustrate reformist education policies at work and were exhibited at the Paris Exposition of 1900. On the strength of this project, Johnston secured a contract to photograph the now-notorious Carlisle School in 1901 by offering her services to the BIA. While some of Johnston’s photographs show young women in the classroom studying art and literature, these photographs are outnumbered by those which feature the students’ lessons in washing, ironing, and mending – menial tasks which BIA officials viewed as legitimate vocational training and further, characterized as “uplifting” [Fig. 3.9, Fig. 3.10].

Gendered training at the boarding schools reveals the deep entrenchment of separate spheres ideology in the dominant white, middle class of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This ideology presumed a woman’s rightful place was in the home, where she kept the house and cared for children. This contrasted with a

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man’s far more public role: to obtain an education, to do paying work, and to be an active citizen. These values informed the boarding school curriculum, despite the fact that gendered division occurring at the threshold of the home perplexed many Native students unaccustomed to such rigid household roles for men and women. While boys and young men were instructed in carpentry, shoemaking, stock raising, for example, girls and young women learned menu planning, cooking, housekeeping, dress making, and child-rearing. This curriculum reflected Euro-American goals and values, and excluded, by contrast, Native food preparation and preservation techniques, clothing styles and materials, architecture and family structures.

The short-lived Model Family Program at Hampton attempted to initiate both men and women into this domestic social order through a residential program for newlyweds. Young couples lived together in cottages constructed by the men with interiors maintained by the women: ostensibly, the exterior and interiors of the house provided a site for each to inscribe his or her “appropriate” gendered behavior. The control the school wished to maintain over students as Native people, even those it most actively sought to initiate into a Victorian order, is made plain by a vocabulary

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reinscribing control: the area of campus where the cottages stood was referred to as “The Reservation.” This image evokes and further nuances Claus’ installation, unsettlements. With this history in mind, her housing model bears the stamp of the social order evoked by the cluster of reservation housing and, through the external use of the wallpaper, challenges gendered order.

The domestic training the boarding schools provided was not intended solely to prepare Native women to run their own households. The “outing” programs at Carlisle and other BIA-operated schools is further evidence that employment in domestic service was the desired outcome and part of a conscious plan. The nature of the school training had prepared women for little else. Outing programs placed students in service positions in white homes during their school breaks and, ostensibly more permanently, once they had completed their schooling. This aspect of the project of assimilating Native people occurred in private homes, under the supervision of a BIA matron and the white, female head of household. Here, the colonial arena or contact zone between Native and non-native women shifts to this interior, domestic sphere, characterized by Margaret D. Jacobs as more than living spaces or working spaces but as “domestic frontiers where colonial relationships continue to play themselves out.”

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216 Buffalohead and Molin, 116-133.

217 The only instruction provided at Sherman, a school where the curriculum and outing program was based on that of the Carlisle, that prepared women for employment other than in domestic service was nursing. Paxton, 180.

The context of federally-run schools serves to close the gap between domestic ideology and site of the home. In addition to its status as an emblem of women’s work, the home was portrayed as an emblem of society’s achievements and its goals. There, students were initiated into the order that the home represented.\textsuperscript{219} The education that many Native girls and women received in industrial schools prepared them not to be doctors or to run businesses but above all, to work in domestic service in the homes of the white middle class. Supported by domestic imperialism, the education system furthered a systemic goal of cultural assimilation as well as gender assimilation. The girls and women were thus trained in the maintenance and support of the imperializing home itself.

**Home as Indigenous Space: Marianne Nicolson and Danis Goulet**

Between 1909 and 1911, the U.S. Indian Service contracted Richard Throssel, a photographer of Cree and adopted Crow heritage, to photograph the Crow Reservation in Montana, a reservation on which he had settled in 1902. The government intended to use these photographs as part of a public health initiative on reservations, in an attempt to curb the spread of disease, especially tuberculosis, rampant in communities of hastily built reservation housing. One of the most popular in the series, captioned “Interior of the best kitchen on the Crow Reservation,” from 1910, shows a man, a woman, and a child seated at a table laden with china, the man pouring from a tea pot [Fig. 3.11]. This photograph was shown against others

\textsuperscript{219} Simonsen, 72.
captioned “Indians eating from the ground,” an exterior shot, and “Interior of Indian teepee, showing the passing of the pipe.” The binary positioning of Throssel’s photographs evidence the hierarchy and judgment ascribed to Native and non-native housing, and how housing could be differently aligned with the obsolete and the modern, disease and good health.\textsuperscript{220}

Not only did the introduction of single-family homes at times evidence colonialism and alter the social fabric of Native communities, the design of the interior spaces themselves quite often hampered daily practices in a way that undermined cultural values and coherency. For example, small efficiency kitchens, seemingly practical and modern, do not allow for groups of women to cook together. The small eating areas in kitchens for one Californian housing development (later in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century) were designed with minimal counter seating, thus undermining the important place of kitchens as the center of Native hospitality and ignoring that meals are social occasions for groups to gather,\textsuperscript{221} echoing the sentiment of a Joy Harjo

\textsuperscript{220} Richard Throssel was born in 1882 and died in 1933; he also had Métis, Scottish, and English heritage. For more about Throssel, see Peggy Albright, \textit{Crow Indian Photographer: The Work of Richard Throssel} (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997); Tamara Northern and Wendi Starr Brown, \textit{To Image and To See: Crow Indian Photographs by Edward S. Curtis and Richard Throssel, 1905-1910} (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1993); and Jane Alison, ed. \textit{Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography} (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1998).

poem, which opens with the line, “The world begins at a kitchen table.” A housing development designed in the 1960s for the Navajo Reservation community of Shiprock featured carpets and window curtains, distinctly un-Na

dajo domestic touches. Spatially, the rooms were not designed to accommodate Navajo family structures and spatial order, but resourcefully, women used the bedrooms for weaving. While this refiguring of the space demonstrates the resourcefulness of Navajo people at adapting the assigned spaces to meet their needs, it also speaks volumes about the failure of architects and housing bureaus to communicate with or even to notionally comprehend the cultures of the communities for which they designed. Other examples of spatial reconfiguration from the Southwest include the outright refusal by some to live in housing provided by the U.S. Department Housing and Urban Development [HUD], instead using those structures for storage while continuing to inhabit hogans and adobes; others moved into the HUD housing, but continued to do their cooking outdoors. In these instances, the failure of the American middle-class domestic space to “stick” reveals the resistance to assimilation in the form of domestic imperialism.

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222 Harjo is a very well-known poet and musician who is a member of the Muscogee nation. Her poem opens an intercultural collection of poetry, fiction and non-fiction writing by women on the home. Its position in this volume testifies to both the relevance of a Native woman’s personal and cultural perspective on home, as well as its relevance to women from other standpoints. Joy Harjo, “Perhaps the World Ends Here,” Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home, ed. Catherine Wiley and Fiona R. Barnes (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 1.


224 Krinsky, 192.
Through the work of Claus and Belmore, I considered the home as a site through which to read colonial relationships and postcolonial interventions into social history. In this next section, I redefine home space by showing how artists have located it culturally and spatially as indigenous. Establishing the home as a Native space in a postcolonial context involves some degree of strategic displacement, or the deterritorializing of the home from its association with separate spheres ideology and whitestream feminism. This may occur even as artists position the home as indigenous space and mobilize that space in resistance to colonial histories.

Kwakw̱aka̱’wakw artist Marianne Nicolson’s determinations of Native spaces – specifically as they relate to Northwest Coast architecture and world view, does this quite successfully.

“Reservation X: The Power of Place,” an important exhibition organized by the Canadian Museum of Civilization in 1998, explored the relationship between Native subjects and location, as interpreted by contemporary First Nations and Native American artists. While for some of the participating artists, this relationship frames the land itself (Mary Longman) or its resources (Jolene Rickard), and for others, a more specific exploration of reservation life (Shelley Niro), Marianne Nicolson uses

225 I am using the term deterritorializing here as Caren Kaplan does, after Deleuze and Guattari. For a discussion of deterritorialization in the context of feminism, see, Caren Kaplan, “Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse,” Cultural Critique 6 (Spring 1987): 187-198. However, my use is tentative: Kaplan’s essay also figures in Inés Hernández-Avala’s “Relocations Upon Relocations,” where Hernández-Avala thoughtfully critiques Kaplan’s politics of deterritorialization in the context of Native women given the histories of forced removals – actual displacements – experienced by Native peoples.
the structure of the house itself to interrogate a culturally-specific view of place.

Nicolson contributed the large installation, *House of Origin* to the exhibition.

Nicolson was born in 1969 in Comox, British Columbia, to a Dzawada’enuxw mother and Scottish father. She is a member of the Dzawada’enuxw tribe, part of the Kwakw’ala Nation (which collectively unite Kwak’wala speaking tribes) of Kingcome Inlet (Gwa’yi). Nicolson now lives in Victoria, on British Columbia’s Vancouver Island, not far from her home community. The artist has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (now Emily Carr University of Art and Design) and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Victoria. To study Kwakw’ala design, she has also apprenticed with a master carver. Presently, Nicolson is completing a doctorate in Linguistics and Anthropology, also at the University of Victoria.

At the heart of Nicolson’s *House of Origin* is the Kwakw’ala’wakw cedar plank house, the gukwdzi or Big House, the frame of which creates the actual structure of the installation [Fig. 3.12].

226 Four inverted Vs made of wood are

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226 There is extensive scholarship detailing the extraordinarily rich art, culture, language and history of the Kwakw’ala’wakw people, from the ethnographic accounts of Franz Boas to more recent major museum projects of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology and American Museum of Natural History. I cannot possibly adequately provide the appropriate cultural context for Nicolson’s work here, as neither space nor my own expertise allows it. However, this discussion of Nicolson’s work, even with the limited context I do provide, illustrates how one artist presents the specificity of indigenous space in relation to home space. While Nicolson uses contemporary materials and methods, her art serves as an especially significant foil to other artists I discuss here whose work more directly engages in the legacies of colonial history or the realities of living in a mixed society.
suspended from the ceiling, echoing the a-frame roof of the Big House. Two enormous black square frames hang at opposing ends and in the centre of each is positioned a slightly smaller painting. These frames and the paintings held within form “walls.” The effect on the long walls is generated by a row of hanging photographs, sandwiched in Plexiglas. For Nicolson, the Big House:

…the represents the idea of self. The house is a symbol of that development, of seeking self. It’s a strong symbol of identity, home, family, and community. I constructed a house to be viewed from all sides, both from the outside and the inside. I wanted to express ideas about perspective and how people view other people’s lives. In a large part, our lives have been documented because others have imposed their perspectives. I want to present this work so that there are multiple viewpoints. I wish people to have a viewpoint of my home and experience. I also want to represent it in my own way and necessarily have everything understood.227

The Kwakwaka’wakw post and beam structures are essentially square and can measure 40 to 60 feet in length. Massive logs are used for the post and beam frames, and split and adzed planks for the walls and gabled-roof. The crest of the lineage occupying the house appears, painted mural-like, on the façade. The Big House, forms of which other Northwest Coast peoples maintain, itself represents community, because of the communal living it fosters by allowing extended families to co-habitate. By extension, the inverse is also true: absence of the inhabited Big House conjures isolation and loneliness. In her short story, “Bertha,” about the effects on two generations of women being isolated from their culture, Sto:lo writer Lee Maracle attributes the decline in the inhabited Big House to the introduction of

Christianity: “Big houses were left to die and tiny homes isolated from the great families were constructed. Little houses that separated each sister from the other, harboring loneliness and isolation. Laughter died within the walls of these little homes.”

In 2000, “Reservation X” toured to the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian New York City campus, the George Gustav Heye Center. In his review of the exhibition, Holland Cotter, the senior art critic for the New York Times characterizes Nicolson’s House of Origins as “celebratory” and “edifying but a bit bland.” This dismissal evidences a misunderstanding of the work, underlying which is perhaps a generalized ignorance of indigenous spaces, family and community structures and relationships. Nicolson’s installation reinforces the powerful and vital relationship between house and home. Her use of photographs of members of her community suggests reading lived experiences – her own and her community’s – through architecture. Yet she avoids what Antoinette Burton cautions against as the essentializing and romanticizing of the allegorical power of the home, a caution which applies in multiple cultural contexts. The suspended frames that imply the frame of the Big House in House of Origins also suggest of the frame


of a work of art, a correspondence drawn all the more emphatic given the work’s gallery setting. An enormous boxy frame hangs at each end, forming the short walls of the Big House. Within each of these, another smaller frame is set, echoing the dimensions of the outer frame [Fig. 3.13]. Rather than framing negative space, these frames hold Nicolson’s bold, red paintings, vibrantly alluding to life therein. While Nicolson’s work most directly refers to the collective space of home for her Kwakwaka’wakw community at Kingcome Inlet, the work also echoes the artist’s home in the gallery.

If anything, *House of Origin* is essential to the project of destabilizing the site of home from whitestream gender and cultural norms. Conceptually, Nicolson presents home and housing concomitantly as ideas, experiences and practices specific to her own community, and she does so visually, culturally, and architecturally. Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton suggest architecture in Native America is about more than the “design and decoration of buildings” but rather that which

…embraces what happens whenever human thought or action makes order and meaning of random space: naming places, designating sacred parts of ‘wilderness’, clearing village areas and garden plots, claiming food-gathering areas, planning and constructing buildings, and arranging the spaces that surround and connect them. Finally, *it includes the often unseen social and religious meanings which are encoded into buildings and spatial domains.*

By integrating photographs of her community’s people into the implied structure of the Big House, Nicolson affirms this social encoding of the space. The work’s title, *House of Origins*, affirms this as well: her “origins” are not located in the

ethnographic past, but positioned contemporaneously, within her own community. Images cradled by the house’s supports could be said to provide a turn on the Kwakwaka’wakw saying, the house holds the tribes in its hand. Additionally, the relationship between the house and community members is reinforced by the belief in Northwest Coast societies that houses themselves are almost living entities.

Galdas is the Kwak’wala word for storage container. The meaning of the box is complex. Sometimes, the bent wood (or kerfed) boxes are functional vessels for storage and food preparation; other boxes, elaborately carved and painted, are designed to hold regalia and important objects. Those galdas hold prized objects, but are beautiful objects in their own right. Their elaborate decoration alerts their beholders to the precious nature of what is contained within, while also protecting those contents and keeping them hidden from view. The box is a key metaphor in Kwakwaka’wakw culture and shares its rich meaning with the concept of the house. The house is like the box in that it is a container for the members of the extended family protected therein. Also like the box, the house maintains multiple identities:

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232 Andrea Walsh likens the effect of Nicolson’s use in her installations of historical and contemporary photographs of members of her community to the creation of a “cultural landscape,” especially so given the images of people engaged in the activities of daily life. See, Andrea Walsh, “Marianne Nicolson,” *Contemporary Masters: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, volume I*, Eiteljorg Museum (Indianapolis: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, 1999), 28.

233 Nabokov and Easton, 256.

234 Nabokov and Easton, 229.

235 The importance of galdas and other Kwak’wala terms as well as concepts specific to Nicolson’s Kwakwaka’wakw culture are carefully explored and explained
for example, it assumes one identity in the practice of daily life and another during times of ceremony and celebration.\textsuperscript{236} Nicolson uses the image of the \textit{galdas} in her work, notably in \textit{Bax’wanat’i: The Container for Souls} (2006), an illuminated glass and cedar box, with Kwakwaka’wakw iconography etched onto the glass [Fig. 3.14]. In \textit{Bax’wanat’i: The Container for Souls}, the halogen light within casts shadows into the gallery, alluding to an active presence within and metaphysically, aligning this work with the earlier \textit{House of Origin}. A more recent installation at the Vancouver Art Gallery, \textit{The House of the Ghosts} (2008) saw the museum’s façade lit up by projected images. This glowing iconography re-framed the edifice as a Big House and as indigenous space, and evoking in the tradition of the \textit{galdas}, ironically given the relationship between museums and Native peoples in North America, the treasures held therein.\textsuperscript{237}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{236} Potlatches, the ritual-filled song, dance, and gifting ceremonies central to Kwakwaka’wakw life, were held in the winter, when families were in residence in the plank houses and not dispersed at their hunting and fishing grounds. For a brief summary of the potlatch and anti-potlatch legislation imposed by the Canadian government in 1884, see Robert Joseph, “Behind the Mask,” \textit{Down From the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast}, ed. Peter McNair, Robert Joseph and Bruce Grenville. (Vancouver: Douglas and MacIntyre, 1998), 18-35.

\textsuperscript{237} Many objects confiscated at the time of the bans on Northwest Coast potlatches (central to Kwakwaka’wakw cultural life) ended up in museum collections. The sight of the Vancouver Art Gallery, in particular, is significant. Formerly a
The Kwakwaka’wakw house is a “sacred container of the lineage.” At the heart of the life of the extended family, its physical structure symbolized the people who inhabit it, as much as the lineage’s stories and emblems do. Kwakwaka’wakw people regard the red cedar from which they habitually construct buildings as a living entity. So too are the by-products of red cedar considered living things. The identifiable reddish hue to the cedar recalls blood and the living. The artist has painted the panels at the long ends of the Big House a deep, vibrant red, and has inscribed them with text and images thus affirming the relationship between structure, place and the living. Another work produced by Nicolson reinforces this: in 1998, the artist painted the image of a copper using red oxide paint onto the cliff side near her home at Kingcome Inlet. In doing so, she makes a potent statement about the relationship of Kwakwaka’wakw people to this particular place in a period where ongoing land claims continue to strain communities. Moreover the red hue of the stenciled image references the living nature of the land itself, and indeed of the people. Taken in context with the earlier work, House of Origins, a triangular courthouse and jail, First Nations people caught defying the ban may have appeared at this sight to receive punishment.

239 Nabokov and Easton, 246.
240 The shield-like coppers signified wealth among peoples of the Northwest Coast, and are associated with the lavish exchanges of the potlatch ceremonies. Bans on potlatches forced the practice underground, where they continued to be practiced defiantly. Even when such bans were rescinded, the potlatch, and specifically the copper because of its association, remains a symbol of resistance, endurance and cultural survival. Grand potlatches were a particularly important part of Kwakwaka’wakw culture. See, Aldona Jonaitis, Art of the Northwest Coast (Seattle: University of Washington Press; Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2006), 107-108.
correspondence can be drawn between house, people, and place, here united by the “living blood” of the red paint.

While Nicolson uses the definitively aboriginal and specifically Kwakwaka’wakw Big House to articulate a powerful and unified sense of community and identity, filmmaker Danis Goulet explores these same themes in her 16-minute short dramatic film, *Divided by Zero* (2006), and does so in a far more generic domestic setting: the middle-class urban/suburban house. Ashley, the teenage protagonist in *Divided by Zero* experiences an adolescent crisis over her identity as a young, Native woman. In part, Goulet, who is Cree and Métis,\(^241\) made her film in response to the frequent recurrence of identity as a theme in Native cinema, and further, as a counter-narrative to the Native experience as defined as poverty-stricken and or bound to the reservation.\(^242\) The over-representation of the reservation in film (and in other cultural forms, both literary and visual) has the effect of diminishing the visibility of other sites of importance.\(^243\) It also has the effect of streamlining and singularizing the identity of Native peoples to the exclusion of a multiplicity of identities and experiences. The overemphasis of the experience of poverty often has

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\(^{241}\) Métis, along with First Nations and Inuit, are one of Canada’s distinct aboriginal peoples. Métis people are descendents of 17\(^{th}\) century marriages between First Nations (predominantly Cree, Ojibway, Algonquin, Saulteaux, and Menominee) and Europeans in western Canada.

\(^{242}\) Danis Goulet, interview by the author, Toronto, August 27, 2007.

\(^{243}\) Goulet highlights the various turns on the theme of the reservation she has encountered in her capacity as Executive Director and programmer of the ImagineNATIVE Film Festival, in Toronto, including the departure from the reservation, the return to the reservation, and the tension between the reservation experience and the urban experience.
the unwanted effect of perpetuating a stereotype of Native people as impoverished, rather than revealing something of an individual’s experience or bringing attention to the economic conditions experienced by some Native people and communities. Thus quite deliberately, Goulet sought to represent the middle class experience, and made use of an obviously middle class setting, setting most of the film’s scenes in the kitchen and teenager’s bedroom.

Questions over her Native identity provokes Ashley’s crisis; or perhaps more accurately, her concern over not being Native enough. Ashley lives with her mother and sister in a culturally mixed, middle class Canadian neighborhood. Ashley’s earnest activist boyfriend and his affectedly liberal mother are white. Broadly speaking, Ashley’s identity crisis is typical of adolescence, something the film presents with humor and dignity. If it is a goal of this work to question some of the assumptions about Native identity, it is an elegant choice to set it in the context of adolescence, itself a time of “becoming” and of searching for identity.

Ironically, the setting of the middle class family home emphasizes the complicated nature of Ashley’s identity struggle. The home is peaceful and banal, and it is therefore a safe place for such adolescent uncertainty. But the home is also a useful setting in the way it mediates a relationship with its occupants. Typically, when the middle-class home is tied to a concept of domestic space, an order of space with historical and temporal dimensions is evoked. But unlike Belmore’s Wild, in

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which the artist’s occupation of the home draws attention to the paradigm of exclusion the house’s history maintained, Goulet’s work does not locate tension in the home itself. Its occupation is one of a matter of course. This, particularly by contrast to the other works discussed in this chapter, makes *Divided By Zero* significant. If Goulet’s use of the home is to be understood as an act of resistance, it is in how she resists the home being scripted as a site wholly unwelcoming to Native people.

Ashley’s crisis culminates when she shuts herself in her bedroom, refuses to see her boyfriend or give her sister entry and builds a tipi out of bed sheets in the corner [Fig. 3.15]. Overwhelmed by confusion about who she is supposed to be, Ashley retreats to this space of privacy, of safety, and of “authenticity.” In the realm of teenage girls, the bedroom signifies a place to retreat, the inner sanctum; the construction of the tipi within that space creates a visual metaphor for a place in which to be herself. For a teenage girl, that sense of self, yet to be fully defined, feels precarious. Not so subtly – but to comic effect – the young woman constructs the tipi based in equal part on how she imagines the tipi and what she extrapolates from the internet (she carries the laptop into the tipi with her, along with her cellphone and stereo). As “culturally inauthentic” as this tipi appears, its rendering is touching because of the authentic presentation of adolescence, and because of how deeply the image of the tipi resonates in its location. By introducing the tipi into the bedroom space, the filmmaker presents an obvious tension between her character’s lived self,
and her sense of what that lived self should be, in her own mind or in the minds of other people.

As so-called “Indian enthusiasts” often imitate or reconstruct tipis as a hobbyist pastime, and as the image of the tipi appears frequently in Western theme movies and books, it holds a troped status in popular representations of Native culture. The use of the tipi here acknowledges that subtext of appropriation by retrieving the structure, in part, from that very context (as accessed through online instructions) and repositions it as an indigenous-occupied space. Thus Divided By Zero presents two layers of indigenous spatiality connected to the home space through the house and the tipi. In House of Origins, Nicolson uses photographs to connect Kwakwaka’wakw people to the structure of the Big House, emphasizing their claim to the structure and the culture it represents. In another visual, representational form, Goulet enacts much the same action, legitimizing the experience of urban, middle class Native people as Native and presenting home space as such.

Belonging and Being-at-Home: Rosalie Favell

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Many publications about tipis offer as much by the way of instructions for non-native people to build tipis for recreational purposes, as they offer specific histories of their indigenous use. See, Linda A. Holley, Tipis, Tepees, Teepees: History and Design of the Cloth Tipi (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2007); Reginald Laubin and Gladys Laubin, The Indian Tipi: Its History, Construction, and Use, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Adolf Hungrywolf, The Tipi: Traditional Native American Shelter (Summertown, TN: Native Voices Book Co., 2006).
Inclusion and exclusion are influential and foundational concepts for theorizing the home. By treating the home as a site defined in ways other than through domestic space and by emphasizing the home’s relationship to the community or nation, less prescriptive spaces of home emerge. These compelling spaces invite further analysis as counter-models to those seemingly unmovable constructions wherein, as Erin Manning summarizes,

> the home continues to be portrayed as the secure entity that presides justly over domestic, racial, gendered, and sexual containment, placing itself as the locus of protection and inclusion. Hence, the home continues to be represented as the emblem of security even while it conceals a silenced matrix of terror within its bounds.²⁴⁶

This terror could take the form of abuse concealed beneath the veneer of domestic and familial normalcy. It also evokes the widespread (and only recently widely and publicly acknowledged) physical, sexual, and emotional abuse endured by Native students in boarding and residential schools through the late twentieth century.²⁴⁷ Without diminishing these experiences, I turn to the kind of pain exacerbated by containment in a home where one is not at home, a predicament of identity explored by Rosalie Favell in several series of photography-based work.


²⁴⁷ On June 11, 2008, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper formally apologized to Native Canadians for the government’s treatment of students in residential schools. That same month, the government established the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission creating a forum for former students to share their experiences and to create a historical record of the schools and their policies. In Canada, residential schools, operated from the 1870s to the 1980s (with the last closing in 1996). A compensation package for former students came into effect in 2007, but the apology, for many, was seen as a greater milestone.
In her art, which uses digital photography, “found” photography, and collage techniques, Favell employs the domestic setting to explore identity in relation to her Métis culture, sexuality and family history. Favell was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1958. She holds a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Photographic Arts from Ryerson Polytechnic Institute (now Ryerson University) in Toronto, and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. The home setting, while often only implied, is crucial to the power of these works which draw on her Métis heritage, her ambivalence about gender roles, her sexuality, the power of popular culture and the pervasiveness of Native stereotypes. Favell’s work represents a kind of migrancy from the domestic ideal, and it does so via multiple threads. Three series of work are especially relevant: Belonging (2003), Longing and Not Belonging (1999), and Plain(s) Warrior Artist (1999-2003).

Favell makes use of the family album as a resource and as a trope in her art. The album houses the family’s visual archive, containing in two-dimensional, perusable form the records of those people and benchmark occasions that originate from within the home. Its presence in Favell’s art strengthens the art’s link to the idea of home. Favell maintains the format of the album itself in Belonging, a work where she displays digital reproductions of all the pages from her mother’s family album [Fig. 3.16]. The artist preserves the look and feel of the period album: matte black paper pages, on which snapshots are mounted using triangular tabs, a style that fell out of usage decades ago. Usually nine to a page, in neat rows of three; sometimes more, where the pictures fit, or fewer, where over time they have come unfixed from
those flimsy grips. Forty-one giclée prints comprise the earlier series, *Longing and Not Belonging*, which presents a far more mediated engagement with the family album. Usually as groups of three, Favell assembles old family photographs, more contemporary family snapshots, frequently of girls and women, photographs of friends and travel, self-portraits, images of nature (especially deeply hued flowers and spikey succulents) and landscapes [Fig. 3.17, Fig. 3.18]. Interspersed with these are a selection of images drawn from popular culture, the importance of which I will return to.

What is striking about Favell’s family photographs is how unremarkable, how generic they are when presented in this form. As independent images, they are quite conventional, signifying family in nonspecific, mid-to-late twentieth century North American terms: a tinsel-covered Christmas tree; smiling children by the water in bathing suits and beach clothes; a laughing pregnant woman, standing with belly in profile behind the bleachers. Yet the generic becomes more complex when the artist destabilizes this banal referent by using it as a conduit for an exploration of her own identity. Here, Favell’s art departs from the hetero-normative, white North American “ideal” the family album upholds. Favell is Métis, but her personal past as a Native person is opaque: born in 1958 in Winnipeg, she grew up with little knowledge of her Native background. The family album is, according to art historian Carol Payne, “a
cultural artifact associated with whiteness and middle class status.” By employing the paradigm of the album, [Native] artists and communities are also invoking and problematizing the normative model of the white, middle class nuclear family. Typically in collections of ethnographic photography – or the colonial enterprise as a whole – whiteness is not represented. Yet its absence (for example, the lack of images of Europeans and references to European contact) paradoxically underscores white hegemony. In short whiteness – or Euro-North American references of any kind – do not have to be seen or articulated overtly; they are assumed.

The album is thus an apt symbol to explore the confluence of cultural influences and identities (at times more complicated than Payne allows in the passage quoted above). It also provides a useful avenue through which to explore individual identity against the group culture of the family.

In her brief look at American immigrant family albums, Laura Wexler considers how those albums visualize the struggles of families to be a part of the nation and further, that those struggles require triumph over the nation. She cites a Chinese American couple who, in order to gain admittance to the United States, had to leave a child behind. As their family grew, the mother superimposed a cut-up photograph of her first-born into a family portrait with the children who were born in the U.S. Wexler points out that in this case, the album constructs the family (here glueing members who have never met each other together), just as the nation, through its borders and exclusions constructs the contents of album (who appears and who does not).

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249 Payne in Payne and Thomas, 118.
Wexler’s analysis is relevant here, though, of course, as Native people, Métis are not an immigrant nation. But in some respects, as an individual struggling to belong to a nation she came to as an adult, Favell’s struggles to belong to the Métis nation are what her album works represent, rather than the implicit desire to participate in the Canadian nation (to triumph over the social, economic, and political exclusions her skin tone presents) Wexler might suggest lies in her family albums in their original form.

Just as the cultural norms evoked are those of white, middle-class mid-century North America, the images also project spaces of gender opacity and heteronormativity. The artist reconstructs her cultural and ethnic identity through a close revisiting of her family’s visual archive, but also uses the medium to contextualize her concomitant journey to her sexuality, to feeling “at home” as a lesbian. Thus, the home conveyed in her work is a point of departure. Though the “familiar” images may exist as popular ideal of home life, they may not be idealized. If, as Gaston Bachelard posits in his highly influential text, *The Poetics of Space*, we are always trying to return to and recreate the intimacy and familiarity of the childhood home, it is not in Favell’s case out of a desire to dwell therein, but rather to chart her own departure from it. With Bachelard’s topoanalysis (his name for the exploration this space), home embodies memory and thus, identity. While his treatise explores in

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beautiful prose the metaphorical possibilities of home, it is somewhat universalizing in its ideals. Favell’s photographs suggests that the revisiting or recreating of home does not necessarily imply that the familiar will be evoked. Nonetheless, her work reflects a deep, emotional responses to identity in this localized space.

Cultural theorist Sara Ahmed finds that it is not so much that the home inheres fantasies of belonging, but rather, that it has been sentimentalized as a space of belonging so that “[t]he question of home and being-at-home is a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel.” To recreate it is to understand it, and perhaps to leave it: Favell’s becoming, her nomadism depends on this journeying. As she moves away from the white, feminine and heterosexual ideal of her childhood home, she in turn is in the process of further becoming at home. Ahmed also observes that:

The sense of not being fully at home in a given place does not lead to a refusal of the very desire for home, and for a community and common heritage. The very experience of leaving home and ‘becoming stranger’ involves the creation of a new ‘community of strangers’, a common bond with those others who have ‘shared’ the experience of living overseas. It is the constitutive link between the suspension of a sense of having a home to the formation of new communities that we need to recognize. The forming of a new community provides a sense of fixity through the language of heritage – a sense of inheriting a collective past by sharing the lack of a home rather than sharing a home.\footnote{Ahmed, Strange Encounters, 84-85. Italics in the original.}

The narratives of identity produced through migration described by Ahmed have an analog in other forms of leaving home. Even when that grand narrative of an

imagined home does not correspond to our own history, experience or personal story, it remains a significant aspect of identity formation. In terms of narratives of home and identity, Favell’s work demonstrates the disjuncture she feels between her own experience of family life, and her coming out (or “coming in,” as it were) to her adult identities as a Métis person and a lesbian. Nothing in Favell’s presentation of her childhood suggests that it was an unhappy one; its significance comes from the strangeness of the visual images of home in relation to her contemporary, adult self. The foreignness of the family home signifies, then, demonstrably differently in Favell’s work than it does in the foreignness of the colonial home expressed by Belmore in *Wild*.

Suggestively, Madun Sarup wonders how an individual is held in place by the frame of culture.254 Favell explores personal and cultural identity through the medium of photography and digital manipulation, attesting to this framing. Culture is to be understood in multiple senses, with the artist’s Métis culture, family culture, and inferred popular culture all in evidence as well as the gender cultures that frame her identity as a woman and as a lesbian. The frame of the family snapshot and the frame of the television still have a literal dimension in this series, as if these framings make the message about containment all the clearer. The artist, orchestrating isolated images into a teeming narrative, imposes herself in this role in one more frame: the artist herself as a frame for culture.

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Fictional characters insinuate themselves into *Longing and Not Belonging*, alongside actual friends and family members: Emma Peel from the 1960s program *The Avengers*, Jaime Sommers from *The Bionic Woman* which aired in the 1970s [Fig. 3.19], Linda Hamilton toting an automatic weapon as Sarah Connor in *Terminator*, Sigourney Weaver as Lt. Ellen Ripley in *Alien*, both from the 1980s, and Xena, the title character from the 1990s series *Xena, Warrior Princess*, notably a cult hit with a strong lesbian fanbase for its portrayal of the title character’s relationship with her female sidekick [Fig. 3.20] These characters (film characters Sarah Connor and Ellen Ripley excepted) have their homes in popular family television series from the mid and late twentieth century. Favell calls them women warriors.

In contrast to the woman warriors, Favell’s female friends and family members are ordinary and the settings for these snapshots rote. Yet as different as the women themselves may appear – extraordinary versus ordinary – these women warriors tellingly find their home primarily in television (and not in film, or comic books, or literature), on view, especially in the case of the first two, in the family home. This links the ordinary with the extraordinary. While satellite television of the 1990s and early 21st century has been described as a form of armchair tourism, allowing its consumers to imagine that they are in a different location or belong to a different culture, “to reimagine the boundaries of [their] own community and identity,” Morley, 100.
domesticity, family values, and North American suburbia.²⁵⁶ Witness, in 1954, the NBC network head famously referring to the television as “the shining centre of the home.”²⁵⁷ Favell broaches these eras, referencing the values of home and family that television heralded, while also mimicking the “transportative potential” associated with more recent satellite television. As characters, the women warriors verify the temporal aspects of home in that home is, in addition to being locatable in space, locatable in time. The women warriors, veterans of popular culture, are indexical to moments in American culture. Yet significantly, Favell identifies with these characters on a more personal level.

The women warriors re-appear in another series, the Plain(s) Warrior Artist series. This series, like the previous one discussed, also involves the juxtaposition of personal and popular imagery, but in some images here, Favell appends her own head to Xena’s warrior woman body. In I dreamed of being a Warrior (1999), the Xena/Favell figure clutches a beaded and feathered dream catcher while standing in front of a celestial backdrop [Fig. 3.21]; in Opening New Frontiers (2003), Xena/Favell paddles a canoe with Xena’s television companion, Gabrielle [Fig. 3.22]. It is significant that in these reconstructed images, Favell uses her own image, her own head, and not, for example, that of her mother or a sister. This implies an

²⁵⁷ Morley, 88
identification with the women warriors not just for their power and strength, but also for the obvious sense of being out-of-place in the home.

**Unhomeliness at Home and in the World**

Home is an elastic concept, one that encompasses more than the domestic sphere’s historicity allows, thus enhancing its significance. The concept of home, for example, also relates to identity, as narratives of identity correspond to narratives of home. Sarup, who addressed a personal experience of diaspora in his scholarship, develops this correspondence by considering the relevance of “roots” as a term with which to bridge concepts of identity with concepts of home.\(^{258}\) Sarup’s context for home here includes homeland, underscoring just how entwined these concepts are. However, generally-speaking (and indeed, specifically, for many individuals) the familial home, whether as an idea or as an actual location, plays a primary role in identity formation.

Metaphorically – and importantly so – a common idea binds together these understandings of home. This relationship to home, the relative proximities and distances individuals experience with regard to it, is persuasive. Sarup claims that:

> In terms of their biographies, contemporary individuals pass a long string of widely divergent social worlds. At any single moment of their life, individuals inhabit simultaneously several such divergent worlds. The result is that they are ‘uprooted’ from each and not ‘at home’ in any. One may say that the stranger is universal because of having no home and no roots. The stranger’s experience is one most of us now share. Amidst the universal homelessness individuals turn to their private lives as the only location where they may hope to build a home.\(^{259}\)

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\(^{258}\) Sarup, 95.

\(^{259}\) Sarup, 102.
In this passage, Sarup refers to “individuals” but we can equally substitute the word “artists.” Artists are acutely reflexive with regard to their position in the world, particularly, as Gerald McMaster has written of Native artists, in terms of the shifting and multiple understandings of center and periphery.\textsuperscript{260} Self-reflection on the relationship to one’s many and/or volatile environments may even be a condition of the artist’s identity, as the volume of art practice tied to this theme makes evident. All contemporary peoples are agents in a world where contexts and relationships readily shift and change and many Native people, paralleling the experiences of other peoples globally, have relationships with home that are fraught, contested, and multiple, just as Sarup attests.

These provisional conclusions affirm the appropriateness of expanding on private, interior, domestic and familial notions of the home when developing this broader, meta-discourse on home, belonging, and the contemporary global world. Exploration of the private and personal (what could be thought of as the micro-local) experience of home are appealing when the public experience of the world is often one of un-homeliness, a concept I will return to. But more importantly, it is a necessary component of apprehending how individuals relate to families, communities, and the global world at large. The relationship between these two understandings of home underscores the reality that individuals turn inward to an

experience of home as a means of understanding their position in the world, or as Sarup contends, they create (and represent, in the case of artists) homes in their private lives to soothe that prevailing sense of universal strangerness and unhomeliness. While scholars have shown that public and private spheres are unfixed, shifting, and often (falsely) contrived, these spaces are also mobile ones. Domesticity, a discourse dependent on those spheres, is also necessarily mobile. While this means that principles of whitestream domesticity were imported to the colonial context to support imperializing and colonial aims, it also means that aspects of domesticity – those that reflect a place of comfort and security – can be imported through time and space and under unstable circumstances. Home, in this sense, travels.

Cultural critic Kobena Mercer’s central thesis in his anthology *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, is that art history has been slow to displace nation-based interpretations of artistic activity and that the influence of migration in twentieth

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261 Vincente L. Raphael explores the colonial application of this idea in the context of the Philippines, positioning domesticity as a discourse of colonial modernity whereby the private and public are mobile and reproducible structures that can be translated across cultural and bodily spaces. See, Vincente L. Raphael, “Colonial Domesticity: White Women and United States Rule in the Philippines,” *American Literature* 67 no. 4 (1995): 639-666. Laura Wexler’s work on feminized colonialism is also based on the portability of domesticity to the colonial context, and its function in maintaining the colonial structure. See, Wexler, *Tender Violence*; see also, John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, who acknowledge that the “dialectic of domesticity was a vital element in the process [of colonialism].” Cited in Raibmon, 18.
century art production has yet to be fully understood. While these ideas are not as neglected in the theorizing of contemporary art as they are in art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a serious exploration of some forms that migration and diasporas take, as well as the experiences of certain peoples, remain limited. Introducing this critical vocabulary to the context of contemporary Native art is not intended to valorize globalism; rather it is an effort to situate Native America within a global discourse, acknowledging how existing patterns and practices contribute to the global world as it is understood, and drawing on Native perspectives, experiences and cultural practices to help shape this understanding.

The theorizing of globalization must reflect not only a utopian concept of the global village, but also an awareness of the conditions of language that make up this discourse – it is not emancipating for everyone. This is particularly pointed when considered, as Avtar Brah does, in light of the fact that the majority of the world’s refugees are women of color. If so many of the spaces of migration are in fact conditioned by the (female) bodies which inhabit them, it is crucial to consider the impact of migration on everyday life as well as the gendering of diasporic space.

In theorizing travel, migrancy, and diaspora, homes in stasis need also be theorized; rather than being overshadowed or obliterated by movement, the “fixed”

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263 I addressed this in my discussion of Belmore’s Vigil in Chapter 1, and will discuss it further in Chapter 5.

spaces of home are also in play. This overlap is particularly important with regard to women’s subject positions, and in this instance implicates the “domestic” part of home as necessarily part of the communal one, when the underlying focus of the discussion is transnational feminism. In the context of migrancy, Ahmed writes that “[h]ome is somewhere; it is indeed else-where, but it is also where the subject is going. Home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject’s future (one never gets there, but is always getting there), rather than the past that binds the subject to a given place.”

Similarly, Angelika Bammer expresses home as an indeterminate space, as “it can mean, almost simultaneously, both the place I have left and the place I am going to, the place I have lost and the new place I have taken up, even if only temporarily.” This tension between an imaginary ideal, a lived experience, and indeed a sought after state exists where displaced peoples and global traffic are concerned. It also exists with memory, the individual, and domestic space, where a very similar vocabulary is often employed.

The disquieting experience of unease with the domestic home and a feeling or experience of being disconnected from a more broadly interpreted home are linked in significant ways. One means of revealing these links is through the concept of the unhomely, that “estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an

265 Ahmed, Strange Encounters, 78.

unhallowed place.” Homi Bhabha relies on this sense of *Unheimlich* in his theorizing of the unhomely, an unhomely that relates directly to the condition of transnationalism. He notes, however, that while the world of the unhomely may be induced by displacement, this “transnational” movement is not necessarily brought about by forcible evictions but, potentially also by effects of “enforced social accommodation,” or “historical migrations and cultural relocations.” These displacements evoke those experienced by Native peoples in Canada and the United States: the aforementioned establishment of the reservation system which relocated nations, tribes, and communities, the removal of children from family homes and communities and their placement in residential and boarding schools, the contemporary diasporic movements from reservations or rural homelands to urban centers, and movement from one part of the country to another for work, education, or family reunification.

These cited instances are geographic migrations, but those other forms of displacements, the cultural ones that Bhabha alludes to, are corollary to these. Concerted programs of assimilation, as well as those less institutionalized forms, have had a profound effect on both the experience of home life and also, that feeling of being-at-home in the world for many Native people. Laws designed to assimilate sought to do so by depriving Native peoples of their culture and languages. Residential schools are perhaps the most compelling example of how unhomeliness

arises because these schools were so pervasive, because the evidence of the negative effects of these programs on the individuals who went through them and on generations which follow is so widespread, and because the unhomeliness arises out of a “home” experience of sorts, a residential school. Here, the compelling difference between home and residence is emphatically underlined by the trauma experienced: families were split apart, many children experienced emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, and subsequent generations of have suffered the effects of these experiences.269 The result of these myriad forms of relocations – geographic, cultural, familial – all testify to a deep and painful connection with the unhomely. These relocations can also be characterized as instances of domicile, the neologism coined by Douglas Porteous giving name to the deliberate destruction of the home, causing the suffering of its inhabitants.270

One of the results of these displacements is that as the boundary between home and world blurs, so too do the private and the public mingle and become confused. This may be disorienting, as Bhabha finds, but, perhaps, not without possibility, for “the home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock

269 For more history and accounts of the experience of residential school, see, Where are the Children?: Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools (Ottawa: Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2003); Agnes Grant, Finding My Talk: How Fourteen Native Women Reclaimed their Lives After Residential School (Calgary: Fifth House, 2004); and Celia Haig-Brown, Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential Schools (Vancouver: Tillacum Library, 1993).

of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world." 271 One suggestion here is that the private and public cease to be viable as mutually exclusive spaces. If this is the case, it follows that the attendant subscriptions of gender, race and class associated with these spaces need also be rethought. Therefore, while the unhomely may more directly relate to a sensation experienced while “out in the world,” its dislocation returns the feeling subject to the home space and the relationship between these two notions of space is brought into play. The domestic, so often undermined, its value considered secondary to the politics of public space, is now contingent on the public, in so much as “[p]rivate and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed." 272

Experiences of diaspora, as Bhabha and Sarup attest, evoke unhomeliness and a feeling of not belonging in the new home. Often, the non-citizen in the nation assumes the status of foreigner, a stranger to the nation. This feeling of not belonging, of being a stranger occurs in the home, as Favell’s work explores, drawing on the slippage between the domestic home (Heim) again into the nation-as-home (Heimat). Her strangerness is not just based on uneasiness with not belonging, as a Native person in the whitestream, dominant society represented by its familiar and (popular) cultural touchstones. This strangerness also comes, inversely, from not belonging to the Métis nation from which she was excluded through the first decades of her life.

Her own sense of dislocation arises from “inheriting” her Métis identity and culture as an adult, her family’s heritage not having been openly acknowledged as she grew up. Unlike the experience of many other Native people of her generation, Favell’s adult struggles with her identity did not come from having been pulled away from her family, people, and culture, but from trying to reconcile the knowledge of it with how she was (essentially happily) raised. Yet patterns of identity are complicated, and Favell is by no means alone in this particular experience; in this regard, her experience of dislocation recalls those generalized modes of “enforced social accommodation” or “cultural relocations” cited by Bhabha.

Favell works from a very personal, experiential position, and has said she does not aim to produce work that speaks for a collective aboriginal experience. However, the restlessness, anxiety, and pain of not being recognized, of being in this sense without a home, accords a relationship between the personal and the collective. Home’s capacity to evoke these feelings is apparent:

Whether longing for a home or pointing to home’s failures to live up to what it ought to be, individuals speak to the possibilities of an ‘other’ home, their home, a home that would embrace and nurture them. If necessary (or even desirable), such possibilities of home can be spoken, and in the midst of literal or figurative movement, exclusionary visions of home can be destabilized from positions of exile, from points-in-between.

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273 In Cathy Chou, “Taipei to see a different sort of Canadian aboriginal art,” The China Post. No further publication details available.

Favell “tries on” several possibilities for homes by introducing her own image under several different cultural guises in the Plain(s) Warrior Artist series, taking on the technique and identity of the bricoleur. In a work titled I searched many worlds (1999), two figures, each with the artist’s own face, wear heavily brocaded Japanese robes; a blurred feather headdress crowns the head of one of the figures, emphasizing the “collage effect” of both the image itself and the search for identity – we try stuff on, often clumsily, and rarely seamlessly [Fig. 3.23]. Real Indian (2003) plays on the semantic relationship between Native American “Indians” and “Indians” from India [Fig. 3.24]. As realms of imagination and representation meet, this work has much the same effect as I searched many worlds in that it points to the instability of all identity labels – those assumed as well as those ascribed to others. In this work, the artist appends an elephant head with a bejeweled gold headpiece to her own party-dress clad body, cut from a photograph of herself as a child. Here Ganesha, the elephant deity that so often appears as a metonymy of Hinduism, replaces a popular trope of Native identity, the Plains headdress, one sign of Indianness swapped for another, as it were. The artist creates this creolization of two “Indians” – a métissage – using digital photography. This medium effectively sustains this practice at a material level as the capacity to cut and paste images from different sources is one of digital photography’s most exploitable attributes. The message, however, around essences of identity is that they do not fit – and Favell feels no more at home as a “real Indian,” than she did without that vocabulary at hand.
Favell’s work complicates the hegemonic premise of identity as an authentic and hidden core that to be uncovered requires the purging of the “foreign or not true to the self, […] the not-I, other.” Through her parsing of the “inauthenticities” of popular culture, Favell confronts the vagaries of authenticity and inauthenticity grafted onto her own Métis family history and pierces, as Trinh Minh-ha does, the premise that

The further one moves from the core the less likely one is thought to be capable of fulfilling one’s role as the real self, the real black, Indian, or Asian, the real woman. The search for an identity is, therefore, usually a search for that lost, pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is considered other, superfluous, fake, corrupted, or Westernized.

From a feminist standpoint, this positioning implicates the “out in the world” experience of transnationalism to the home space and ties the often feminized or feminist reflections on the home space to the transnational condition. The transnational experience of the unhomely connects home and homeland through an experience of displacement and longing. Ties to the domestic and to the private spaces of the home implicate the feminine and the feminist in this relationship. Feminine and feminist articulation of these spaces, however, need not rely exclusively on the narrow confines of domestic sphere ideology. The metaphoric allure of the home should here be quite apparent and well-exercised in this project.

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276 Trinh, “Not You/ Like You,” 415.
However, when it comes to Native women finding a home within feminism or feminist scholarship, the metaphor is less forcefully integrated. Nonetheless, the experience of the unhomely positions itself as a starting point for re-engagement with actual home spaces as well as with feminism itself.

Women’s experiences of home are rendered against the “prevailing hegemonic discourses” which affect them. Importing these crucial questions of identity, authenticity and belonging into images of home and housing is complicated because people have ambivalent relationships to the home, despite the weight home spaces carry. Two visions of home – the idea of home and the experience of home, are thus often at odds. Anthropologist Sarah Pink concludes that

Home as an emotional and imagined identity-space is thus never completed [sic] mapped onto the homes that are emergent from people’s everyday living, housework and home creativity. Instead the relationship between these two domains of home is constantly renegotiated as the material and sensory home and individual identities come into being. Although it might be possible to invest one’s identity in an architectural and material and sensory space called a home it is rarely possible to do so completely.

But rather than determining this tension to be evidence of the lived home being of a different order than the home of the imagination, rather than being frustrated by the home’s many guises and levels of signification, this frontier between the experienced and the imaginary should, emphatically, be ruled a space of creativity. The artists discussed in this chapter explore aspects of home as they relate to gender, culture,

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277 A point made in the context of Native American women’s literatures by Hernández-Avila, 171-187.
278 Straight, 3.
family, history, and identity, and their representations leave home spaces remain open to further interrogation and imagination.

Figure 3.9. Frances Benjamin Johnston, Ironing Class at the Carlisle Indian School, Carlisle, PA, 1901. Lot 12369; LC-USZ62-26794. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.
Figure 3.10. Frances Benjamin Johnston, Clothes Mending Class at the Carlisle Indian School, Carlisle, PA, 1901. Lot 12369; LC-USZ62-26792. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.
Figure 3.15. Ashley retreats to the tipi she has made in her bedroom. Still from Danis Goulet, *Divided by Zero*, DVD (Toronto, 2006).


Figure 3.21. Rosalie Favell, *I dreamed of being a Warrior* (Plain(s) Warrior Artist), 1999. Giclée print. Paper, 118.3 cm x 86.8 cm; Image, 82.7 cm x 76.2 cm. Collection of the artist. As reproduced in Barry Ace and Christiane Becker. *Rosalie Favell: I Searched Many Worlds*, exh. cat. (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2003), 77.
Figure 3.22. Rosalie Favell, *Opening New Frontiers* (Plain(s) Warrior Artist), 2003. Giclée print. Paper, 118.3 cm x 86.8cm; Image, 82.7 cm x 76.2 cm. Collection of the artist. As reproduced in Barry Ace and Christiane Becker. *Rosalie Favell: I Searched Many Worlds*, exh. cat. (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2003), 95.
Figure 3.23. Rosalie Favell, *I searched many worlds*, (Plain(s) Warrior Artist), 1999. Giclée print. Paper, 118.3 cm x 86.8cm; Image, 82.7 cm x 76.2 cm. Collection of the artist. As reproduced in Barry Ace and Christiane Becker. *Rosalie Favell: I Searched Many Worlds*, exh. cat. (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2003), 86.
Figure 3.24. Rosalie Favell, *Real Indian* (Plain(s) Warrior Artist), 2003. Giclée print. Paper, 118.3 cm x 86.8 cm; Image, 82.7 cm x 76.2 cm. Collection of the artist. As reproduced in Barry Ace and Christiane Becker. *Rosalie Favell: I Searched Many Worlds*, exh. cat. (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2003), 87.
Chapter 4

“Clara Forslund, My Eskimo Friend”: Cosmopolitanism, Home Economics, and Friendship and the Photographs of Gladys Knight Harris

The previous chapters have explored aspects of contemporary Native visual culture by drawing on critical theory that originates, overwhelmingly, from outside of Native America in its authorship, sources of inspiration, and intended field of application. This is by no means intended to diminish the Native content and contexts of the art and visual culture discussed, but rather, as intercultural, critical study, present new avenues that are exploratory, dynamic, transnational, and postcolonial in nature. While I argue for the relevance of feminist and related critical theory with regard to Native art and cultural production, the relationships between Native and non-native women, relationships underscored by the integration of critical thought from other contexts with Native visual culture, remain complex. This tension is not just a consequence of contemporary cultural production, itself arguably entwined with the issues of critical theory, nor are the issues which arise from these junctures only relevant to the contemporary moment. Cross-cultural encounters between women, even those in the recent historical past, have shaped personal, cultural, and national histories.

Leaving certain subjects and perspectives to lie fallow has been productive where it has allowed for the rise of scholarship focusing on Native art, perspectives, and ideas. For this reason, this dissertation privileges Native art making by women
over and above representations of Native women by non-native people. However, to avoid these complex histories of encounter and representation entirely is to forget that within these parameters, women – Native and not – have also defied and resisted forces of imperialism, forces that may be latent in their relative social position and in the structure of encounter itself. Acts of resistance and defiance, even minor ones, render these histories all the more complicated. In this respect, there remains much to be learned by encounters.

This chapter focuses on the encounter between Gladys Knight Harris, a white non-native woman from California, and Clara Forslund, an Iñupiat woman, in the community of Kotzebue, Alaska, in 1949, narrated through Harris’s photography.280 Harris photographed the Iñupiat community, particularly the women, including Forslund, who she befriended during her stay. Thematically, I concentrate my discussion of Harris and her photographs on cosmopolitanism, Home Economics, and friendship. My larger goal in discussing the visual culture of intercultural interactions between women outside of the contemporary moment, is to historicize my approach to the larger themes of feminism, transnationalism and home. While colonial histories have shaped relationships between Native and non-native peoples, including women,

280 The Iñupiat are the Eskimo (Inuit) population who occupy the Northwest Arctic and North Slope regions of Alaska. The people in the region of Kotzebue comprise the Qikitagrunmiut Nation (or “Peninsula people”). For more history and ethnography of Iñupiat people than I can provide here, see Ernest S. Burch, Jr., The Iñupiaq Eskimo Nations of Northwest Alaska (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1998); and Norman A. Chance, The Iñupiat and Arctic Alaska: An Ethnography of Development (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1990).
I focus here on other orders which have steered intercultural relationships between women.

While contemporary scholars approach intercultural relations and transnationalism with regard to shared feminist spaces with great interest, by way of this case study, I demonstrate that these contemporary issues are built upon and apply to previous negotiations, both spatial and cultural. Including the actions, ideas, and images of non-native women in contemporary scholarship thus may in fact be useful, especially when specific case studies are introduced. These studies can, as Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose argue, disrupt imperial claims of transparent space and mimetic representation by revealing the fluidity, rather than the fixity, of spaces of interaction. Colonial and gender discourses intersect with subject positions that are at times contradictory and shifting. Accordingly, identities (and representations) are not static. Both Native and non-native women, can represent centre and periphery, identity and alterity.281

Gladys Knight Harris was born in Mendocino County, California in 1892. She received Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees in Home Economics in the early 1920s, and began a teaching career. As a young wife and mother, she stopped teaching but returned to it in 1928 after her husband died and she had young children to raise on her own. She taught Home Economics at high schools and colleges in southern

California through the 1930s and 1940s. When Harris retired from teaching in the mid-1940s, she dedicated herself to learning photography. She took two years of courses at a trade school with cameras borrowed from her son, who was by this time a professional photographer. In 1947, Harris packed up her car and via car, boat, train and plane traveled to Alaska; she was fifty-five years old. Her goal was to photograph scenes of Alaska, and specifically, scenes of aboriginal life. Over the course of three years she visited Juneau, Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Teller, as well as smaller communities like Nome, but Harris’ deepest ties to place were made in Kotzebue, the Iñupiat community in which she passed the spring and summer of 1949.

Clara Forslund was born in 1910. Her husband, Fred Forslund, a sailor and thirteen years her senior, was not Iñupiat. At the time of Harris’s visit, they had three children, two girls and a boy, all in their late teens. Forslund’s daughter describes her as a memorable person;\textsuperscript{282} Harris testifies in her journals to Forslund’s kindness, and to her excellent cooking and sewing abilities, the latter which she photographs.

Harris kept a detailed record of her time in Kotzebue. In her journals, Harris recorded her experiences, stories heard and local information acquired. She interspersed these accounts with a dizzying compendium of budgets and financial records, lists of clothing and supplies, photography techniques, addresses of friends and contacts she met along the way, photography resources in the continental U.S., recipes, and meals enjoyed. Most importantly, she produced an extensive photographic record. The Southwest Museum of the American Indian (now part of

\textsuperscript{282} Rhoda M. Fox, e-mail message to the author, March 13, 2009.
the Autry National Center of the American West) in Los Angeles holds her still largely uncatalogued collection of approximately 8500 images: in the region of 6000 black and white and 2000 color slides, 75 color transparencies, and some film reels. Harris shot about a quarter of this material in Kotzebue.

Harris’s photographs prompt questions about the nature of her relationship to the community, particularly its women, and about her experience of friendship in the North, which to a certain extent, Harris documents in these photographs. The photographs serve as signposts through a three part thematic discussion of Harris’s stay in Kotzebue. These themes, cosmopolitanism, Home Economics, and friendship, relate generally to a mid-century cross-cultural encounter between women. Specifically – and illustratively – though, they form an apparatus with which to study the Harris photographs. I connect the images to women’s culture through a discussion of Home Economics. I also connect the images to the themes of intercultural feminism that concern this dissertation more broadly through my discussion of space and cosmopolitanism, identity and friendship.

**Space and Cosmopolitanism**

To some extent, cross-cultural relationships continue to be theorized as simple binaries, often so-construed in spite of complicated individualizing circumstances and environments. Supported in this way by a binarizing framework, identity politics still guides much of the scholarship on intersection between Native and non-native peoples. While identity remains a key aspect of postcolonialism and transnationalism,
and a critical aspect of my analysis of Native art, identity politics has come under fire and for many scholars, ceased to provide the insight that it did a decade ago.\footnote{283} Circumventing this discursive obstacle instigates a shift in how these relationships might be approached. Rather than focusing on cultural identity as that which most contributes to the context of “encountering subjects,” a focus on the spaces of those encounters offers new insight. Since space contributes to identity formation, undertaking spatial analysis does not undermine the importance of identity. Rather, by looking more closely at the spaces of these encounters, spaces that ultimately inform identity, the relationships between women can be examined without the divisive and reductive analysis of a binary between self and other, insider and outsider. By examining the diversity of spaces of encounter, specific relationships can be held up against a larger picture of feminism and cross-culturalism.

Distilled to its Greek root, \textit{kosmopolitês}, the term cosmopolitan refers to a citizen of the world, the well-traveled (male) individual. However, the climate of

imperialism that supported this travel cast cosmopolitanism into disrepute. The cosmopolitan subject as a well-traveled citizen of the world keeps in place that framework of western philosophy.\textsuperscript{284} Oriented this way, Europe is the centre, ideologically and spatially, with travel radiating outward, travel that may have resulted in the colonization or exploitation of peoples in the Americas. In large sense, contemporary cosmopolitanism has been born from that dyad of the metropole and the colony. It emerges from an improbable construct that can no longer accommodate – ideologically, culturally, or geo-physically – the circulation of traffic in an increasingly mobilized world. Proponents of World History would argue that global networks which feed cosmopolitanism have always been in effect, and that these historical global networks have simply not been sufficiently acknowledged or explored.

Renewed interest in cosmopolitanism as a productive category of analysis owes much to the study of the twenty-first century metropolis, itself a global space

\textsuperscript{284} Montesquieu, Hume, and Voltaire, among other eighteenth century philosophers, positioned themselves as cosmopolitans or citizens of the world. Towards the end of the century, Kant developed a cosmopolitan moral philosophy in which he positions all men as brothers in a single community. While related, the cultural cosmopolitanism I discuss in this chapter differs from the moral and political cosmopolitanism of the Kantian tradition. For a history of this tradition, see Martha C. Nussbaum, “Kant and Cosmopolitanism,” \textit{Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant’s Cosmopolitan Ideals}, ed. James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 25-57; and Jürgen Habermas, “Kant’s Idea of Perpetual Peace, with the Benefit of Two Hundred Years’ Hindsight,” \textit{Perpetual Peace}, 113-153.
made up of diverse subjects. Yet this too is a myopic association. While the contemporary megacity remains the premier site for exploring the cosmopolitan, overemphasizing this location’s centrality diminishes cosmopolitanism’s discursive potential, and specifically, its potential with regard to other sites. This short-sightedness occurs temporally as well as spatially. While nationalism, multiculturalism, and globalization – themes that cosmopolitanism connotes – together evoke contemporary contexts, regarding them exclusively this way curtails cosmopolitanism’s discursive possibilities. Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge and Dipesh Chakrabarty propose “archival cosmopolitanism” as a means of looking “…at the world across time and space and [to] see how people have thought and acted beyond the local.” I invert their term, maintaining its meaning, and position this research as archivally cosmopolitan. If in some sense the goal of revisiting the terms of postcolonial, feminist engagement entails avoiding the polarizing effect of the self and other formation, then the binary of metropole and colony – persistent binary terms in postcolonial spatial analysis – demands attention as well.

A shift away from a colonizer/colonized model to a cosmopolitan one inheres a will to consider all subjects as participatory, as informed by a global view of a


world that is not static. With the specific example of Harris, the traveling white woman photographer, and Forslund, the Iñupiat host, expert sewer, and friend, this means undertaking to consider both as subjects that inform a common context. To do so necessitates acknowledging and to some extent working through the colonial history that led to and facilitated their encounter. However, it also involves assessing how each subject, informed by her own constantly evolving culture and multiple contexts, lives and acts through the encounter and beyond the local.

The environment in which Harris and Forslund met is integral to the development of their relationship. Their encounter occurred not in a metropolitan centre, the primary setting for contemporary explorations of cosmopolitics, but in Kotzebue, a small and predominantly Native community in northwestern Alaska, the population of which in 1949, was approximately 900 [Fig. 4.1]. Clearly, Harris wanted to visit Kotzebue because it represents Iñupiaq space; yet unlike other photographers who have visited Native communities, her photographs do not show Harris to be overwhelmingly nostalgic about Iñupiaq customs, nor does she attempt as others have done, to represent the community as timeless. Harris does not exclude those elements from her photographs that are culturally “inorganic”. Adrienne Rich’s phrase “a place on the map is also a place in history” is often cited in the context of cross-cultural travel. However, it might be more accurate to consider Harris’ trip as

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a far more lateral one, and further, to view her photographs as evidence of both a
culture and an encounter that is far more cosmopolitan than we might assume.

Yet just as scholars have demonstrated that the globalized world is not a
recent phenomenon and specifically, that Native peoples in North America have been
active participants in those global networks, there is a need, tangentially, to
consider the possibilities of cosmopolitanism extending historically, prior to the
twenty first century metropolis. Cosmopolitanism, as we understand it today, comes
about as a result of transnational traffic in a globalized world; it is a consequence of
long-begun processes of globalization. While cosmopolitanism, because of its
strong designation as a philosophical category, is often questioned in relation to its
ethic obligations to live beyond national community, it also presents a cultural

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288 See, Janet Catherine Berlo, “Creativity and Cosmopolitanism: Women’s
Enduring Traditions,” Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in
Native Women’s Dresses, ed. Emil Her Many Horses (New York: Collins, 2007), 97-
147, especially 109-121; Berlo, “Native American Art History in the Age of
Globalization,” Lecture for Columbia University and Harvard University, 2002; Ruth
B. Phillips, “Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early
Twentieth Century Visual Culture,” Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing
the Boundaries of Modernity, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 2001), 26-49; Ruth B. Phillips, Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native
North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900 (Seattle: University of
McMaster, “Our (Inter) Related History,” On Aboriginal Representation in the
Gallery, ed. Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg (Hull, QC: Canadian Museum of

289 See, Pollock and others; for discussions and definitions of the terms of
cosmopolitanism, see also the essays in, Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds.
Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation (Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 1998). James Clifford, in particular, notes the risks of
cosmopolitanism being folded into the vocabulary of globalization (terms like
migrancy, diaspora, and border crossing) because of its unstable definition. See,
paradigm. Cosmopolitanism, by this model, values the contact with outsiders and their ways, rather than defining that contact as, de-facto, detrimental. Given the abhorrent effects of colonialism on Native peoples in North America, this is a somewhat radical proposition. However, not exploring spaces of exchange, especially historical ones, would seem to keep a colonial power relations – quite unproductively – in effect. Here, I propose to look at cosmopolitanism in two ways. By the first, I consider how Alaska, generally, and Kotzebue, specifically, was a more cosmopolitan place by 1949 than might be assumed. By the second, I view the relationship between Harris and Forslund as one informed by cosmopolitanism, as opposed to colonialism, that is as a relationship of two individuals from different cultures who connect over mutual interests, as opposed to a relationship coerced and pre-ordained by an immutable, unequal distribution of power. Ulf Hannerz describes cosmopolitanism as “an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It is an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity.” To this, in light of Harris and Forslund’s connection, I add an openness to friendship.

People have inhabited the district of Kotzebue for at least 6 000 years, possibly 10 000. While Kotzebue itself may have been a remote community given its location in the northern part of the state, it was by no means wholly isolated to

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outsiders. The community takes its name from the Russian explorer Otto von Kotzebue, purportedly the first non-native person to make contact visit the area in 1816, though there are claims to earlier incidents of contact. Instances of outsiders visiting Kotzebue accelerated between the 1830s and 1850s, though none would be as well known as Kotzebue’s twentieth century guests: Knud Rasmussen in 1924 (whose encounters with Inuit people have drawn renewed interest with the release of Zacharias Kunuk’s Palme d’Or-winning film, The Journals of Knud Rasmussen [2006]) and Edward Curtis in 1927. Curtis’s On Kotzebue Sound became the frontispiece to volume 20 of his Native American Indian series, a volume in which he devoted a chapter to Eskimo people, published in 1930 [Fig. 4.2]. These images circulated widely, thus bringing, if not a southern population to Kotzebue, Kotzebue to the south.

Alaska’s strategic importance during World War II undoubtedly fostered its development. However, even pre-War, the U.S. census identified a population that, while small, was comparatively diverse: 22% of population was foreign-born, as compared with the 9% of the rest of the U.S., with, among others, people of Norwegian, Canadian, Swedish, British, Finnish, German, Danish, and Russian origin. Half of the population was Native, and was also comprised of a diverse range of peoples: the census enumerates the presence of “Indians, Eskimos, [and]

Aleuts. The influence of all these peoples informs the cultural fabric of the collective place.

The war brought industry and construction to Alaska. Large-scale projects undertaken included the Canol pipeline, the Alaska Highway, new airfields, and army and navy bases. During these years, several hundred thousand army personnel moved in, called in defense of the northern frontier. While this influx of industry and population may have been temporary, the clock was not entirely turned back after the war. Construction continued, albeit at a slower pace. Soldiers returning from overseas were encouraged to settle in Alaska, particularly those in whom the war had cultivated a taste for adventure; as well, some who had served in the north desired to return. There was talk, too, of settling European refugees in Alaska. Amidst this flurry of anticipated development, a new board of trade was established to promote the state to outsiders and to field inquiries from potential immigrants from the south. By 1946, the population of Fairbanks jumped to 9,000, almost doubling its pre-War numbers of 5,000.


The temporary condition of this population influx shows parity with more contemporary cosmopolitan populations, themselves the product of, in part, the diasporic movement of migrant workers. These populations are quite often transient, and form what Arjun Appadurai has termed a “global switching point.” See, Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

The other effect of the wartime boom and military influx was that with so many going north to serve, the American consciousness at large was turned on to Alaska. A *Time* magazine survey found that 340,000 of its readers were planning trips to Alaska after the war.\(^{296}\) Harris’ fascination for Alaska was lifelong, dating back to her childhood, but the extensive popular media coverage of Alaska in the 1940s could only have further cultivated her interest.\(^{297}\) Her own extensive collection of clippings contains a 12-page photo essay from *Life* Magazine, “Beyond the Arctic Circle,” dating to 1947 [Fig. 4.3], as well as issues of “The Alaska Newsletter,” a publication “*for everyone interested in Alaska.*”\(^{298}\)

If a cosmopolitan project privileges a multiplicity of informing experiences and perspectives in order to cast doubt upon nationalist, and perhaps more pointedly, European hegemonies, then it follows that a cosmopolitan project would endeavor to locate those experiences in multiple spaces, including those spaces outside of the public sphere. Moreover, as I have discussed elsewhere, the binarizing of public and private spheres, among other dichotomies of the Anglo-American tradition, also needs revision. In Kotzebue, Harris’s movement in and outside of domestic spaces attests to the different ordering of Iñupiat women’s spaces and activities. Her photographs also testify to Harris’s desire to record women engaged in spaces and

\(^{296}\) Cited in Sundborg, 171-172.


\(^{298}\) Southwest Museum Library, Harris archive, Ephemera MS.245.
activities that defy the spatial, gendered logic that influenced the culture from which she came.

In studying historical photography, scholars have deftly deconstructed the colonial frameworks that allowed for large bodies of work by non-native photographers of Native peoples. They have provided extensive critical and theoretical analysis of these images, and in the case of writings by Native scholars, often deeply personal and culturally insightful perspectives. By conducting research of this nature, some Native scholars also have gained important insight into their own histories, using this archival material to recuperate aspects of the histories

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of the communities represented.\textsuperscript{301} Further, many Native artists have drawn on this history of representation, incorporating archival photographs into their own work as a way of confronting a colonial past, and re-appropriating control of their image-making from these direct points of contact.\textsuperscript{302}

Despite the value in scholarship that addresses visual culture of the past, there remains a large body of contemporary art produced by Native artists, including much photography-based work, yet to be adequately addressed by art historians and cultural theorists. Building a discourse around contemporary production by Native artists arguably works more towards cultural decolonization than do further investigations of archival material. Further, by analyzing representations produced from dominant

\textsuperscript{301} Jeff Thomas’s extensive research into the photographic collections of the National Archives of Canada and particularly, the Canadian Museum of Civilization has informed his practice as a visual artist, his curatorial work, and his scholarly writing on photographic representations of Native people generally, and Iroquois and Onondaga people specifically. Thomas complicates the legacy of historical representation by acknowledging that some forgotten parts of history can be filled in using these photographs. He also suggests that anthropologists working for the Canadian Geological Survey (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization), Marius Barbeau, Harlen Smith, Sir Francis Knowles, and Frederick Waugh may have conducted their photographic endeavors under more ethical and responsible terms than others, by recording extensive details of their subjects and sharing photographs with the individuals and communities in which they were taken. See, Payne and Thomas.

\textsuperscript{302} Jeff Thomas is best known for this, having used archival photography of Native people, including photographs by Edward Curtis, in several series of work alongside his own photographs of Native people. In her photomontage, \textit{Cew Ete Haw I Tih: The Bird That Carries Language Back to Another} (1992) Jolene Rickard uses a historical family photograph as its staring point. While this personal tie to the source photograph alters her relationship to the image, she uses a photograph to chart a specific genealogy, but also to examine a historical past, much like Thomas does. See, Rickard, “Cew Ete Haw I Tih: The Bird That Carries Language Back to Another,” \textit{Partial Recall}, 105-111.
culture perspective, the risk of further reproducing and perpetuating the dominant view, and leaving the colonial framework intact remains. But quite often, and such is the case when examining the visual culture of a past era, the comparable material by colonized subjects which would provide for a more fully articulated and multi-perspectival view accounts of history, simply is not available. Given the relative paucity of historical photographs by Native photographers, it is surprising that what little does exist, especially by women photographers, remains remarkably understudied: for example, there is some scholarship on Kiowa photographer Horace Poolaw (albeit still limited amounts), while the work of Jennie Ross Cobb, a Cherokee photographer, remains obscure. This lacuna is in itself symptomatic of colonial relations, and the unequal distribution of power, attention, voice and

303 There are very few accounts of early Native photographers, and of those who were women, little of their work remains. Carol J. Williams in the context of the Northwest Coast writes that Native peoples took up photography very soon after its introduction in the 19th century, and, as with other non-indigenous technologies quickly adapted to its function and possibilities. Native peoples thus became both photographers and collectors of photographs. See, Williams, 26-27.

resources. With this acknowledgement of the asymmetry of the historical photographic enterprise, studying representations remains important, especially given a context of transnationalism, feminism, and the dynamics of cross-cultural encounters. So stacked are these relationships in the still-uneven distribution of power between groups of women even today that dismissing a historical case because it exposes this unbalance would seem to deny that this continues to be a problem, even when the status of Native women as cultural producers has been elevated considerably and feminism has long undertaken to confront its own inward views.

The challenge in studying Harris’s photographs is to acknowledge a necessary balance, some kind of a third space in which Harris and her subjects meet, and in particular, where Harris and Forslund meet. Women’s complicity in practices of imperialism and colonization is well-documented. Accordingly, feminism is still coming to terms with the legacies of these practices. Colonial conditions have often facilitated cross-cultural encounters between women, at times mirroring, reproducing and propagating colonial and imperialist attitudes, as well as highlighting the unequal

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305 Sara Mills makes this argument with regard to spatial frameworks in the colonial context in “Gender and Colonial Space,” Gender, Place and Culture 3 no. 2 (1996): 127.

distribution of power between women. For those reasons, contemporary postcolonial scholars have often been reluctant to again revisit encounters that quite often, stem from white women’s expeditions outside of their own cultural and spatial zones.\textsuperscript{307}

By consequence, the residual evidence of these encounters, like maps, drawings, paintings, and especially photography have been overlooked or cast aside.\textsuperscript{308}

Harris was interested in the activities of the Iñupiat women, all activities – scenes that we might, variously, describe as representing daily life, as intimate, as “domestic,” and as “exotic.” She photographed beading and sewing, hunting, cleaning and preparing hunted game and skins, cooking and food preparation, childcare, recreation, and dancing. In addition to these, the collection includes views of the buildings and businesses in town, fishing boats, airplanes, other community members, including non-natives, tourists, and Iñupiat men, sled dogs, and wild animals, such as reindeer or whales. She photographed indoors and outdoors, and

\textsuperscript{307} Sara Mills surveys Victorian women’s travel literature as well as reviewing the existing scholarship on this form. She describes how some feminist scholars have argued the importance of the experiences of 19\textsuperscript{th} century women travelers, in that their accounts describe the movements of women outside the private sphere. She also asserts that some critics have valorized these women, asserting that through their marginality, they skirted the imperial apparatus. For her critique of this scholarship, see, Sara Mills, \textit{Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism} (New York: Routledge, 1991).

some of these photographs are candid while others are quite obviously posed. It is not surprising, given Harris’s vocation as a Home Economist, that she was most interested in the women of Kotzebue and in recording their practices of daily life. She paid each of her subjects for each picture taken, and they in turn signed releases. She intended to publish her photographs and prepare a lecture series that she could tour with upon her return to California.\textsuperscript{309}

While Harris’ endeavor was still an unusual one for a woman of her stage of life (retired) and marital status (widowed), it was not without precedent. Though with less frequency than their male counterparts, women tourists, anthropologists and photographers had insinuated themselves into Native, including northern, communities since the late nineteenth century. Suzanne Rognon Bernardi, a governess temporarily posted in Alaska, photographed Iñupiat whalers at the turn of the century, circulating a small publication which included her photographs, \textit{Story of a Whale Hunt} (ca.1901-1902) upon her return to the south.\textsuperscript{310} The anthropologist,

\textsuperscript{309} A short newspaper clipping from an unknown source in Harris’ papers states that: “Gladys Harris of Hollywood, Cal. is in Ketchikan after spending four and a half months photographing various phases of Eskimo life around Kotzebue Sound. Miss Harris is completing the third year of taking pictures of native life in Alaska for use in educational and lecture films. This summer she completed work on Eskimo hunting of seal, whale and polar bear, and says she obtained some very interesting scenes. While here, she will obtain pictures of Saxman village and possibly some of the native villages on the West Coast.” Southwest Museum Library, Harris archive, Ephemera MS.245

Alice Fletcher, who was especially interested in the practices of Native women, conducted fieldwork in Alaska in the 1880s. Concluding that Native women were far more emancipated than women in the south, she held up gender relations in Iñupiat society an example for suffragettes.\(^3\)

While there is no indication that Harris was specifically acquainted with the work of Bernardi or Fletcher, her own extensive collection of clippings from the 1940s through the 1960s about Alaska includes narratives by several non-native women from the south who wrote about their experiences as outsiders in the north. In 1952, *Collier’s* published a feature titled “Mrs. North Pole,” about Alice Cromwell, the wife of a weather station manager [Fig. 4.4], while “I Married Alaska!” ran in the 1951 issue of *Woman’s Home Companion*: “Here is the true story of a girl who went on a painting trip to America’s wonderland and fell in love with a wonderful guy – an Alaskan fisherman. She stayed… she married. Main Street was never like this!”\(^4\)

Harris was interested not only in the experience of (Iñupiat) women in the north, but also in women’s experiences of the north. Both of these articles gesture at the sense of adventure of the women involved, but also implies that not only did they not have to sacrifice their “femininity” for life in the north, but that they owed something of their


success to it. Harris, too, still identified with Alaska after her return. She prepared a Christmas card with a photograph of herself taken through a window, dripping with icicles, her face framed by a fur hood; the other side features a sketch of a dog team [Fig. 4.5a, Fig. 4.5b].

Laura Wexler argues that women photographers, historically, held a double innocence: just as the medium of photography implied a pretense of innocence, with the camera in the service of mirroring an empirical truth, a woman, by virtue of her gender, possessed an innocent eye. Harris’s vocation as a teacher of Home Economics adds another layer to the camera’s innocence as a mechanism appropriate to and supported by the construction of the “innocent gender.” Just as the camera provides a receptacle for empirical science to fuse with unapologetic female innocence, so too is Home Economics bolstered by science (and increasingly, technology) but delivered by and in the service of women and their households. Like photography, Home Economics was both scientific and innocent; this double mantle of photography and Home Economics informs Harris’s perspective on Kotzebue. Her values and expertise as a Home Economist lie close to the surface of her photographs, yet in Kotzebue, she situates herself as a witness and a student of the practices of women and household management among Inupiat people. While her career teaching Home Economics informs her place, she does not situate herself in Kotzebue as a teacher, or “missionary” of the gospel of her discipline.

Home Economics

Home Economics is almost exclusively associated with women’s culture: the discipline focuses on the management of the home and family and its most notable proponents were women who wrote for other women. Indeed, the goal of Home Economics was to inspire middle class women to strengthen their houses by implementing scientific knowledge and by extension, to strengthen their communities and eventually their country.\textsuperscript{314} The terms Home Economics and Home Ecologies are often used interchangeably. Both “economics” and “ecology” are rooted in the Greek \textit{oikos}, a term for house which nuances it as more than protective shelter. Rather, \textit{oikos} suggests a private space distinct from the public \textit{polis}, or emerging city-state. In this respect, “Home Economics traces its orientation back to the socio-spatial distinctions between \textit{oikos/polis} and the invisible tensions between the private/public domains.”\textsuperscript{315}

The close association between the home as a site and the attendant social science coded as a woman’s discipline depends on the persistence of the ideology of gendered separate spheres. This ideology, which took hold in the nineteenth century, was in place before the rise of the Home Economics Movement. The Home Economics Movement refers to the period spanning the 1920s and 1930s during which Home Economics saw a rapid expansion of its mission and practices, what


could effectively be termed the professionalizing and “academicizing” of household practices, a professionalizing which is key to Harris’s place within it.

While Catherine Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Science* (1841) is said to mark its advent, Home Economics did not acquire the formality of a veritable discipline, nor official recognition, until the early decades of the twentieth century. Two major acts of legislation shuttled in this new era: the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 and the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917. The Smith-Lever Act gave Home Economics a boost by providing for Home Economics extension studies through land grant colleges, effectively giving formerly isolated women access to education: in 1917, 27,000 American women attended 450 Home Economics extension schools. The Smith-Hughes Act evidenced further national support for Home Economics education, as it legislated Washington’s cooperation with state government to pay instructors of Home Economics. More students gained access to education, and in 1926, 180,000 students were enrolled in federally-funded schools of Home Economics. The Bureau of Home Economics, an arm of the Department of Agriculture, was formally established in 1923. The Department was primarily a research bureau with a mandate to improve living conditions by studying problems in the home, to examine various products for their usability as food, clothing, or other home use, and to recommend plans and methods for better living to the American public.\(^\text{316}\)

The Movement gained further momentum as departments of Home Economics were established at universities; enrollment of women in those institutions increased, as did numbers of female professors; school curricula for girls and adult women were designed and implemented; and government and private research institutes were launched. All of these factors point to the professionalizing, rather than the mere popularizing, of Home Economics. In this respect, the Home Economics Movement facilitated the growth of the “home” in the public sphere, and with it, signaled a move away from the domestic as an arena of confinement. The skills of the home could be acquired, perfected and disseminated outside of it. Despite the focus of those skills on the home environment, scholars have noted that those who advocated for Home Economics in schools and in post-secondary institutions were advocating for women’s access to education.\footnote{317}

Notwithstanding, even as a reform movement Home Economics still finds itself entangled with ideology that confined women to the domestic sphere and

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valorized her presence there. While domestic space was integral to the constitution of women’s subjectivity in the 19th century and ultimately, to the development of Second Wave feminism, more recently feminist scholars have complicated the ways in which public and private spaces comply with essential, gendered binaries. This is to say that while feminists have, historically, reconfigured the domestic sphere so that it reads as a site of women’s activity, creativity, power and autonomy, and axiomatically, my interest in the history of Home Economics supports that interpretation, that is not my objective here.

The experience of this separateness extends beyond gender, as race and class also order the domestic sphere. The characteristics of an Anglo-American, white, middle-class code the domestic sphere, and Harris fits within these parameters. Yet to assume that it is Harris who implicitly defines the spaces she photographs, and does so by these terms, is to assume a kind of universalism of gendered spatial politics in play in the north.

Harris’s imaging of Inupiat women’s spaces is a further catalyst to the dismantling of separate spheres based on their limitations. The women in Harris’

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photographs repeatedly acknowledge southern ways, practices shared with the south, and elements which originate in the dominant culture, yet they subvert or refuse the spatial limits of these gendered practices. Nowhere more is this captured than in the photograph of Mrs. Rexford seated on the beach, making bags for whale meat at her sewing machine, and baby Gerald’s tiny hand grasping the wheel [Fig. 4.6]. Harris focuses her lens on those spaces and bodies that Home Economics defines, yet she does not let Home Economics define these images. Rather, her background in Home Economics has trained her eye to certain themes and contexts, yet the Iñupiat women who pose for her fill those spaces as they define them and thus, they are represented as active agents. The palpable shift in how the settings are characterized – the shift from spaces defined, discursively, as domestic spaces by Harris, to domestic spaces defined by the Iñupiat women who live and work in them – suggests a far more collaborative space of photographic and inter-cultural encounter. The resulting photographs, while participatory in the visual trade of domestic space, challenge the fault lines of those spaces and undermine Harris’s authority in Kotzebue as determined by Home Economics.

Harris’s photographs illustrate that southern notions of gendered spheres that coincide with interior and exterior ones cannot be seamlessly applied in Iñupiaq contexts. Iñupiaq public and private spaces are not respectively defined as male and female spaces, in part because, the boundaries between private and public are not as clearly and mutually exclusively defined as they are in southern culture. Anthropologist Barbara Bodenhorn argues that there exists a strong cultural
consensus that knowledge is public and communal and must be shared, and this sharing occurs in and outside of the home; that household membership is more fluidly defined; and that while some activities are more generally taken up by men (such as hunting), and others by women (such as sewing), those assignments are not immutable, as men do sew and women do hunt. Forslund fished and trapped with her own dog teams, and Esther Vestal, a nurse whose company Harris enjoyed, was adept at hunting as well as skinning muskrats. Thus just as Harris endeavored to represent scenes of maternal domesticity, such as Forslund posing with a friend’s infant [Fig. 4.7], she also photographed Vestal with a rifle [Fig. 4.8].

The interior, domestic aspects of Iñupiaq life fascinate Harris. But so too do those activities integral to family and community survival that occur out of doors like hunting, fishing, and skin preparation. Harris photographs indoor activities, such as cooking and sewing, taking place outdoors. The photograph Harris captioned “Marjorie Beaver Beading Outdoors” illustrates the severing of activity from a gendered location [Fig. 4.9]. This photograph shows Beaver engaged in an activity Harris might have safely assumed was an indoor pursuit. By contrast, the photograph in which Mrs. Flood skins a muskrat, features Mrs. Flood seated on the floor in front of her bed, legs curled casually as she performs the task [Fig. 4.10]. The bed behind her, with dresses hung above, as well as the stove to her left orient the viewer with these indoor features. Yet surely Harris is not immune to the effects – on her or the

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non-native people she intended to share her photographs with – of this collapse of indoor and outdoor spaces coded indexically to gender and privacy. Potentially, this opening of spaces motivates her as a photographer and contextualizes some of her shots.

Harris craves access to outdoor activities like hunting, fishing, and their attendant practices, no doubt because they represent new or stimulating experiences for her – her son, Knight Harris, relays to Molly Lee in an interview that she was a good shot. Further, outdoor settings are photogenic ones. Equally, though, her diaries and photographs evidence her strong interest in gaining access to what she might define as private, family spaces. Entering the homes of community members implies an intimacy with individuals that clearly pleases Harris and she eagerly accepts invitations. She describes in her notebook a visit to the home of an elderly woman, Kitty. When Harris asks if she may photograph her, Kitty declines (although she later agrees) but invites Harris into her home to see a childhood photograph:

I bent way down & walked bent low thru her entry way. The inner shed had the usual junk, mukluks, sleds, snow shoes & a big tub of snow melting. Then I had to stoop to enter her one room. The room was about 10 x 12. At left of door was stove made out of ½ 30 gal drum. A fire almost out & tea kettle of water or [__]. She offered to make some coffee. Chopped wood was stacked [against] the stove. A regular fire trap & never in the world could she escape, should this happen. Ruth told me sometimes a boy comes and chops wood. Kitty seated me on a little padlock chest in front of her bed. On another padlocked chest next to mine Kitty climbed up & onto her high bed & under a canvas which had a rope tied to the center of it & suspended from the ceiling over the center of the bed. Evidently Kitty slept in under the canvas to help keep the cold from her. After crawling all thru her bed looking for the keys, she finally found them under the table. She had several keys on a fishing cord

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320 Lee, 174.
& couldn’t tell which one would fit the lock. The lock was a cheap little affair & I showed her which one would fit, she asked me to open the lock. Kitty brought forth a gold frame about 7” across raised [forms]. It was a family picture of 2 sisters, 2 babies, man, & wife, Kitty & her boy (about 10). She went over it many times & pointed out each person by bending very low over the pict. While she was repeating over & over I was stealing glances around the room. She had a bark basket for berry picking & a wooden spoon, carved to pick with, Shee hooks of ivory etc – Kitty wanted me to go out in the sun to see her pitifully yellowed snapshot. Of course she could see much better.

This long passage from her diary reveals several of Harris’s traits: her desire to gain the trust of another, her descriptive abilities and fascination with living spaces, her interest in indigenous objects, and her attention to efficiency and home safety. Albeit mediated by her own account, this passage also reveals how Harris has framed her presence and purpose in Kotzebue, perhaps her sense of herself. Evidently, Harris has presented herself to the community as photographer, not as Home Economist, nor teacher, nor tourist, for Kitty wants to show Harris her own photograph. But Harris’ lengthy description of Kitty’s room, and her impatience with the older woman’s photograph, suggests that observing Kitty’s surroundings interests Harris far more than viewing the older woman’s snapshot.

Harris pays close attention to the ways in which Iñupiat community members transform the hunt into food and workable skins, and she accumulates shots of community members gutting seals, whales and fish. Food preparation and aggregate concerns of nutrition, sanitation, and budget comprise core issues of Home Economics and Harris maintains these interests as her own. Her notebooks include

321 Notebook #8, Gladys Knight Harris papers, Southwest Museum/ Autry Research Library, Los Angeles, California.
references to what the Iñupiat eat and what food she herself was served while in Kotzebue. Her interest can be interpreted as both professional and personal: food matters to Harris.

Her notebooks contain detailed passages about various procedures of transforming of fish and game, and further, exactly what parts are consumed and whether and for how long these are cooked. The consumption of raw meat signals cultural difference in a most marked way, and yet it does not appear to alarm Harris. Nor does the obvious spectacle of it appear, overwhelmingly, to fascinate her over and above more mundane domestic activities: she observes and records it, but does so without comment.\(^2\) One can imagine, however, that the practice would be at odds with her training in southern ways of sanitation and food preparation. Six years prior, Harris’s notes from a course she took in Nutrition and Sanitation reveals the quite different thinking that prevails in the south on such matters. She scrawled, “Should we cook foods? Yes. Better to cook & destroy germs and bacteria. Meat – destroy Trichinia.”\(^3\) Kotzebue, it seems, is a long way from Ponoma City.

Her photographs of women gutting whale and oogruk comprise a series in which she photographs women working on the beach [Fig. 4.11, Fig. 4.12]. The women appear jovial, conversant with one another. These scenes, which include

\(^2\) Harris by no means reserved judgment on all aspects of Iñupiaq life. She makes several comments about the treatment of dogs in the community, which she felt were neglected and inadequately fed.

\(^3\) In the fall of 1941, Harris enrolled in an evening course put on by Ponoma City Schools, adult division on “Nutrition and Foods,” taught by Dr. Charles J. Robinson. See Notebook 1941-1942. Ephemera, MS.245. Gladys Knight Harris papers, Southwest Museum/Autry Research Library, Los Angeles, California.
children convey a scene of maternal and family responsibility, through the tasks presented, while also presenting the nature of the labor itself as quite specific to this northern vantage. A shot Harris captioned, “Group on the beach stripping gut,” featuring a moment of rest, is beautifully composed [Fig. 4.13]. Two women are seated on a beached log, one with a coffee cup in her raised hand. Another, to her left, reaches over to a coffee pot set down on the pebbled beach. A fourth woman glances at the three children by her side; one, the young girl, has what appears to be a white wad of chewing gum plastered to her lips, as does a small boy seated beside her. The photograph was taken with color film, and the color remains beautifully saturated, the blues, greens and grays of the women’s clothing against those shades in the seascape. The image evokes the intimacy of a picnic scene of women and children, where one can imagine the photographer as a participant who has stepped out of the frame to take the picture. Yet the gut itself – the tasked object from which they are taking a break, and that which brings them to the beach – fills the foreground, separating the photographer from the group. The flayed, pink expanse of flesh belies this as a scene of predictable, postwar domesticity; it is a gulf that separates the group from the photographer, just as it fixes the gaze. On the gut lies an ulu, set down until the work resumes. The implement used for gutting amongst other tasks, the ulu is the tool most emblematic of Inupiat women. It is integral to so much of their work yet it is also one without a southern equivalent or translation. The ulu, like the gut itself, is foreign

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and quite “different,” both to Harris and to the anticipated consumers of these images in the south.

The dualities Harris finds in Iñupiaq households, their coincident familiarity and strangeness, captivate her, and here lies a recurring theme in her photographs. Just as she remarks in her notebooks on aspects of Iñupiaq culture that are new and foreign to her, she seems also to delight in those aspects which suggest sameness. Even difference – and the highlighting of difference and sameness, north and south – does not evidence a binarizing reflex. This is especially so if these elements are accepted as negotiables in a shifting spatial context to be read as a currency of the archivally cosmopolitan, rather than what Renato Rosaldo terms imperialist nostalgia, a “reverence” and “yearning for what one has destroyed.”

Harris’s interior shot of two women, Clara with another woman, possibly Mrs. McClellan, contains some clear signals of domesticity [Fig. 4.14]. This black and white photograph features two women seated at a kitchen table. Even in profile, Clara’s smile is apparent as she pours from a teapot into Mrs. McClellan’s cup. Mrs. McClellan seems awkwardly seated too high from the table, and she appears to be giggling as she extends the cup. She looks over Clara’s head, perhaps to someone else in the room, outside the frame. While Mrs. McClellan perches above the table, Clara sits on the floor, her legs curled beside her. The table, observably, is not a table at all, but a flat surface raised a few inches off the floor, perhaps a pallet, covered with an

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oilcloth. The tea things have been laid out on top: one can of Hills Bros. coffee and one of Carnation condensed milk, a tin jug or coffee pot, a tin mug with a spoon inside (perhaps a sugar bowl), and a plate of treats. While in the photograph of the beach scene the pink flesh of a gutted mammal filled the foreground, in this shot a silvery aluminum kettle takes its place.

If the carcass flanking the women in the beach scene has the effect of separating the space of the intended non-native viewers (and the photographer) from the women themselves, the kettle in this photograph has the opposite effect. Its familiarity and the commonness of its object status signal domesticity and entreat the viewer further into the image. Its relative enormity – so close, it takes up a large space in the bottom left corner of the image – further emphasizes its importance. The kettle’s ubiquity as a household object reassures viewers of their welcome presence in this room, the probability of such a kettle being in any given viewer’s own possession functions as a ticket, an invitation. The kettle’s place in the foreground puts it in line with the front end of the table, effectively the only open spot: the inside edge of the table is flush with the wall, Clara is opposite, and Mrs. McClellan is at the other long end. A triangular correspondence can be drawn between Mrs. McClellan, Clara and the kettle, and the kettle leads us, this strange composite subject of camera, photographer, historical viewers, and contemporary scholar to the table.

The functionality and simplicity of this scene underscore the values of the Home Economics Movement, which imported something of William Morris’ ethos for the earlier Arts and Crafts Movement – that objects ought to be both beautiful and
functional – in its organization of the home. The influential reformer, Ellen H. Richards, closes her 1904 poem, “Home Economics,” with the reminder that

simplicity in material surroundings
which will most free the spirit
for the more important and permanent interests
of the home and of society.  

Harris’s interest in photography can be seen as further evidence of her training as a Home Economist, not just so much as it permits her to take a record of the skills and practices she encountered, but in terms of the beauty she recognized as present in certain scenes, over and above the beauty of the women’s beading and sewing traditions. In 1944, Enid Robertson, a teacher of Home Economics, wrote that

Home Economics is necessarily concerned with material things, but the wise teacher recognized that man does not live by bread alone. The love of beauty is innate in every soul, and to awaken and train this sense of beauty is one of the functions of home economics. In the study of this subject, the material surroundings may be utilized to develop an appreciation of beauty and of quality in the simple things of everyday life.

No small part of what makes this photograph of a kitchen scene so compelling is the women’s smiles, their ease with each other and their good humor in spite of the scene’s artifice. This is the beauty of the photograph and this leads me into the next theme, friendship.

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Friendship

Postcolonial histories have shown how tension pervades cross-cultural encounters. Even when these encounters are not coerced, or the direct result of a colonial context, cultural incongruities, unequal division of power, and (vestiges of) an imperialist climate doggedly undermine attempts at connection and communication. In the midst of such encounters, friendship is a balm, smoothing over the rough edges of these divides, defying the defining logic of colonial and postcolonial disjuncture. Where symmetry, collaboration or consensus seem impossible, friendship suggests that possibility. Friendship, thus, holds a status apart from these other means of encounter, a status which eschews too much explanation or analysis. The role of friendship in cross-cultural encounter is overlooked, especially in as much as the general overwhelms the particular. In building his case for the value of cosmopolitanism, Kwame Anthony Appiah states: “the cosmopolitan curiosity about other people does not have to begin by seeking in each encounter those traits that all humans share. In some encounters, what we start with is some small thing we two singular people share.”

The other problem with friendship – and especially women’s friendship – is that as a theme for scholarly analysis, it reads as kind of soft, out of step with the politics of postcolonial and feminist study. This softness intensifies with the urge for intimacy or informality that has led some scholars to refer to their female subjects by

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their first name, an affectation that more rarely occurs with male artists. Generally, I avoid this convention; however, this next section on friendship, a specific friendship at that, reads so much better if I refer to Harris and Forlund by the names they called each other: Gladys and Clara.

While in Kotzebue, Gladys grew close to Clara, a relationship she qualifies as friendship. Gladys refers to Clara frequently in her diaries. Gladys describes in great detail stories that Clara has shared with her, stories about her upbringing, her schooling, and practices she recalls from her youth. Gladys seems especially interested in particulars of the hunting expeditions Clara took with her family as a girl. Presumably Gladys pressed Clara to share these details with her. However, the sensitive nature of some of these anecdotes suggests a greater level of intimacy between the two women than one would expect from an uninvited visitor and an unwitting but obliging host. Clara, for example, tells Gladys in detail about the birth of her second child and the experience of a difficult delivery. She also tells Gladys about the unwanted sexual advances of a man in town, someone who Gladys has regular contact with. It is difficult to imagine Clara sharing this information if a certain comfort level had not already been reached between the two of them.

Gladys took many photographs of Clara, and the tone of these photographs differs from those she took of other women in the community. The photographer’s proximity to the subject, her relaxed demeanor, and the sheer volume of shots point to a greater intimacy between Gladys and Clara than Clara experienced with any of the other women she photographed in Kotzebue. Clara posed for Gladys in a variety of
situations, including machine-sewing parkas, hand sewing mukluks, making dolls, fishing, serving coffee, and dancing. Gladys also took a range of shots in which Clara models several parkas in different contexts or settings, such as outdoors with fishing implements [Fig. 4.15] and at the airport, and indoors at her dressing table, and holding a friend’s infant while demonstrating the utility of the mother’s parka for efficient childcare [Fig. 4.16]. Gladys took many of these photographs on a single day, as she describes in her diary:

I took pictures […] all day yesterday of my friend Clara Forslund. I enjoyed her company all summer, I have tried so many times […] to shoot her. She just never does it, although she promised. I took her flash in her house, with shee fish & Tom Cod equipment combing her hair, making moccasins, & dolls, etc. She put her pancake on and combed her hair to suit me. She was worn out when I finished. The one way I could get a smile was to swear. 329

Gladys testifies to her emerging bond with Clara with the warm and complimentary manner with which she refers to her. She writes in her notebook of a duck dinner prepared by Clara as “the best I ever tasted,” and elsewhere describes some “delicious” nut waffles Clara made for lunch. Most glowingly, Gladys pronounces Clara to be “the best sewer in Kotzebue,” and that “Clara can sew or make any thing.” 330 More than just a straight-ahead notation of her skills, these remarks intone almost boastfully, with a measure of pride particularly apparent in the second phrasing. It follows then, that the way Gladys would want to photograph

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329 Notebook #9, Gladys Knight Harris papers, Southwest Museum/Autry Research Library, Los Angeles, California.

330 Notebook #8, Gladys Knight Harris papers, Southwest Museum/Autry Research Library, Los Angeles, California.
Clara would be sewing, and perhaps too that Clara would want to be photographed with her sewing. Not surprising then, the images of Clara doing so are among the most compelling photographs in the collection.

Gladys photographed Clara engaged in the activity which she does best, perhaps better than she does any of her other occupations, but certainly, according to Gladys, better than any other member of the community, sewing a parka [Fig. 4.17]. A skilled parka maker would be revered, not just for the function of a well-made garment but for its beauty. A beautiful parka was made with the intention of attracting animals to the hunter, and thus the parka maker skill is a crucial dimension of the hunt’s success. Parka-making is thus likely an activity that is emblematic of Clara’s personal identity, but also, because of its importance and inherency to Iñupiat people, her cultural identity, and contingently, her gender identity. These photographs, which show Clara as imaged by Gladys, reveal both Clara’s difference from Gladys and the photographs’ intended audience of southerners, as well as her

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331 While Harris writes in her notebook that Forslund is the best sewer in Kotzebue, she has made the notation on a photograph of Esther Vestal and Lena Sours [P52985 N26784], “Mrs Sours best sewer in Kotzebue.”

332 Bodenhorn, 191.

sameness. The parka as an irrefutable sign of a Native and Northern people marks its maker as different; the act of its construction, sewing, universalizes and domesticates the image, and reinforces sewing as women’s work. That Clara, the photographer, carries the mantle of Home Economist further entrenches the visual signage of this message. That Clara performs this task at a hand-crank sewing machine, one marked with the ubiquitous Singer logo, also reinforces the familiar in the image. While this machine might not be the latest model, or even a modern electrical one that Home Economists favored for their efficiency, the machine itself defies any slippage that would situate Clara and her work in the ethnographic past. This photograph is not one of salvage ethnography. These are portraits of a friend, a friend at whom Gladys uttered swear words just before the shutter click to make her smile.

Somewhat humorously, Clara wears a parka in these photographs, and in doing so reveals that these photographs were planned and set up. It would be far too warm indoors and in summertime to be dressed in such a heavy garment, and indeed, the parka too cumbersome for performing the task Clara is ostensibly engaged in. Staging a photograph by manipulating dress recalls the photographic practices of many non-native photographers who showed their Native subjects in this way. Gladys’s staging is quite transparent – this is not fakery. Photographing Clara in the parka purports a transparent fiction, as Gladys endeavors to show off Clara’s work (as presumably Clara models the product of her own hand) and not to create the illusion that this is typical indoor work wear. The fiction too, may be Clara’s, as she may have wished to show off her own creations in her portrait. In this series, Gladys
photographs Clara in more than one parka: in some shots, she wears a summer parka in the Mother Hubbard style, made of dark green cotton, in others a white one, and in others still one made of sealskin. These wardrobe changes upset any pretext, however illusory, that these photographs are candid. In the sewing pictures, all other elements remain the same, suggesting a temporal continuity interrupted only by the Clara’s change of clothing.

Clara’s dress in this series shows off her formidable talents far more markedly than could be implied by her being seated at a sewing machine kitted up with a small section of fabric. The parka itself takes on a far greater significance than does the act of sewing. By wearing her parka, Clara displays personal and cultural subjectivity of a high and immediate order. As mentioned previously, given her reputed skill as a sewer, the garment carries with it personal pride, skill, and accomplishment. The parka may represent for Clara how best she would represent herself to others both in and outside of her community, thus marks her personal subjectivity. Given the parka’s local importance, it secures its maker to her community and culture and presents an easily identifiable sign of the Iñupiat people. In so doing, the parka projects Clara’s cultural subjectivity, alongside her individual relationship to it.

Clara sewing while blowing a huge bubble out of chewing gum lends a playful element to the series and can be taken as a reminder that as seriously as Gladys took her photography project, there was an informality to her presence, especially with Clara [Fig. 4.18]. The bubble would be enough to disrupt the seriousness of the image as an example of women’s labor. However, as a piercing
element in the image, the bubble gum competes with and is perhaps upstaged by the
gun rack just to Clara’s left in which six rifles hang. This confluence of elements
again indicates the imbrication of male and female spaces and technologies, it also
curbs any sentimentalizing of the image of a woman sewing.

Given her own appreciation for handiwork, it is little wonder that Gladys
would want one of Clara’s parkas. On August 14th, Gladys writes in her diary, “Saw
Clara’s beautifully designed cotton parka. She is going to make me one.” This is the
decorative stitching that Clara is engaged in as Gladys photographs her, seated at her
sewing machine [see again, Fig. 4.17]. Gladys captioned that print, “Clara making my
parka,” and this implies another layer to Gladys’s self-insertion into her imaging of
Clara. It reveals another framing of the subject by the photographer and further, the
insinuating of Gladys into the space – and skin – of another. Both women have a
claim to this parka, with Clara as its maker and Gladys as its intended recipient. The
parka provides some union, a common skin that incorporates their friendship.

Further photographs explode the subtlety of this initial intimation: Gladys
takes several self-portraits in Iñupiaq dress, wearing her parka, as well as others, and
she photographs herself with Clara, images I will return to. She also takes a self-
portrait at the home of a reindeer herder, in which she wears a heavy fur parka and
boots, with stitched detail at the hem, shoulders and at the boot cuffs [Fig. 4.19].
While Clara did not make the parka Gladys wears in this self-portrait, this photograph
serves as a prelude to those in which Gladys does wear Clara’s work. By staging her
self-portrait in this manner, Gladys overtly inserts herself, however unwittingly, into a
visual history of a colonial order, as the adoption of the dress of a colonized people by their colonizers is a common trope; witness the 1875 photograph of William Blackmore, the railroad speculator and friend of artist George Caitlin, dressed in Native regalia [Fig. 4.20].

To assume the skin of the other, to get inside of the other, predominates as an impulse of the colonizer. This occurs symbolically, of course, by taking on the dress of another; that level of signification is intensified by the nature of this particular garment, a fur, literally a skin. A garment that both defines and protects, the parka is the iconic dress of the Iñupiat. Betty Kobayashi Issenman writes that Inuit skin clothing signifies as protection, as identity, and as a cultural bearer, that “skin clothing acts as a carrier for an enduring, complex culture, based on a vast body of knowledge and an intimate mastery of every nuance of northern living. In other words, the garments embody spiritual, social, and artistic conventions, both prehistorical and historical.” The skin itself constitutes an important part of the local economy, connected to hunting, trade, and cash economies. The stack of skins in the photograph, piled high behind Harris and hanging from the rafters, highlights the economic function and importance of fur. Yet so integral to Northern society is the skin that a metonymy between the Iñupiat body and the skin of an animal surfaces when represented visually. Piled, lifeless and flaccid, the skins cease to represent the wealth, activity and history of a vibrant economy and attendant cultural practices.

Issenman, ix.
Rather, Gladys’s smiling figure overtakes the image with her extraordinary vibrancy, animating the one skin that is the parka she has put on.

Luce Irigaray uses the term “cultural cannibalism” to describe the proximate relationship between the desire for intimacy in friendship and a desire to “consume” the friend.335 The impulse to get inside the skin of the other exists as a trope of colonization, but it also exists as one of friendship: becoming the other in this manner sees a collapse of systems of colonization and friendship, as the desire to take on the skin of the friend and to become the other straddles both so readily. The skin is not Clara’s, not even of Clara’s hand, but it is a casing of her culture, and in this sense it signifies as Clara’s skin. The respective nuances of the skin of the other and the friend as other vibrate with meaning across lines of demarcation. Inevitably, the suggestion of inhabitation of the other as an impulse inherent to friendship intensifies when Gladys photographs herself in the parka Clara has made.

The desire for proximity and intimacy with the other marks friendship, and as stated previously, manifests itself here by Gladys taking on the dress of the other. This desire is rendered all the more cogent in a self-portrait taken in Clara’s home, where Gladys photographs herself not only wearing Clara’s parka, but seated at her sewing machine [Fig. 4.21]. This photograph is staged and framed identically to that

other one which Gladys captioned, *Clara making my parka*. Here, Gladys represents herself being Clara making Gladys’ parka. Gladys seeks – and achieves, visually – another level of proximity to Clara as she adopts the other woman’s posture, essentially aping the previous Clara portrait. If sewing is the activity most central to Clara’s personal and cultural identity, miming her action is another means of seeking proximity and intimacy with the here-absent subject. Gladys’s gesture represents, perhaps a tribute to Clara’s skills, but also the putting on of a metaphorical skin, the activity with which Clara might “robe” herself before others. Understood in this manner, sewing stands for Clara, and posed this way, engaged in this suggestive, identity-building activity, Gladys plays Clara.

Interestingly, the theme of inhabitation does not appear to be lost on Gladys, as testified by a photograph she identifies as “Clara Gladys Double complex” [Fig. 4.22]. The photograph of Gladys together with Clara, both wearing parkas, was double exposed in one instance, so that Gladys’s silhouette appears overtop Clara’s, their faces eerily layered together. Gladys’s *becoming* takes on another dimension: she actively takes on the outward “skin” of her friend, her friend’s parka, and then, in this representational dimension, merges her body with her other’s. The resulting image struck or amused Gladys for she kept it; among her thousands of slides, negatives, and transparencies, there are next to no other “bad” shots, suggesting that she discarded her other, inevitable, technical errors.

Gladys notes in her diary: “Clara finished my white drill parka and put the big wolf parka on it. It was raining so we could not wear our twin parkas. We went
walking.” Weather may not have permitted a walk in the “twin parkas,” but Gladys does photograph the women wearing them, posed side by each as in the “double complex” shot [Fig. 4.23], and vertically, with Clara standing beside a seated Gladys [Fig. 4.24]. Here reference to the twinned garments renders the women alike, matches them, smothes their differences. Gladys’s intonations of her friendship with Clara are manifold, but they always seem complicated by their distinct cultural identities, the very identities that have brought them together so that they could be friends. Although difference guls between them, it is this difference which in some respects attracts Gladys to Clara: she photographs Clara because she is Iñupiat, because she hunts and fishes and guts whales, because she makes her own mukluks, and wears garments so completely unlike those which Gladys could wear in Los Angeles. This affectual identification with otherness, visceral cosmopolitanism, as Mica Nava describes it, seats Gladys’s friendship with Clara. Yet while this difference awes Gladys, inspires and attracts her, she seems equally excited by their sameness. As set out above, “Clara can sew or make any thing,” Gladys writes in her notebook. She follows this with another claim: “Wonderful American cook. Makes excellent cake, pie, bread.”

Cultural difference imposes its own conditions on the friendship for Gladys. One of the subject release forms signed by Clara has the addendum, inked in by

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336 Mica Nava asserts that the more intimate, felt and feminine aspects of cosmopolitanism remain understudied. See, Mica Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference* (New York: Berg, 2007).

337 Notebook #8, Gladys Knight Harris papers, Southwest Museum/ Autry Research Library, Los Angeles, California.
Gladys underneath Clara’s signature: “My Eskimo Friend” [Fig. 4.25]. But on the other hand, it is a nod to the very specificity that prevails, that is celebrated, in cross-cultural, or even cosmopolitan encounters. Despite her excitement in those activities and interests that they share, Gladys does not exchange Clara’s distinct Iñupiaq identity for the commonalities of womanhood, homemaker or seamstress. “Eskimo friend” thus highlights just how special their bond is, not the least reason for which is the difference in their cultural, ethnic and geographic backgrounds. Here, friendship is the site of engagement, and “Eskimo” is that sign of cultural difference that amends their relationship as ultimately, a cosmopolitan one.

Read in this manner, the cosmopolitan view of friendship trumps that of the cannibalistic one, no matter how engaging and visually compelling that reading is – particularly when coupled with Gladys’s (previously cited) self-portrait with a pile of skins. The photographs act in some sense as Gladys’s documents of her friendship with Clara, further supported by the anecdotal evidence she provides in her notebooks. We do not have access to that same level of testimonial, visual or textual, by Clara. But we are not without that enigmatic residue that objects – the photographs – can provide. Gladys and Clara bonded, we gather, from their shared interests. Gladys photographed Clara engaged in these tasks, and notably, constructing and modeling her parkas. That parka that Clara made for Gladys, which Gladys proudly wore in her *Twins* self-portrait with Clara, returned to California with Gladys and, ultimately, was sent with the rest of her photographs and archival material to the Southwest Museum [Fig. 4.26].
A small collection of personal letters from Kotzebue residents to Gladys Harris indicate that though she never returned to the north, she had expressed that intention. Illness kept her in hospital for at least part of the following winter, and this in part provides an explanation. Harris mailed photographs to her sitters in Kotzebue as dozen letters sent in return acknowledge. Esther Vestal, whose hunting skills had impressed Harris, wrote on October 24, 1949:

I got the picture you sent me. Many thanks. (…) We are expecting you again next spring. I may have to buy a motor boat. Small one. Some women went up to share for fish across the Flatt(?) boat load of shea fish and white fish they caught. Lucky women. Let us make date this spring for some hunting. Shall we. Only we need small tent. I will try and buy a small boat. We miss you. By [sic]. From Esther Vestal.

In a letter dated February 5, 1950, Maime Mary Beaver, whom Harris photographed beading (identified as Marjorie), tells Harris that she continues to bead “lots” of “fancy works,” as well as to make Eskimo Dolls and nets. Demonstrating pride in her own skills as well as interest in Harris’s photography, she asks that Harris send her an enlargement of a particular photograph and suggests the dolls and a fur jacket with a beaded trim would also make “good pictures.” Finally, she writes: “you should see that spoiled pup is a leader of a dog team. Now, if I had a camera I sure would take her picture.”

Yet it is Clara Forslund’s letter of February 3, 1950, that conveys the warmth, humor and informality of a note to an absent friend. Devon Abbott Mihesuah, a scholar of indigenist feminism, writes that “without the inclusion of feelings and an understanding of motivations, histories of Native women – of all Natives – are
boring, impersonal, and [...] merely speculative…. The same might be said of the
history of an encounter, and the intonations of friendship are as revealing as they are
instructive in this account. “Dearest friend Gladys,” Clara’s letter opens:

Sure glad to hear from you and to see that you are okay. I sure did a lot of
fishing in the early fall. And the dogs are fat and frisky! I got the Christmas
box and all the pictures. I have given the ones that you marked for the girls
and boys and they liked them and are sending you their thanks. The clothing
sure came in handy for many of the small children. Husband got home ok
after traveling all over the country, but I did not see any money bags hanging
around him. (…) I will see if I can get you some pictures of snow banks and
houses. I sure hope you can find a good job and make plenty of money so you
can come up and stay with me next summer.

The letter continues with news from the community before closing with: “Well dear I
cannot tell you how much I miss you but I hope to see you again and we will have
loads and loads of fun again. Write soon again.” The following year she writes:

“Often thinking of you and wishing you was up again and we could talk over our
secrets!” Despite the intimacy of the sentiments expressed, the letters are few;
perhaps distance and the diminishing likelihood of Harris’ return quelled the

Needless to say, the documents in the Harris collection raise as many new
questions as they provide answers about gender and cross-culturalism, about
friendship, and about visual practices of looking and documenting. Yet a most
specific and localized sense, Harris’s photographs along with her contextualizing

338 Devon Abbott Mihesuah, “A Few Cautions on the Merging of Feminist
Studies with Indigenous Women’s Studies,” *Indigenous American Women:
Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,
2003), 4.
records provide insight into the idea of agency in encounter, of cosmopolitan subjects and relationships built on commonality and difference. As artists and scholars explore these very issues as integral parts of contemporary identity, what this work as archival cosmopolitanism reveals is that any productive look forward also invites a historical gaze.
http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/curtis/
Beyond the Arctic Circle
Coupé Lives Two Years in Wilds of Alaska

Live there an hour after they had been married, Harmon and Constance Helmerski sailed on their way out of Seattle and headed for Southeast, Alaska. The newlyweds went north partly because they wanted to travel and see young enough to live on a stock firm, chartering but rarely because, like generations of Americans before them, they longed for an adventure that only the wilds upon which country could provide. But after living in the town of Southeast they returned for an even more primitive and remote, and headed for the complete wilderness. Armed with wooden skis, a cheap, an unrefined skier, a bed kit, a tent and two cameras, they set off for a two-year camping trip in the frozen wilds of the Alaskan territory.

Although the Territory of Alaska is more than twice the size of Texas, only 95,000 people inhabit its 260,000 square miles. Today it is one of the least populated areas in the world. But the Helmerskis were hardly

Figure 4.3. Page from a photo-essay titled “Beyond the Arctic Circle,” Life, March 24, 1947, 72.
Mrs. North Pole

Mrs. Alice Crowell is one housewife who never turns about moths, termites or noisy neighbors. But she has a few problems all her own—like polar bears, arctic wolves and five months of constant darkness. Known as “Mrs. North Pole,” she is the wife of Jack Crowell, American manager of a Danish-U.S. weather station in Greenland, about 800 miles from the Pole. That makes her the world’s northernmost American woman, nearly 1,000 miles farther north than her rivals in Alaska, Canada and southern Greenland.

Yet, though her pretext, government-built dwelling sometimes is covered by snowdrifts, Mrs. Crowell leads a life not too different from that back home in Idaho. In fact, she has a garage and stables to the weather station, a few hundred yards away, to get groceries. She even maintains the New England tradition of calling on her neighbors Saturdays, walking two miles to a little Danish-Eskimo village where she visits Anna Rasmussen, pretty half-Eskimo wife of a Danish official, and several other women. Sundays, she’s at home for return visits. She and the others don’t speak one another’s language, but they exchange gifts, drink tea and coffee, and “when things lag, we look at my Sears, Roebuck catalogue.”

Mrs. Crowell is in the north as an experiment: if it works out, other weatherwomen will take their wives to the arctic. (They aren’t the only ones around; several thousand GIs live on a nearby military base, but Mrs. Crowell never sees them.) In July, when the Crowells will have been in their new home a year, they’ll have to decide whether to stay 12 months longer. They may do that. “We’ve been married 28 years,” Alice Crowell says, “but Jack’s always been away. That’s why I’m so content here. You see, this is our first real home together.”

Figure 4.4. Magazine article titled “Mrs. North Pole,” Collier’s, September 20, 1952.
Figure 4.5a. Christmas card made by Gladys Knight Harris, featuring a photograph of the photographer. Outer view. Gladys Knight Harris collection. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles.

Figure 4.5b. Christmas card made by Gladys Knight Harris, featuring a photograph of the photographer. Inside view. Gladys Knight Harris collection. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles.
Figure 4.6. Gladys Knight Harris. Mrs. Rexford on the beach with baby Gerald and a Singer sewing machine, Kotzebue, 1949. Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo # P52916, N26715.
Figure 4.7. Gladys Knight Harris. Clara Forslund with a friend’s baby in her hood, posed at the airport, Kotzebue, 1949. Color slide. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo # 7235.
Figure 4.8. Gladys Knight Harris. Esther Vestal on the ice with a shotgun, wearing a blue parka, Kotzebue, 1949. Color slide. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo # 7265.
Figure 4.9. Gladys Knight Harris. Marjorie Beaver beading outdoors, Kotzebue, 1949. Color slide. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo # 7167.
Figure 4.10. Gladys Knight Harris. Mrs. Flood skinning a muskrat indoors, Kotzebue, 1949. Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo # P52954 N26753.
Figure 4.11. Gladys Knight Harris. Group on beach with child, whale gutting, Kotzebue, 1949. Color slide. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #7316.
Figure 4.12. Gladys Knight Harris. Women on beach gutting oogruk, Kotzebue, 1949. Color slide. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #8913.
Figure 4.13. Gladys Knight Harris. Women drinking coffee on the beach, with children; gut in foreground, Kotzebue, 1949. Color slide. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #7285.
Figure 4.14. Gladys Knight Harris. Clara Forslund pouring tea for Mrs. McClellen, Kotzebue, 1949. Captioned by Harris, “Kotzebue. Clara Mrs. McClellen?” Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #P53151 N26948.
Figure 4.15. Gladys Knight Harris. Clara Forslund in a fur parka with bag of implements, Kotzebue, 1949. Color slide. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #7229.
Figure 4.16. Gladys Knight Harris. Mother Rhoda Rexford bends forward as Clara Forslund puts baby Virginia Rexford into the pouch of her mother’s parka, Kotzebue, 1949. Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #P53355 N27146.
Figure 4.17. Gladys Knight Harris. Clara Forslund, wearing a fur trimmed parka, sews at her Singer machine, Kotzebue, 1949. Captioned by Harris, “Kotzebue. Clara makes my parka Aug. 8, Singer.” Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #P53019, N26818.
Figure 4.18. Gladys Knight Harris. Clara Forlund blowing a chewing gum bubble, sewing decorative trim on her Singer machine, Kotzebue, 1949. Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #P53037, N26836.
Figure 4.19. Gladys Knight Harris. Self-portrait of Gladys Harris in a fur parka, in front of a pile of skins, Kotzebue, 1949. Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #P52929, N26729.
Figure 4.21. Gladys Knight Harris. Self-portrait at Clara Forslund’s Singer sewing machine, Kotzebue, 1949. Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #P53022, N26821.
Figure 4.22. Gladys Knight Harris. Double-exposed self-portrait of Gladys Harris with Clara Forslund, wearing matching parkas, Kotzebue, 1949. Captioned by Harris, “Kotzebue. Clara Gladys Double complex.” Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #P53021 N26821.
Figure 4.23. Gladys Knight Harris. Self-portrait of Gladys Harris with Clara Forslund beside her, wearing matching parkas, Kotzebue, 1949. Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #P53483, N27274.
Figure 4.24. Gladys Knight Harris. Self-portrait of Gladys Harris with Clara Forslund behind her, wearing matching parkas, Kotzebue, 1949. Captioned by Harris, “Clara, Gladys.” Black and white negative. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, Photo #P53013, N26812.
Figure 4.25. Consent and Release form prepared by Gladys Harris and signed by Clara Forslund, Kotzebue, 1949. Gladys Knight Harris collection. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles.
Figure 4.26. Parka made by Clara Forslund for Gladys Harris. Courtesy of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Gladys Knight Harris Collection, #2306.G.326.
Chapter 5

At Home in the Global World: Transnational Contexts, Diaspora Aesthetics, and Hybrid Identities

Studies of Diaspora, Hybridity, Nationalism and Globalization

The video begins with a dark, blank screen. Slowly, an image comes into focus as the video’s soundtrack becomes audible: a woman wearing a niqab made of American flags sways gently, arms outstretched, to the sound of powwow drumming and singing [Fig. 5.1]. Behind the dancer rises the iconic, red southwestern landscape that comprises Diné territory. This landscape comes in and out of focus, revealed and obscured by the unfurling and flapping of the dancer’s garment. Deeply-saturated colors change rapidly in tone and hue, making it difficult to grasp the images presented. The screen darkens and alights and the woman reappears directly in front of a red mesa; again it darkens and when she reappears this time, the backdrop has changed. A wide sandy beach and the rolling waves of the sea now take the place of the desert and its rocky outcrops, but the singing and drum rhythms remain constant, as do the performer’s movements. She turns, circling to face the landscape behind her, then back again to face forward. In the final moments of the video, the camera zooms in on the woman’s covered face, framing the veil which frames her eye, holding this view for a few seconds until the screen fades to black again and the looped video restarts [Fig. 5.2].

The scene described above is a video by Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, titled Aboriginal World View with Aboriginal Dreams (2002). The acclaimed artist and
director of the C.N. Gorman Museum at the University of California, Davis, is of Diné, Muskogee and Seminole heritage; her art practice consistently addresses themes of Native identity and representation. Thematically, by means of its aural components, the landscape it represents, and its title, Aboriginal World View with Aboriginal Dreams affirms the artist’s Native identity and cultural knowledge. Yet visually, culturally, and intellectually, this work presents more complicated themes and imagery and provides an entry point for discussing other ideas relating to Native women’s art practice: here I speak of issues of hybridity, diaspora, nationalism and globalization. It is these four themes that I address in this chapter.

Native women artists today make art that expresses their identities as Native women at home in a global world. The two case studies that follow deal with artists whose work positions them as artists living and creating in hybrid spaces or with hybrid identities, and whose work demonstrates the material and ideological viability of diasporic subject positions and spaces in Native America. With so much contemporary talk about globalization, global traffic, and global citizens, I consider the artists’ takes on these concepts. I focus on the work of two artists: Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie’s above-described Aboriginal World View with Aboriginal Dreams; and Anna Tsouhlarakis’ Let’s Dance! (2004), a video that appeared in the exhibition Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World, curated by Joe Baker and Gerald McMaster for the Heard Museum in Phoenix (2007) and the National Museum of the American Indian’s George Gustav Heye Center in Manhattan (2008). This analysis is interspersed with a discussion of related visual culture and works by other artists that
illustrate these themes, including an artist, Sama Alshaibi, who has been exhibited alongside Native North American artists. Alshaibi is of Palestinian and Iraqi heritage; her photograph, *In My Country’s Embrace* (2004) was one of three of her works featured in the 2006 exhibition, *Our People, Our Land, Our Images*, at the Gorman Museum, where Tsinhnahjinnie is the director. I argue that these artists’ works reflect an engagement with the contemporary global world from the vantage of a Native woman, as well as an ongoing engagement with a body of visual culture consistent with post-Contact Native art practice. This involves engaging what are, in this context, two seemingly contradictory discourses of identity and art making: diaspora culture and diaspora aesthetics on the one hand, and the harnessing of transnational culture and the global world on the other. The case studies I present afford an opportunity to discuss women’s art practice and the formation of contemporary identity, as well as the related theme of women’s art practice and the expression of narratives of aboriginality.

**Transnationalism and Diaspora Aesthetics: Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie**

Tsinhnahjinnie was born in 1954 into the Bear and Raccoon clans of the Seminole and Muskogee Nations, and born for the Tsinajinnie clan of Diné Nation. Her father, Andrew Tsihnahjinnie, is a well-known painter. She draws from her father’s

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339 Tsinhnahjinnie’s mother is Seminole and Muskogee and her father was Diné (Navajo).

340 Andrew Tsihnahjinnie (variations in spellings exist) was born in 1918 and died in 2000. In the 1930s, he trained under Dorothy Dunn as part of the Studio
legacy but is also influenced by her mother, Minnie, who was community-oriented and dedicated to tribal protocol. Tsinhnahjinnie largely makes photography-based art. She authored “When Is a Photograph Worth a Thousand Words?” first published in 1998, one of the most frequently cited essays on Native photography.\(^{341}\) While other Native artists have employed a similar strategy, Tsinhnahjinnie’s use of historical photography of Native people in her art has been particularly effective. She incorporates personal family photographs and old photographs she has collected, often of women, into collage and digitally-manipulated works that challenge photographic conventions of representing Native peoples and that honor those individuals represented. Tsinhnahjinnie’s series, *Portraits Against Amnesia* (2003), which includes an image of the artist’s grandmother, updates “lost” historical photographs by altering backdrops or drawing over images to “free” historical subjects from historical contexts and to give new life to the images. The effect is one of *photographic sovereignty*, a key concept that Tsinhnahjinnie develops in her 1998 program at the Santa Fe Indian School, an innovative program which was the precursor to the celebrated Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA). Notably, Tsinhnahjinnie was among the Studio painters who participated in the Works Progress Administration’s (WPA) Santa Fe science-themed mural project. Dunn called Tsinhnahjinnie one of the best Studio painters and further, a painter with “few superiors among modern painters.” See, Dorothy Dunn, *American Indian Painting of the Southwest and Plains Areas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 302. See also, Bruce Bernstein and W. Jackson Rushing, *Modern by Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995).

essay, whereby historical images of Native people are reclaimed and decolonized. Tsinhnahjinnie paints yellow dots over top the photographic image in *Portraits Against Amnesia, Grandma* (2002-2003), reclaiming the image through this intervention. The dots also portend a private nod to the spirit world, marking the unrepresentable, but the screen they form over the photographic image slows the process of looking, without reflection, at historical photographs.

In more recent work, Tsinhnahjinnie has turned to video as a medium. As part of her 2002 Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition at University of California, Irvine, Tsinhnahjinnie made *Aboriginal World View*. She collaborated with performance artist Leilani Chan, who appears in the video; the character is one Chan conceived of for an earlier solo performance, *The Enemy of My Enemy* in 2001. In addition to a shift in medium for Tsinhnahjinnie, this work introduces more complicated visual imagery and a broader context for understanding Native identity, gender and a relationship to place.

In part, *Aboriginal World View* is arresting because its title positions it as originating from a Native subject position, affirmed by the double use of the word *aboriginal*. The title suggests that the work explores a view outward and onto the world at large as it is experienced, as well as inward to a place of imagination and ideas. The title evokes the concept that both of these tracks derive from the artist’s aboriginal identity. Yet the work itself, conveyed through image, motion, and sound,

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342 Leilani Chan is the artistic director of TeAda Works, a performance and theatre collective based in southern California, which mounts productions by, for and about people of color.
defies expectation about who is aboriginal. Importantly, it challenges some viewers’ assumptions about what that aboriginal world view is and what those aboriginal dreams might consist of. Arguably, an aboriginal world view unites the many different people who so identify; Grace Ouellette, who conducted sociological research amongst aboriginal women, identifies this common philosophy as a sense of belonging with nature, often described by her subjects as a feeling of “connectedness.” Many other Native artists have produced work that crystallizes the relationship between nature, land and Native identity. These themes recur in Tsinhnahjinnie’s work, including *Aboriginal World View*. The video, shown on a loop, was initially installed at U.C. Irvine. The gallery floor was removed as part of the installation to reveal a dirt floor on which the artist shaped a mound of earth, topped with an Indian-head penny, further underscoring the importance of land to an aboriginal world view. Even without this added layer of context, land remains central to, as Tsinhnahjinnie conveys in the video, an aboriginal-centered identity and outlook. This particular work invites consideration of the stakes of such a relationship and interference by political forces therein. It also invites consideration of who else might share in that experience, that world view, or even that indigeneity.

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In *Aboriginal World View*, Tsinhnahjinnie stresses the relationship between a connectedness with the land and a historically verifiable claim to place by referencing Native America’s experience of colonial occupation. She evokes the contemporary occupation of Iraq by U.S. forces in order to draw attention to the experience of Native peoples in North America as having lived for generations as peoples whose land was colonized. She articulates this analogy by juxtaposing the image of the Eastern dancer veiled and “bound” by the American flag with visual and aural signs of Native America. This hybrid provides an accessible reference point for a wide-ranging audience to renew their understanding of the long-term occupation of Native land in North America. In drawing the analogy between two different “occupations,” Tsinhnahjinnie suggests a solidarity between herself as a Native person in the United States and the experience of those living under occupation in Iraq and perhaps, because she does not use very specific references in *Aboriginal World View*, with those living under similar conditions in other parts of the Middle East and the world at large. In a sense, this work represents a shared experience and understanding of *domicide*, wherein the home (understood in its specific sense as shelter, or more broadly as homeland) is destroyed resulting in the suffering of its inhabitants.\(^{344}\) That this is an experience undergone by many different peoples the world over suggests that there is a need to further theorize the loss of homes and resultant diasporas cross-culturally. Moreover, it suggests the need for a greater exploration of the ways in

which the idea of home is maintained following a displacement, even when the actual physical home no longer exists.

Visually and aurally, Tsinhnahjinnie’s work lends itself to the aesthetic, sensory dismantling of its parts. This results from Tsinhnahjinnie having drawn on imagery and experiences outside of North America to create transnational reference points for an understanding of Native America. Powwow music and the Diné landscape are readily identified. The woman veiled with a niqab evokes – rather obliquely and without specificity – Muslim culture or the Middle East. These two elements do not correspond readily, despite the rhythmic coherence of the work. Elements of sound (Native North America) and elements of sight (Muslim Middle East) collate with friction, presenting an intellectual challenge for the viewer. While Tsinhnahjinnie’s underlying message about the colonization and dispossession of Native land may be strongly felt, the imagery with which it is made is not so straightforward, in part due to Tsinhnahjinnie’s use of the veil.

Veiling is an ambiguous sign. Scholars point to the single English word “veil” as a limited term to describe many different garments with different regional applications and Arabic names. As a symbol, the veil is in some respects like the land: while it is central to identity, outsiders often misunderstand its relationship to identity and it becomes a site for the projection of the will and desires of others. To this end, the veil has long stood as a film on to which the West projects its orientalist fantasies about Middle Eastern women. Recently, it has also become, for many, a cipher for women’s oppression, so much so that conceiving of the veil and
representing it becomes a complicated endeavor. Still another dimension to the veil’s meaning in the West intensified after September, 2001: it became a locus of the West’s xenophobia towards the Muslim world. Orientalist desire “is now replaced by the xenophobic, more specifically Islamophobic, gaze through which the veil, or headscarf, is seen as a highly visible sign of a despised difference.”

Given the veil’s complexity, Aboriginal World View creates an ethical predicament by using what is essentially a “Muslim sign” absent a Muslim voice. Tsinhnahjinnie’s work thus invites an interrogation of the use of a symbol with multiple acquired meanings to stand in for another experience. This is especially so given that the Muslim woman, as signifier attached to the veil, has also been silenced, spoken for, derided, fetishized and commoditized. Tsinhnahjinnie thus faces the burden of how to harness the symbolic power of the veil without reinforcing those orientalist fantasies or commodifying the experience of women who do veil.

Artist Zenib Sedira uses the image of the veil in her photography, and has, in her written work, addressed the problem of deploying such a value-laden image. To use the symbol as a critique, Sedira finds, following bell hooks, that it must be adequately transformed so that it takes on new meanings, and does not re-inscribe stereotypes. To employ the logic which informs Tsinhnahjinnie’s concept of photographic sovereignty, Sedira creates images that transform the veil, and in so

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doing she *reclaims* and *decolonizes* its image. This is an issue familiar to Native artists, frequently asked to justify their use of stereotypes, even when mobilized through parody, so that those stereotypes are not re-enforced. This issue arose during a recent panel discussion with four Native artists commissioned to make video works that respond to several East and West German “Westerns” adapted in the 1960s and 1970s from the popular novels of “Indian enthusiast” Karl Friedrich May. Three artists, Bear Witness, Keesic Douglas, and Darryl Nepinak engaged May’s stereotypes directly in their videos. The fourth, Bonnie Devine, intentionally made a video completely devoid of the imagery of Westerns, provoking a heated discussion amongst the panelists and audience members on the effectiveness of deploying, subverting or avoiding stereotypes. Curator Steven Loft anticipated this controversy, writing in his catalogue essay that “[i]t can be a messy dialogue, full of charged dynamics, misunderstandings and even some hurt feelings, but it can also point to the recognition of Aboriginal societies as living, dynamic cultures, freeing them from the static view of the appropriators, the revisionists and the re-enactors.”

Tsinhnahjinnie uses feminine imagery in the work, thus drawing a larger correspondence between women, representation, solidarity, and identity. Identifying such correspondences by no means undermines the heterogeneity of women’s experience of gender. Like Muslim women in the Arab world, Native women in North American have also been represented through a visual shorthand: the

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347 Steven Loft, “Culture Shock,” *Culture Shock*, exh. cat. (Toronto: VTape, 2008), 12. The panel discussion took place on October 18, 2008 as part of the ImagineNATIVE Annual Film and Media Arts Festival in Toronto.
overabundant feathers and braids used to signify a generalized indigenous femininity can contract and distort specific cultural symbols and complex identities. Native women specifically, as Tsinhnahjinnie herself has identified in her artistic and her scholarly work, have been misrepresented through photography since its advent in practical form in 1839.

Less well-known perhaps are the Middle Eastern analogues to this body of photography. Photography gained popularity in the Middle East at the same time it did in North America. Period studio photography that employed inadequate or incorrect identifying captions, categorizing subjects as types by race, religion, tribe or class can be found in the Middle East just as it can in North America. The rise in photography coincided with the rise of global-scale European imperialism. Not surprisingly, similar colonial-era images exist in different parts of the world. Photographs of women in the Middle East taken by European photographers did not differ dramatically from those taken by Westerners elsewhere; photographers drew on “archetypal anonymity” in composing images, just as they played out existing “local” clichés.  

Despite their different cultures and traditions, a shared experience of European imperialism, as well as a parity in the experience of visual representation, exists between Native American and Middle Eastern Muslim women.

In considering Native art as I do below, within the framework of diaspora, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between globalization and transnationalism.

Michael Peter Smith positions globalization discourse as describing social processes that are de-centered from national territories, what exists in “the space of flows.”

Processes of transnationalism, by contrast, feature social relations which remain “anchored in,” even as they transcend one or more nation-states. In *Aboriginal World View*, Tsinhnahjinnie broaches a topic of global interest, uses visuals which evoke space and identity outside of Native America, but still maintains the specificity of her subject position as a Diné woman. This suggests a transnational, rather than globalized approach. While the tensions and imagery in *Aboriginal World View* may present as akin to that which occurs in the space of flows, the work evokes a mood of *dépaysement*, a feeling of strangeness or disorientation. Sieglinde Lemke finds that “diaspora art depicts the act or the consequences of either forced or voluntary dispersal. Sometimes diaspora art expresses a longing for a home, and frequently it tries to construct a collective identity out of its mostly heterogenous reality.” It is Tsinhnahjinnie’s suggestion of the strong ties that Native people hold to place and to home that entrench the feeling of strangeness that the work conveys. It is not that Native people do not disperse, for they have and do – voluntarily or otherwise – but Tsinhnahjinnie’s work suggests that an aboriginal view of the world, onto the world, will be shaped by those ties to home.

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349 I made this point in Chapter Four, but it is important enough to this discussion to repeat it here. See, Michael Peter Smith, *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 3.

Cultural critic Kobena Mercer has very usefully plotted out a concept of diaspora aesthetics, specifically to describe contemporary cultural production in the African diaspora.\(^{351}\) Mercer’s model may also be appropriately applied to other diasporas. Mercer takes a broad, visual culture approach to creative and cultural practice. He foregrounds and de-hierarchizes complex patterns in cultural and national formation and identity, and repeatedly emphasizes that such patterns and experiences are the contemporary norm rather than the exception. Samuel Floyd, also writing about African diaspora aesthetics, insists that since diaspora is a term used to re-unify dispersed peoples, a concept of diaspora aesthetics should include a range of expression including the visual, the verbal and the aural, and take into account cultural and creative practices with multiple influences.\(^{352}\) Multiple influences are consistent with a term whose Greek root, *speirein*, means to scatter: multiple journeys will ensue, each replete with its own new encounters and influences, even if a central locus, a home, remains.

These features of diaspora art and aesthetics that Lemke, Mercer and Floyd describe resonate with my discussion here, and with Native art more broadly.

*Aboriginal World View* is comprised of various layers which suggest that diaspora

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aesthetics are in play and inform the work of Native artists. Tsinhnahjinnie makes use of the materials and means of visual culture (rather than “high European” art or so-called traditional means for Dine art production such as weaving) to create her work. Video is her medium and she makes her work available digitally on her website;\(^{353}\) she takes up the image of a woman outside, territorially, of Native America; she represents ambiguous forms of movement and dance rather than “pure” cultural forms; and she chooses a popular mass-produced textile as a focal image.

I suggest that Native artists have, as a result of being re-territorialized, living amongst diverse populations, and having in many cases hybrid ethnic or cultural identities, brought to their work a diaspora aesthetic that parallels the aesthetic Mercer describes. There exists, however, resistance to seeing Native peoples’ claims to diasporic experience as in kind with, for example, historical African or Jewish populations. Some find the relationship between indigeneity and diaspora to be, as James Clifford describes, “in constitutive tension.” This is in large part because indigeneity is an identity positioned so closely to the land and to claims of territorial sovereignty. The relationship of “firstness” to the land and of an uninterrupted bond with the land (if not a continuity of habitation) preclude the experience of diaspora, which is defined by its dislocation from the homeland.\(^{354}\) Many Native people will choose not to identify as diasporic populations, because they remain inside the


\(^{354}\) James Clifford, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 252.
political borders of North America; however, this has recently begun to change.\textsuperscript{355} Furthermore, as Clifford determines in his essay on the subject, even if indigenous peoples are not necessarily in diaspora, many diasporic dimensions to their experiences can be identified. More broadly, “diasporic forms of longing, memory, and (dis)identification are shared by a broad spectrum of minority and migrant populations,” and this includes Native people.\textsuperscript{356}

These diasporic tropes are inherent, I argue, in Tsinhnahjinnie’s *Aboriginal World View*. The work reinforces what I see as an indigenous claim to diasporic experience, evoking the territorial occupations experienced by Native people in the United States. Viewers are reminded of the dislocation, dispossession and displacement experienced by Native peoples as the map of North America was drawn and re-drawn over the past five centuries. These themes find their voice in the part of the work where the backdrop changes. Initially, the setting is the landscape of the Southwest [Fig. 5.3]. When the screen darkens then re-alights, the backdrop has changed. While the figure of the woman and the music remain constant, the performance breaches two separate locations, first the mesas and now a beach [Fig. 5.4]. This evokes the physical and spatial dislocation of the diaspora experience, as

\textsuperscript{355} For example, Stanford University’s Feminist Studies program hosted a major speaker and performance series in 2008, titled, *Indigenous Identity in Diaspora*, which included, among others, presentations by storyteller Luisha Teish, musician and poet Joy Harjo, painter and performer Celia Herrera Rodriguez, and writer Linda Hogan. In 2006, the exhibition, *Holy Land: Diaspora and the Desert*, at the Heard Museum in Phoenix featured works by artists from the United States, Canada, Iran, Israel, Mexico, Nigeria, and Pakistan engaging the themes of desert and dispersion.

\textsuperscript{356} Clifford, 247.
well as the connection between a Native North American experience and one in the Middle East.

Also evoked is the internal experience of “longing, memory and (dis)identification,” cited by Clifford. The moment of blackness which marks the shift in location is only, however, a temporary darkening, a blink. A blink is itself a momentary exit from the outside world, a veiled moment in which we can be protected from that which is seen, when an internal space takes hold. In this sheltered moment, the space of memory may transport us from the visually apprehended present to a past place. Time is collapsed, but the experience (or possibility) of displacement remains. The work invites the conclusion that Tsinhnahjinnie rejects a singular idea or experience of an aboriginal world view. A fixed identity for diasporic communities (and the visual culture of those communities) is not already in place, but is rather “constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively.”

Aboriginal World View is in many respects a simple, straight-forward work, the power of which resides in its simplicity. The artist represents two geographies and two cultural traditions (at least) together, ostensibly as intertwined; diasporic movement may result in new forms of hybridity. Tsinhnahjinnie attests to the importance of considering the more positive aspects of hybridity, racially and as a

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tool in art practice.\textsuperscript{358} Here, the use of intermingling as artistic tool is mobilized not in the style of an \textit{organic hybridity} but rather an \textit{intentional hybridity}, to use the contrasting models of Baktinian hybridity so effectively parsed by Robert Young. Intentional hybridity suggests a dialogical form, one that welcomes the inevitable contestation and friction that the hybrid produces.\textsuperscript{359} Tsinhnahjinnie has not presented an entirely new form, the seamless fusion described as an organic hybrid. Rather, she presents discrete elements in a new form, a new context.

The emergent hybrid is multi-dimensional: first, the scene presented in the art work; second, the issues that the artist expresses or which motivate her; and third, the collaboration invested in the production of the art work. The hybrids Tsinhnahjinnie creates illustrate the diaspora aesthetics active in much contemporary Native art today, resulting from the hybridities comprising contemporary Native identities. Further, the parallels between traditions that remain distinct in the work invite a perspective which evokes Bahktin’s endorsement of dialogics to understand one’s own culture and the cultures of others:

> In order to understand it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding… It is only in the eyes of \textit{another} culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly… [but] without \textit{one’s own} questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign … Such a dialogical


encounter of two cultures does not result in mixing or merging. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched.\footnote{Mikhail Bahktin, “Response to a Question from the Novy Mir Editorial Staff,” \textit{Speech Genres \& Other Late Essays} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 7, cited in Mercer, “Introduction,” \textit{Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers}, 18.}

Tsinhnahjinnie’s juxtaposition of motifs extends beyond the visual; it is also kinetic and auditory. The sounds of powwow drumming and singing and the rolling of waves create the beats and rhythms of the dance. As explained, the aural elements of the video most directly reference Native America, while the visual represents a hybrid of East (through Islamic dress, which reads most essentially as not American) and West (Stars and Stripes, which read, by contrast, as quintessentially American). These elements and motifs connect through movement, yet remain discrete, if interrelated. Their apparent cultural dissonance accounts for this, but it may also be attributed to the hierarchy of the senses which keep the aural and the visual as inherently oppositional. This tension contributes in a positive way to the anti-nostalgia the work conveys. The artist’s subject position (her aboriginal world view) is affirmed. If it is Tsinhnahjinnie’s intent to highlight a Native American experience of living through territorial occupation, she avoids pathos when she does so by not referencing that history directly through visual imagery, but rather by evoking the experiences of others outside of Native America. The actual experience of territorial dispossession and imperializing occupation are not metaphorical unifiers, rather, they reference actual experience. The tension struck in this work between seemingly disparate images and geographies, ultimately makes claims about the active
participation of Native people in the movements, travels, exchanges, and hybridities in the global world.

The relationship of the title to the work itself presents perhaps the most powerful testament to the idea that this work represents diaspora aesthetics. The title affirms the status of this work as emergent from an aboriginal subject position, yet the video format is not one identified, historically, with Native art. Moreover, Tsinhnahjinnie makes use of culturally ambiguous, paradoxical, and contradictory motifs. This evokes the work of the much-lauded, London-born artist of Nigerian parents, Yinka Shonibare, the artist Mercer deploys to illustrate his theory of diaspora aesthetics.

Shonibare moved to Lagos at the age of three, and returned to London to study art in his late teens; the artist’s movements between Nigeria and England feed his bicultural and cosmopolitan identity. Shonibare’s outstanding Dutch wax-print fabric works – sculptures and installations made of the colorful “African” fabric known as ankara, fabric with complicated colonial origins that span west Africa, Indonesia, the Netherlands and England – emit layers of diasporic meaning, exchange in colonial history, cultural translation, and global movement. Aptly, Mercer writes that “Shonibare’s art reveals that the cultural ‘meaning’ of fabric is not intrinsic to its ethnic origins. Rather it constantly acquires layer upon layer of cultural meanings as it travels through diverse sites and locations in which users and consumers encode their
own tastes and preferences into the intentions and interpretations of their semiotic choices.”

With this in mind, the various signifiers in *Aboriginal World View* present themselves as belonging to a global culture that crosses national and temporal borders, rubbing up against one another and in so doing, distorting meanings and creating new ones. This is a world in which Native artists participate, in which Native artists apprehend and create meanings. Tsinhnahjinnie presents a work that reflects the entanglement of cultures. It challenges some people’s view of what qualifies as Native art; this, Jean Fisher reminds us, has as much to do with the use of non-traditional media and materials as it does with the artist presenting herself as “the author rather than the bearer of (an other’s) meaning.” This is especially evident in Tsinhnahjinnie’s practice, as she so emphatically claims a speaking voice through her work and the often “found” or derivative, popular culture elements her work comprises.

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Flags and Textile Actions: Native America in a Global Visual Economy

Tsinhnahjinnie created and exhibited Aboriginal World View in the post-9/11 cultural and political sphere. This is a context of heightened attention towards the Middle East, through occupation and combat there and through perceived and real terrorist threats in the United States. It is also a period of heightened American patriotism, and deep reflection on that patriotism.\(^{363}\) Tsinhnahjinnie shapes an aboriginal perspective with reference points that extend beyond her local surroundings; this interpolation of Native America into a global world which reflects a cultural and political climate has its analogues in the wider visual culture, and indicates how diaspora aesthetics are mobilized for sometimes complex and contradictory ends.

The niqab rendered in Aboriginal World View is Americanized by the “Stars and Stripes,” signifying nation; this use of the symbolic imaginary highlights the idea that the artist deals in symbolic imagery. Even with such emphatic imagery, there can be nuance and layers of meaning. The significance of Islamic dress is too broad a subject to address adequately here, but it is widely acknowledged that women dress, variously, for religious, social, cultural, economic, and political reasons. For example, some women wear Islamic dress not only as an affirmation of Islamic identity but as a

\(^{363}\) Native Americans have a very high rate of participation in the U.S. military relative to their population; this is especially so amongst Navajo people who have a long tradition of military service. While the contributions of Navajo “code talkers” in the U.S. Marines during WWII are widely recognized, the relationship to the military is more extensive and accordingly, patriotism runs deep.
rejection of Western materialism, consumerism, and values. Scholars have also pointed to how women use the veil to carve out their own gendered, cultural, and personal space. Thus, even as the artist represents the body in this work as encroached upon by a symbol of American power and influence, the veil protects, separates, and delineates the subjective space of the wearer.

While Tsihnahjinnie’s use of the flag interpolates Native people into a global context, tactically, the flag has also been used to various ends to position Native people within a domestic one. Just barely into the first decade of the twenty-first century, the United States Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] initiated an advertising campaign aiming to attract visible minorities to seek employment within the organization. Native Americans were specifically addressed through several print advertisements, a demographic made clear both in the visual content of the ads and in the context of their publication. Three separate advertisements appeared between


2004 and 2006 in *Native Peoples* magazine, an arts and culture periodical affiliated with the Heard Museum (a premier museum for Native art in Phoenix) aimed primarily at a Native American readership in the U.S. and Canada. One advertisement, which ran in several issues in 2005 and 2006, features an attractive, tan-skinned woman with long dark hair [Fig. 5.5]. The woman, though she gazes directly into the camera, is partially obscured by a curtain of sorts. A vibrant, heavy weaving, still in progress, hangs between the model and the camera. The model pulls the warp threads firmly aside with her index finger so that she may peek through to meet the viewer’s gaze. Her head and shoulders remain covered, though still discernable through the remaining vertical threads, while below, the already-complete portion of the weaving covers her torso. The worked portion of the weaving clearly shows a partial American flag. Four alternating red and white bars rise up with a fifth bar worked in blue on the far right just begun. Beneath the photograph, the bold, all-caps caption in large-point type reads:

THE STRENGTH OF AMERICA’S FABRIC LIES IN THE WEAVING OF MANY COLOURS.

The suggestions the image makes and the layering of its motifs render it particularly compelling. This advertisement appears in a publication directed primarily at Native peoples, but nowhere in the ad itself is that Native American demographic textually identified. The texture and color of the woman’s hair as well

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367 The advertisement I describe was in the March/April 2006 issue of *Native Peoples*. I examined issues from 2001-2008 and found it appeared five times between July/August 2005, and November/December 2006.
as her skin tone work to compose her as a Native woman, yet these elements are by no means certain ethnic identifiers – the model (and the woman she represents) could also be, for example, of southern European, Middle Eastern, North African, or South American ancestry. If neither the text nor the model actually confirm the ad’s presumed audience, it is the textile, then, that secures its desired context.

Although many Native peoples throughout the United States weave textiles, textile production is most closely identified with the Southwest. Navajo women, in particular, have a strong tradition of producing loom-woven blankets and rugs. The weaving technique depicted in the ad, thus, is Navajo while the design represented on the textile itself, the flag, is more generally and inclusively American. Accordingly, the image visually underscores and corresponds to the invitation spelled out beneath it: “Your talent, experience and heritage can help meet America’s challenges.” This phrasing suggests that an ideal candidate may contribute culturally-specific experience and know-how, conveyed and represented through the act of weaving, to a broader-based project that serves the nation as a whole, conveyed and represented through the image of the flag. The flag here is incomplete, in progress, just as the candidate’s role is active and participatory. Just as a weaver will complete this textile, the CIA candidate will contribute to the building and protection of the nation.

Significantly, this image features a woman. The act of weaving in Navajo culture is primarily a feminine practice; yet here, a female tradition conveys what is surely intended to be a gender-neutral engagement. Just as the copy does not explicitly make a call to Native Americans, the text does not endeavor to recruit
women as potential candidates. Women are frequently cast as a symbol of the nation, their image often standing in for the nation. This image presents a double metonymy of feminized nationhood through the woman and the flag. The latter is represented as a weaving-in-progress, where the nation symbolically is being woven by a woman’s hand.

Could there be another, more oblique message coded in this imagery? In a post-9/11 climate, when the United States is engaged in a war in Iraq, in violent and difficult reconstructive efforts in Afghanistan, and in tense diplomatic relations with Iran, the image’s lack of specificity opens the possibility for other interpretations, those which draw on the peoples and cultures of the Middle East. The woman peeking out from behind the warp threads does not so much use her culture’s tradition and heritage as a lens to gaze onto her country and the world, but rather, looks beyond it, actually displacing that which obscures her line of vision. The Native American woman here morphs into a more generically-conceived Muslim woman who casts aside the “veil” that confines her. So well-worn is this cliché in the more populist versions of global feminist discourse of the very late twentieth century that the veil itself need not be literally represented – it is rendered and recalled through the gesture of the unveiling. One culturally-specific textile replaces another: the carpet, of which there is a strong weaving tradition in Iran and Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Middle East, for the veil. Such a reading is ambiguous and confusing to be sure. But

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it does suggest the important engagement of Native American women in global culture, some of the ensuing confusion around identity and representation, and the particular conditions that gender plays within this mobilizing.

In a study of a similar recruitment advertisement, this one for the U.S. Secret Service, Joanne Barker researched an advertisement soliciting a "‘new kind of WARRIOR’ Woman." Of the accompanying image, featuring a woman in a conservative power suit with a dangling communications earpiece tucked in her ear and holding a feather-adorned spear, Barker writes that:

The Secret Service wants to foreground its acknowledgement of ‘diversity’ by extending it from Indian to woman – from race to gender – in one sweeping Affirmative Action gesture. It wants us to believe that the Secret Service counters the often hypermasculinized and racist notions of U.S. patriotism, particularly those associated with growing incidence of Euro-American militia activities in the United States, with the very radical idea that the Secret Service already recognizes and reveres the qualities of heroic loyalty that Indian women possess.  

The CIA advertisement reads in much the same way that Barker describes in that it also draws on cultural generalizations of Native women to cast a relationship between these characteristics and ideals of nation and service. In her study, Barker was unable to turn up any real relationship between the particular ad she examined and


370 Other similar recruitment campaigns can be found in Native Peoples, including those for United States Customs and Border Protection, United States Border Patrol, the Air National Guard, Internal Revenue Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, as well as private sector outfits like the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), American Express, and Kodak.
any actual opportunities at the Secret Service for Native American women. This led her to conclude the advertisement was far more about that organization seeking to improve its reputation with regard to Equal Opportunity and promoting a positive image among Native American women and other visible minorities than it was about informing a readership of Native people about available jobs. In addition to the “Weaving of Many Colors” ad, two other CIA advertisements appearing in *Native Peoples* in the past decade testify to this as well. One, published in alternating issues from the “Weaving” ad, features a man with a tribal-style necklace holding a globe and the phrase, “A Career That Takes You Full Circle.” The other ad presents a ring of racially diverse men and women. “You Are America. Choose a Career That Matches,” reads the accompanying copy.

These images expose the complicated issues that arise when juxtaposing nationalistic symbols, such as the flag, with images of Native cultures or people. The American flag, as suggested earlier, appears commonly as a motif in Native art. As the most recognizable visual symbol of a nation whose very formation inheres a denial of Native sovereignty, the flag, in certain contexts seems incongruous. Tsinhnahjinnie’s *Aboriginal World View with Aboriginal Dreams* draws on this tension. Yet even with a history as “involuntary Americans,” Native peoples have

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372 This advertisement appeared only once in *Native Peoples*, in the July/August 2004 issue.
long incorporated the flag in the production of clothing, and in other functional and decorative objects.

The flag motif appears, for example, in Lakota beadwork dating back to the late nineteenth century. Lakota artists have used the flag on articles for sale to non-natives but also on those for their own use, indicating a longstanding affinity for or identification with the motif. Indeed, sometimes its usage signifies the allegiance of the maker or wearer with the (American) nation. Today, Emil Her Many Horses points out, use of the flag motif often indicates that the wearer has a loved one in military service. In other instances, usage of the red, white and blue hues, and the star symbol and horizontal bands, corresponds to Lakota cosmology and evidences how Lakota artists incorporated and transformed the American flag into their own spiritual, cultural and aesthetic traditions. The use of the American flag in Native art offers a reminder that even as it represents the nation, the diversity in meanings discussed above support a critique of that nation as a site of homogeneity, equilibrium and integration. That this visual culture comprises an example of diaspora aesthetics is again to rethink the kinds of journeys that create diasporas – certainly dislocations from home territories, but also by adapting to new influences and materials newly at


375 Herbst and Kopp, 15-26, especially 20-22.
hand. Creative and cultural work in the diaspora also reflects the particular identities of those populations, and these are often hybrid or mediated identities.

Navajo weavers have produced American flag designs since the early 1870s, weaving rugs and blankets in the image of the flag from loomed, handspun wool [Fig. 5.6].\(^{376}\) Scholars have attributed several American flag or patriotic weavings to Juanita, a weaver married to Navajo leader Mañuelito, dating to this time. These include a blanket she made for the Navajo delegation to Washington in 1874 and a small scale flag weaving that, though never completed, she was nonetheless photographed with [Fig. 5.7, Fig. 5.8].\(^{377}\) Like Lakota beadworkers, Navajo weavers incorporate the flag as a sign of patriotism, sometimes also implementing the eagle or designs taken from coins to the same effect.\(^{378}\)

Contemporary artists also strategically harness the power conveyed by this motif. Sometimes, the artist uses the symbol ironically or as a political statement with regard to the presence of Native peoples in the American state. In *Lunasteen* (2001), Luiseño artist James Luna superimposes a photograph of himself over a larger one of “all-American” rock musician Bruce Springsteen against an American flag backdrop [Fig. 5.9]. Luna mimics the jubilant guitar-wielding posture of the musician well-known for his hit song, “Born in the U.S.A.” While Springsteen wrote the song about the hardships experienced by veterans of the Vietnam war, ironically, it has come to

\(^{376}\) Herbst and Kopp, 24.

\(^{377}\) For more on Juanita, see Kathleen Whitaker, *Southwest Textiles: Weavings of the Navajo and Pueblo* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 57-59.

\(^{378}\) Rodee, 159-160.
be associated with uncritical patriotism. The work of Winnebago artist Martha (Marty) Gradolf provides another example: she made a series of weavings incorporating the flag and appending cowrie shells to represent the fifty states. These glossy shells (whiteshells, or miigisag as the shells are called in Ojibwe language) have been used variously as currency, as ornament, and as symbols of femininity or fertility amongst aboriginal people globally; Winnebago people use cowrie shells in sacred ceremonies. The outcrop of shells on the flag certainly emphasizes the Native presence in the nation but the work itself offers a further, more nuanced view about nation and belonging. In the style of African flags which incorporate a small Union Jack, the flag of the one time occupier of those African nations, Gradolf insets a medicine wheel in the upper right-hand corner of a U.S. flag. Thus she inverts the usual idea of occupation, and here positions the United States as a colony of Native America. The Indiana-based artist’s weaving, *According to Webster* (2002) [Fig. 5.10] features two American flags, one above the other. The lower flag – the Colonial era version – displays the conventional circle of thirteen stars on the blue ground while the upper flag inverts this order with the blue inset at the lower right and, rather than stars, the circular form of a Native medicine wheel embellished with copper and brass beads. Between the flags the artist wove a cream colored panel incorporating the phrase: *treaty, a formal agreement between two nations or sovereigns*.379

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379 This work became the poster image for the 2002 Indian Market, held at the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indian and Western Art, thus giving the image – if not the work itself – a wide audience.
After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, the cultural landscape was flooded with what Nancy Gildart calls “textile actions.” Gildart uses this helpful term to describe textile-related practices employed in response to a real-world event. The textiles themselves may be real or metaphorical. In her argument, Gildart specifically refers to the proliferation of American flags at this time and the kinds of messages conveyed by the use of a powerful national symbol when mediated by art, craft and culture.\textsuperscript{380} Flag-based textile actions encompass amateur gestures as literal as the flying of a flag or banner with an inscription of support, but can also include the work of artists, like Gradolf, whose series of woven flags made after 9/11, demonstrate the influence of the new climate of patriotism on visual culture, a politicized, identity-based art-practice, and an indigenous history of weaving with its own traditions, styles and motifs.

Following 9/11, the editorial staff at \textit{Native Peoples} magazine, the same publication in which the CIA advertisement appeared, elected to use the \textit{image} of a textile action (which is, arguably, a textile action in itself) to express sympathy with victims and their families and solidarity with the nation. The first inside page of the November/December 2001 issue features a photograph of Navajo weaver Sadie Curtis at work at her loom. The loom holds a nearly-complete weaving of the United States flag [Fig. 5.11]. The bold-faced copy below the photograph reads:

\begin{flushright} 
September 11, 2001
A Crime Against Humanity
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{380} Nancy Gildart, “Torn and Mended: Textile Actions at Ground Zero and Beyond,” \textit{The Object of Labour}, 239-254.
All of us at Native Peoples Magazine extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to the loved ones of the innocents taken from this earth.

The photograph is used as a textile action in solidarity with the outpouring of patriotism following 9/11 in that it uses the image and the emotional impact of the flag to convey a message of engendered support. The photograph itself becomes a metaphorical textile as it makes use of a textile in its composition and meaning and is, as such, also a textile action. Importantly, however, the act of weaving featured here pre-dates the moment the photograph elegizes by twenty-five years, something this advertorial clearly states in its caption: “Sadie Curtis, a well-known Navajo weaver from the Ganado area, demonstrates the finishing touches on her flag at the Hubbell Trading Post, AZ. Though retired now, Sadie is still a proud weaver. This photograph was taken in June 1976 by Jerry Jacka.”

Jacka, in fact, took the photograph of Curtis to commemorate another occasion marked by displays of patriotism, the 1976 American bicentennial celebrations. It appeared on the cover of a special, July 1976 issue of Arizona Highways. Curtis, who was born in 1930, worked as a craft demonstrator at the Hubbell Trading Post, where Jacka took the photograph. She was making that rug to benefit a scholarship fund at the Navajo Community College in Tsaile, and has indicated she feels especially proud of that particular weaving. Since this time,
collectors have commissioned Curtis to weave flag designs and she also wove one as a graduation gift for her youngest son in 1989.\footnote{Hedlund, 38, 88.}

The precision of this photograph’s identification in *Native Peoples* is surely about more than properly crediting the weaver and the photographer. A new era of suspicion around identity, nationality, and race began immediately following the terrorist attacks; this image presents verifiable loyalty and belonging signified by the potent symbol of the flag, a flag here produced by a woman indigenous (to the land if not the nation) to America. This last point is especially significant in an era when a renewed fear of foreigners eclipses domestic strife over race and ethnicity: not only does the flag and its making secure Native America’s inclusion as American, the use of the flag is shown to be part of a cultural continuum, one that sets the weaving and the weaver outside of (and prior to) that rash of post-9/11 patriotic textile actions.

In *Aboriginal World View*, the significance of the flag-as-garment reaches beyond the cultural juxtaposition suggested by a Stars and Stripes niqab, and beyond those meanings that exist in a symbolic imaginary. Native artists’ use of the flag includes its usage as a decorative motif in apparel. Ingeniously, so too have Native women incorporated the flag itself in their dress: a 1915 photograph of Mrs. Isabell Bellecour from White Earth reservation in Minnesota, shows the subject wearing a dress made out of still-uncut flag fabric [Fig. 5.12]. The photograph shows how the dressmaker carefully repurposed the fabric into the design of the dress so repeats are pleasing to the eye, with the stars hitting the break of the shoulders like epaulets and
the stripes descending the lengths of the wearer’s arms. The cloth’s usage is functional but also, clearly, intended to adorn the body. As an example of the flag in contemporary art, Roxanne Swentzell, an artist from Santa Clara Pueblo renowned for her life-like and communicative ceramic figures, imbues her sculpture *Vulnerable* (2002) with the complex and contradictory emotions arising post-9/11 through use of the flag [Fig. 5.13]. The naked, earthenware figure sits legs outstretched, ankles crossed, with shoulders hunched defiantly and hands clenched in fists. An American flag covers the figure’s eyes, a blindfold masking his vision. The result is an uneasy figure whose stance conveys a host of emotions and states: vulnerability, fear, victimization, innocence, aggression, and blindness.\(^{382}\)

Like Swentzell, Tsinhnahjinnie harnesses the power and ambiguity of the flag as cultural symbol in *Aboriginal World View* entreating reflection on sensitive political issues about America in the world. Thus in the tradition of textile actions, she uses the flag’s cultural meanings to communicate a response to occupation, war, and the post-9/11 climate in which she made the work. She subverts the veil’s potential to be orientalized or dulled in meaning by introducing the flag imagery and her own cultural signifiers, like sound of drumming and the setting on the land, signifiers that have also been be misconstrued and unjustly appropriated. These factors position this work by a Native artist in a global context of art that broaches issues of nationalism, diaspora, and globalization.

The Global Indigenous, Making Connections: Sama Alshaibi

Drawing cross-cultural or transnational relationships through art practice or display now occurs with increasing frequency. A spate of recent exhibitions signify these forays into the construction of a global home in which Native art lives and flourishes and point to an enthusiastic exploration of wider contexts for understanding Native identities and art practices. Yet the exhibitions participate in this transnational visual economy in different ways, as each has its own distinct aims. These exhibitions include the following:

- *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World*, organized by the National Museum of the American Indian, New York, and the Heard Museum, Phoenix, in 2007. The exhibition comprised of predominantly young artists, often of mixed heritage, who identify in observably different ways to their own indigeneity and to the category of “Native artist.”

- *Global Feminisms*, at the Brooklyn Museum, in 2007, a groundbreaking exhibition of contemporary feminist art by women from more expansive global locations than had been previously attempted. While indigeneity does not figure rhetorically, Anishnabe artist Rebecca Belmore participates.

- *Enacting Emancipation*, at A Space Gallery in Toronto, in 2008, a small exhibition which brought together Native North American and Palestinian artists to draw parallels between their respective cultural experiences and identities.
• *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity* in Venice, Italy, in 2005, not an exhibition, but rather a symposium at the close of the Biennale that assembled a group of indigenous curators, artists, and academics to discuss the role of indigenous artists at Venice in addition to the future of indigenous art and curatorial ventures on the global stage.

• *Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photographers*, an exhibition of photography by Native artists from North American and beyond, which opened at the C.N. Gorman Museum at the University of California, Davis, in the spring of 2006, then the Burke Museum of Anthropology at the University of Washington in Seattle in 2007, and remounted in an abbreviated form at the Autry National Center in Los Angeles.

Veronica Passalacqua, the Gorman Museum’s curator and a scholar of contemporary Native American art, organized *Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photographers* along with Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (the Museum’s Director) in concert with a conference on indigenous peoples’ practices of photography. The exhibition’s importance centers on several key elements which, apart from the strength of much of the work shown, distinguished the exhibition as particularly innovative. Some of the participating artists were indigenous people from outside of North America, namely South America, New Zealand (with five artists), and the Middle East. The geographic diversity of the participating photographers undermines an essentialized indigeneity and unseats an understanding of that status as
strictly tied to the geography, history, and politics of North America. It also invites alliances between indigenous peoples globally, as the artists’ works reveal some commonalities of experience and in concerns. The curators included some little-seen work of early twentieth century photographers and the work of better known (though perhaps now deceased or no longer active) photographers from the mid-twentieth century in addition to photographs by contemporary working artists. Photography by emerging artists (some very young and still in art school) was shown as were photographs by established artists with national and international profiles. Thus, the curators presented the central concept of indigenous photography as expansive: geographically, temporally, and relative to the stage of the artists’ respective careers.

While this exhibition had no specific mandate to exhibit the work of women (certainly not to the exclusion of male artists), to identify a feminist aesthetic, or to present gender as a theme, many women artists did participate; sixteen of the twenty-six artists were women, and much of their work reflects a gendered identity or perspective. The concisely articulated title, *Our People, Our Land, Our Images*, expresses the exhibition’s primary endeavor and point of view: a collective, self-identified people, bound by territory and expressed through the common mean of indigenously-generated representations. In some photographs, these over-arching themes work together with the representation of female bodies, experiences, and identities.

Despite the exhibition’s goals and attendant successes, some difficulties arise. While the exhibition emphasizes the vitality of indigenous culture in New Zealand
with the five Maori artists, this presence, inversely invites a questioning of the absence of indigenous photographers from other locations. The conference and exhibition’s location in the United States, as well as the strength of contemporary indigenous art in North America, explains the prominence of artists from the U.S. and Canada. However, the absence of any artists from Australia, Northern Europe, Central America, Brazil and more parts of South America leaves noticeable gaps in the exhibition’s mapping of indigenous artistic activity. The exhibition presents itself as one of “international indigenous photographers,” not a pairing or cross-cultural meeting place for artists from, predominantly, North America and New Zealand.

A second difficulty concerns what exactly indigeneity comprises. This singularly presents itself with regards to Sama Alshaibi, an artist of Palestinian and Iraqi heritage who now lives in the United States. The curators do not address the inclusion of Alshaibi in the exhibition, her relationship as a Palestinian to indigeneity or the politics of that claim. This confusion over indigeneity is widespread. The much-anticipated United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted on September 13, 2007, outlines, prioritizes and aims to protect the human rights and autonomy of indigenous peoples around the globe. Yet nowhere in this document, two decades in the making, is the meaning of the term indigenous and who it includes addressed or defined. Alshaibi’s relationship to indigeneity may be

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unclear to many viewers of the exhibition in the context of, primarily, Native American art. The lack of insight or textual support by the curators leaves the burden of explication on the artist. Within the context of this exhibition or its primary setting of the Gorman Museum, a museum of contemporary Native American art, the other artists do not bear that burden. With only a single artist conveying a Palestinian perspective, some of the significance of this inclusion is lost and the significant parallels between Native America and Palestine remain oblique. A discussion of In My Country’s Embrace (2004), one of the photographs by Alshaibi included in Our People, Our Land, Our Images, may help to parse the relationship this artist shares with other indigenous artists. Further, this discussion affords an opportunity to broach a connection to the experience of diaspora and domicide that is latent, if not articulated, in the work of the other indigenous artists alongside whom Alshaibi’s work was shown.

Alshaibi was born in 1973 in Basra, Iraq, to an Iraqi father and a Palestinian mother. The family fled Iraq in 1979 and moved, unsettled, throughout the Arab world until 1985, when Alshaibi’s mother took the children to the United States. Alshaibi now lives in Tuscon where she teaches art at the University of Arizona. Her work finds compelling parallels in Native America: the importance of land, displacement, diaspora and cultural dislocation. In My Country’s Embrace is a

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384 The conflict between Israeli and Palestinian populations, ongoing since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and part of a wider (and earlier) Israeli-Arab conflict, has plagued the region with violence. Many Palestinians fled or were expelled from Palestine following Israel’s formation, and many of these refugees and
sepia-toned self-portrait of the artist while pregnant, and part of the Birthright series for which the artist incorporated Palestinian dress [Fig. 5.14]. A dowry money wedding headdress covers her head and she folds her arms at her bare torso, fingers interlaced over her bra. Light reflects off her round, exposed belly upon which some lines by Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan are inked: \textit{Enough for me to remain in my/ country’s embrace to be/ in her as a handful of/ dust a sprig of grass}. Through verse, Tuqan’s work memorializes \textit{Al Nakba}, Arabic for “The Catastrophe” and the term used to describe the creation of the State of Israel and the forced displacement of Palestinians. Alshaibi equates the inscription on her belly with a graffiti. Her pregnant belly “houses” a new life and her skin provides an architectural surface to be dressed or defaced, as such surfaces are throughout the West Bank. The ambiguity of the nature of graffiti as works of art, acts of vandalism, or statements of protest carries over to these markings.

Wedding headdresses were once an essential part of a Palestinian woman’s attire and a cherished belonging. On her wedding day, the bride’s family presented her with the headdress, typically embroidered by women and draped with coins. Symbolically and financially the headdress is linked to the “brideprice,” but this characterization is more suggestive of the high social value of women than it is of a trade in women between families. Like other pieces of bridal jewelry, the coins belonged to the bride: property to be spent, saved, added to or distributed at her
descendants are unable to return. The United Nations uses the term Occupied Palestinian Territories to refer to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, territories which Israel has claimed since 1967.
discretion.\textsuperscript{385} After 1948, when Palestinian coins ceased to be minted, headdresses – generically called \textit{smađeh} in the area around Jaffa, where Alshaibi’s mother was born – were dismantled, coin by coin, and spent during times of need. This object which marks the instance of a couple joining together, of a family being created, now comes apart and is re-distributed, calling to mind the Palestinian diaspora through the dispersal of its own parts.

Few of the headdresses remain intact; indeed, in 1982, family members sold the headdress that belonged to Alshaibi’s great-grandmother. As part of her art practice, Alshaibi recreated the headdress that she wears in the portrait, reconstructing the form based on her mother’s memories of her own grandmother’s piece. Without Palestinian coins at her disposal, the artist produces her own. These coins bear specific traces, traces of the currency of Alshaibi’s own journey: the customs stamps that emboss her passport, visas, and photographs that mark her family’s trail. These mintings, as Alshaibi describes, “suggest an intellectual dowry rather than a monetary or economic one. My inheritance is confined to the memories of my elders, teetering on the brink of obliteration.”\textsuperscript{386}

The recreated headdress memorializes those lost headdresses, just as it memorializes the narrative that describes the experience of those losses. This headdress can be put on and taken off, worn or displayed, new elements added or


taken away. Alshaibi describes the larger project of her artwork as “temporary memorials” which counter the effacement of history that parallels the destruction of her homeland. Alshaibi asks, “Without the country, the house, or the official history that reflects what really happened, where are the spaces that are left to hold our memories?”

Photography is often lauded for its recording properties; it can capture events so that others can see them. Alshaibi’s photographs bear witness in another way, making visible memories with no real-time analogue so that those memories may take on a material dimension when the sites that created or housed them have been lost or denied. There is poignancy to Alshaibi’s use of “temporary” to describe her memorials, as if “a permanent, fixed memorial would imply that we would permanently be exiled from our home.” But use of the temporary to describe these as works of art rather than as memorials is misleading. The headdress and Alshaibi’s photographs serve as memorials, perhaps better described as *temporal* memorials, rather than temporary ones, as they join history and memory to the present day, emphatically pronouncing the active nature of these objects. The photograph, once thought of as creating a permanent mark, a fixed document, is now recognized as unstable and not necessarily lasting – it can be corroded, misplaced, misidentified, misinterpreted, discarded, lost. Personal photographs of displaced peoples, while cherished possessions, may too be lost. Alshaibi’s reference to the temporary reflects

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388 Alshaibi, “Memory Work,” 46.
this history, and her own insecurity about how safe she is in the United States, about how permanent her adopted home really is.\(^{389}\)

In her brief preface to the exhibition catalogue, Tsinhnahjinnie expounds on what marks the difference between a “connected Indigenous photographer,” and a non-Indigenous Western (or non-connected Indigenous) photographer. She suggests it is the “connection to the sacred, connection to community, connection to land, connection to visions of strength, and a steadfast vision of continuance.”\(^{390}\) To be sure, these are difficult attributes to quantify and do not resolve the ambiguities of who is and is not indigenous. However, in *In My Country’s Embrace*, Alshaibi effectively communicates a vision for continuance and an attachment to place. Through the lens of diasporic experience, an identification between Alshaibi’s work and Tsinhnahjinnie’s *Aboriginal World View* comes into focus, underscoring the productive relationships that can be struck between artists (and peoples) cross-culturally, based on common experiences.

**Hybrid Identity and Social Experience: Anna Tsouhlarakis**

In this chapter, I explore the concept of home far less literally than in previous chapters. Home is a space in which for many, identity is born. Identity too, becomes a home of sorts, especially in a world and era where individuals move through many

\(^{389}\) The artist describes her own fears that, even now as a US citizen, she will one day be asked to leave. See, Alshaibi, “Memory Work,” 42.

homes, spaces and locations in a lifetime, and often count multiple affiliations as informing their heritage and cultural identity. Nikos Papastergiadis, whose scholarship crystallizes the cultural significance of migration and diaspora, emphasizes the open-ended nature of identity-formation, its fluidity, and indeed the almost de-facto hybridity of contemporary identities. He finds that:

Cultural identity is […] defined by the way ideas and practices which have crossed frontiers find new homes; it is a way of coming to terms with the past without ignoring the pressures of the present, an expression of belonging which does not lock the individual into a single place. The dream of a single home is gone, only to be replaced by the daunting promise of multiple affiliations. The image of integrated and unified being has been overtaken by a process of translation that is marked by a consciousness that is more open to the contradictory passages of becoming. The integrity of traditions that were previously premised on spurious notions of purity, are now being traced out in terms of the complex crossovers and intersections of cultural exchange.\footnote{Nikos Papastergiadis, \textit{Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday} (London: Oram Press, 2006), 102.}

Papastergiadis isolates the contemporary experience of identity formation as one that is continually in process and in motion, subject to multiple lines of influence and association. It depends and thrives on complex intercultural entanglements. Native people have always participated in networks of trade and exchange within North America – as I have elaborated in previous chapters – and since Contact, adapted to living amongst populations with ever-changing origins. Yet acceptance and even celebration of this as a condition of being contemporary in the contemporary world suggests further possibilities for identities informed by gender as well as culture, race and ethnicity. The idea of dispersion, and its relationship to identity, finds expression
in the work of many contemporary artists. It is especially interesting to consider this relationship in light of indigenous identities which are often bound to a particular geographical location, and a particular and fixed understanding of heritage. The centrality of place and the fixity of heritage are distinct concepts that should not be conflated. However, when understood in light of global traffic and interactions between peoples, the overlap presents a productive space for understanding contemporary indigenous identities.

Anna Tsouhlarakis was born in 1977 in Lawrence, Kansas, and grew up in both Kansas and New Mexico. Her heritage is mixed and also made up of “wholes.” Her father is Greek and Navajo, her biological mother was Navajo, and her stepmother, who adopted Tsouhlarakis and who raised her with her father, is Creek. Tsouhlarakis identifies with each of these cultures and still she feels wholly Greek and wholly Navajo, something she points out is quite natural given that Greek culture is patrilineal and Navajo matrilineal.\footnote{Anna Tsouhlarakis, e-mail message to the author, November 23, 2008.} Tsouhlarakis’ comfort with her shared Navajo, Greek and Creek heritage does not preclude the exploration of identity. In fact, this confidence allows her to assume an exploratory, subjective voice in her practice; she has stated the need to work from an individualized identity, emphasizing that “We need to tell our story. Not our tribal story, but our family story. My story is
nowhere near yours. The communal voice is important, but a singular voice is also important.”

Tsouhlarakis’ art practice reflects this mixed heritage in form and subject matter, but also in contexts of display: Tsouhlarakis participated in the aforementioned exhibition of 2007, *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World.* The exhibition’s organizers understand *remixing,* metaphorically, as in kind with contemporary concepts of identity. The nature of this understanding of identity, and indeed of the crux of the exhibition itself, reflects the ways in which globalization informs identity, and specifically, how indigenous peoples participate in this mobile culture of identities. John Haworth, the director of the Heye Center, describes the artistic exploration of the effects of this premise as “what it means to be of mixed heritage with (or sometimes without) strong connections to one or more Native communities.” Thus the exhibition ably showcases a range of points of view and identity formations that together underscore the diversity in indigenous identities and the contemporary experience of those identities. Yet Tsouhlarakis’ video work,

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Let’s Dance! (2004), is particularly effective in that it reflects not just the artist’s own understanding of her identity but it speaks to a dialogical cultural climate that embodies constant negotiations between peoples, cultures, and individuals.

The subtitle of the exhibition positions the “remixing” as “post-Indian”; post-Indian, in the same way that curator Thelma Golden’s important Freestyle exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem positioned African American artists as post-Black. Thelma Golden had already been theorizing post-Black identities in relation to Glenn Ligon and other young artists through the 1990s. A post-Indian – or post-Black – identity, seeks to avoid a singularly racialized or essentialized cultural identity; as an umbrella term for artists, post-Indian allows the curators to bring together artists who have various and varying relationships to and perspectives on their Native identities. As post-Indian, these artists are not all Native in the same way, nor do they see their work as “Indian” in the same way. Accounting for this span in routes and roots, to use the clever word play Paul Gilroy and James Clifford have employed for bracing their respective discussions of diasporas, suggests that the diverse identities Native artists express in their art have far more in common with the diasporic consciousness expressed by Mercer, than with an older “double-consciousness”

397 Thelma Golden writes that the term comprises artists who explore and redefine the complexities of blackness, but are also “adamant about not being labeled ‘black’ artists.” Thelma Golden, Freestyle, exh. cat., Thelma Golden, Christie Y. Kim, and Hamza Walker (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001), 14.
model that splits identity as Native or non-native. Remix suggests a climate and culture far more complex than one defined strictly as Native and Not-Native, and Tsouhlarakis’ Let’s Dance! provides a window on to the kinds of social interactions that support this claim.

Tsouhlarakis created Let’s Dance! during a two-month residency in 2002 at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, an established summer program for emerging artists in Maine. For this work, the artist invited people she encountered at Skowhegan (primarily other artists, but also a few visiting friends) to teach her a dance. Each day over the course of thirty, the artist learned and danced thirty styles with different participants. The artist compiled the footage into the fifteen minute video archive that comprises Let’s Dance!, with titles introducing each brief segment by day and dance: Day 1, Country Two Step; Day 2, Charleston; Day 3, K-Wang; Day 4, Twist, and so on.

The dances themselves are diverse, and not simply in the ethno-cultural sense the term diversity usually implies. They are diverse in that they span – and defy – multiple cultural categories. Dance is associated with identity, but these dances defy singular correspondence to ethnic heritage alone. While dances like Bangra [Fig. 5.15], Hora, and Lovchansk Ruchenista [Fig. 5.16] suggest origins with particular ethnicities or cultures others like the Lindy Hop or the Bump are more evocative of the temporal moments of their genesis, the 1920s and 1970s respectively. Lesser

known dance forms like Thrashing, a slam-dance variation rooted in punk culture, and the Whop, a hip hop form that dates to 1980s Chicago [Fig. 5.17], evidence the vitality of subcultures and affirm the importance of dance in fostering or defining those subcultures which can be so important to self-determined identities. The different steps and rhythms performed in sequence compels some thought over the origins of each dance, its transmission and its performance here by individuals, who respectively, have chosen to perform a given dance because it is familiar or meaningful to them (though its meaning to them remains undisclosed in the work).

The thirty wide-ranging dances represented in Let’s Dance! correspond to a mass of popular and cultural influences found in the United States today. The array of forms also seem to acknowledge the American appetite for learning dance cross-culturally, a practice which in some cases offers the student the opportunity to acquire what dance scholar Anthony Shay qualifies as “exotic new identities.” However, this enthusiasm does not necessarily reflect a cultural appropriation of the nature that was so hotly contested by the identity politics of the 1980s and 1990s. Jane Desmond emphasizes that in dance, “appropriation does not always take the form of

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399 Anthony Shay asserts that Americans have an unparalleled enthusiasm for learning the dances of ethnicities other than their own. He cites Egyptian belly dancing and Balkan dancing as being two especially notable examples through which enthusiasts may acquire “new, more exciting and exotic identities.” See, Anthony Shay, Dancing Across Borders: The American Fascination with Exotic Dance Forms (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), 7.
‘borrowing’ from subordinated groups. The borrowing and consequent refashioning goes both ways.\textsuperscript{400}

This dialogue reflects today’s more contemporary, dialogical attitudes towards identity formation as well as towards specific cultural practices. Dancing “across cultures” can be understood in different way. For example, Shay attests that the social experience dance presents is what compels many people to seek out dance as a pastime.\textsuperscript{401} Dance, described in this way, persuasively supports Mercer’s observation that two-way cultural traffic is increasingly understood as an ordinary aspect of everyday life, and not overwhelmingly special or exceptional. This assumes, fairly, an interactive rather than essentialist model of identity.\textsuperscript{402} As a kinetic cultural form, dependent on the human body and movement, dance becomes an apt metaphor to describe this cultural traffic.

The performances in \textit{Let’s Dance!} read as social exchanges rather than cultural showcases, offering up dance as the palatable token of difference some take it to be. The variety in the dances, and the variety of meanings they hold in this context testify to this: the dances are ethno-cultural signifiers, but they are also allusions to youth culture, historical referents, social activity, and recreation. Specific dances may have localized origins, but these are not, for the most part, displayed in other visible ways by the performers, such as through their dress, hair style, or even through skin.

\textsuperscript{401} Shay, 50.
\textsuperscript{402} Mercer, “Diaspora Aesthetics and Visual Culture,” 145.
color. In this work, the artist conveys identity as a chosen state, negotiated by individualized subjectivities rather than by inherited conditions and communities. Tsouhlarakis thus negates that too-easy association between cultural difference and dance as cultural artifact. Furthermore, by initiating a break from the costumed Native dancer performing for the non-native audience, she refocuses attention onto those other aspects of cross-cultural interaction.

What is perhaps most outstanding in *Let’s Dance!* is the element of play and pleasure shown by the artist and project’s participants, something that ultimately testifies to this dialogical or interactive model of identity. Upon inviting participants to join in the project, Tsouhlarakis stressed that “no dance was too basic or too silly and that skill level or lack of knowledge of a dance should not be a deterrent.”

Tsouhlarakis and her partners sometimes stumble over steps and this causes the artist and participants to laugh. While some dancers display obvious skill, others move in a less polished manner. Participants, including Tsouhlarakis herself, wear street clothes, accentuating the informal nature of the project and its spontaneous feel. As a Native artist, Tsouhlarakis employs levity strategically; she means it to contrast with works which represent more serious aspects of Native experience or to contrast with the portrayal of Native people as stoic or sorrowful.

Art historian Olu Oguibe effectively uses “the culture game” as a conceit to describe how artists from non-European backgrounds seek entry into the international

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403 Anna Tsouhlarakis, e-mail message to the author, November 23, 2008.
404 Anna Tsouhlarakis, e-mail message to the author, November 23, 2008.
community of artists only to find that their most salient attribute is their difference. Not only does this difference ultimately prevent any real, participatory inclusion beyond what he describes as occasional ethnic tokenism, that cultural difference may not be an accurate measure of how the artist would position him or herself. Oguibe finds that even when the artist is trained in the west, fluent in the language and practices of metropolitan art, and perhaps also a cosmopolitan or global citizen, he or she will still be primarily defined (and excluded) by difference. The space of contemporary art practice is a “game space” and, for “artists in the Western metropolis whose backgrounds are ‘elsewhere,’ the rules of engagement are a straightjacket of history and expectations, which often leaves them with rather stark options: to take a fall with as much grace as the doomed can muster, or to self-exoticize and humor the establishment for a chance at that brief nod, or else fail the hard way.”

Tsouhlarakis learns a Native dance, the Indian Two-Step [Fig. 5.18]; it is presented in kind with the others. She does not perform her “own” dance in this work. Perhaps this omission stands in part to avoid the attendant ambiguities about what dance she would perform (Greek, Creek or Navajo? Or something else entirely?). Let’s Dance! acknowledges of the history of “performing Indian,” made most famous by Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, Bill Cody’s touring act which featured Native American performers during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. During her

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405 Olu Oguibe, “Double Dutch and the Culture Game,” The Culture Game (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 33.
adolescence, Tsouhlarakis was a competitive powwow dancer, and along with her siblings, performed in Native American dance troupes. Usually, they staged performances for all-white audiences in schools and community centers and at corporate events. The dynamic between performer and audience struck Tsouhlarakis, even at the time: as performer, she assumed the role of teacher, just as the audience became the students. Her understanding of this relationship only deepened during her more formal reflections on identity in her Native American Studies courses as an undergraduate at Dartmouth College.\footnote{Anna Tsouhlarakis, e-mail message to the author, November 23, 2008.}

Many artists have successfully satirized the expectation latent in the “culture game,” which can be seen as various turns on the desire to be taught by an “authentic other.” Shelley Niro, Lori Blondeau, Maria Hupfield, Erica Lord and others have done so using tropes of Indian femininity, deploying satire in response to the double axis of essentialized Indianness and essentialized femininity that Native women artists contend with. Yet, to maintain its hold, the expectation need not manifest itself in so literal a manner as the performing Indian. Many Native artists have struggled with producing work that meets societal expectations of what is Native enough, or in certain contexts, too Native. Thus if the performing Indian is a symbolic axis for Nativeness and remains a part of the unwritten rules of engagement that Oguibe decries, Tsouhlarakis’ \textit{Let’s Dance!} is a salient refusal. Artists and scholars have complicated this narrative by revisiting the history: for example, in her study of two
Native performers active in the 1920s and 1930s, Esther Deer and Molly Nelson, Ruth Phillips finds that the tropes of “artistic primitivism” employed by the dancers allowed them a space for creative expression, financial independence, and travel, and does not simply imply an interpellation of the performers into existing stereotypes of Native women.\(^{407}\)

What *Let’s Dance!* is, in addition to what it *is not* is also a crucial part of this work’s power. Significantly, the dances themselves – how the artist conducts and conveys them – represent social actions and experience. Dance as a social phenomenon seems obvious, yet this aspect is often overlooked as the more metaphysical aspects of dance overtake the social aspects. In the case of *Let’s Dance!,* the social aspect of the work is present in the collective *us* implied by the title. The social comes into even sharper relief when thought of in terms of its social choreography, which, as Andrew Hewitt develops it, situates a dance aesthetic at the base of social experience. Choreography itself provides a means for thinking about social order and, further, it is a platform for thinking about the relationship between aesthetics and politics. Dance, further, can be a model for social order and not just reflective of it.\(^{408}\)

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\(^{407}\) Phillips acknowledges the racism faced by the Native performers, but finds that the climate in Europe – especially cosmopolitan Paris – was far freer from racial prejudices than was North America at the time. See, Ruth B. Phillips, “Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture,” *Antimodernism and the Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity,* ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 26-49.

Tsouhlarakis’ dances, and the dancers who perform them with her, testify to the range of identities held by individuals today. These identities are often informed by more than a single inherited ethnicity and culture and incorporate chosen and found aspects of identity as much as they do heritage. The openness with which dance is shared in *Let’s Dance!*, both with Tsouhlarakis and ultimately with the audience, testifies to a model of engagement in which identities are proudly shared and negotiated, and where gate-keeping is minimized. In this way, Tsouhlarakis offers a model for social order, as much as she reflects it. Dance is an action and a representation: through this work, the artist describes in an active and participatory way some identity formations, also suggesting a new means for thinking about identity. Defying the tracelessness of dance as an art form, Tsouhlarakis leaves a record of her performances through video. The video component of the work further emphasizes the material bent of her project. The video, *Let’s Dance!*, becomes a record of the identities expressed through dance, these social choreographies. It also provides a map (as in a model) for the social order she describes.

The “imperfect” dances that Tsouhlarakis performs create, by virtue of their imperfection, metaphors for identity and social order. The dances remain unfinished, incomplete as spectators view just 30-second segments of each in the 15-minute video. This further testifies to their in-process nature. Still in the process of learning the steps as she performs, Tsouhlarakis’s footing occasionally falters. Hewitt writes that, in dance, “[s]tumbling needs to be thought of not as a loss of footing but rather as a finding of one’s feet: it is the act in which the body rights itself by a retraction
and the mind becomes aware of the operation – ‘a secret force’ – operating in and through the body.” Bodies, even stumbling ones, control the dance and are not controlled by it or prescribed by it. Understood in this way, the artist and performers take on further agency as individualized subjects whose identities are always still in progress: finding footings, finding one’s self, finding one’s identity.

Avtar Brah sagely points out that “since all cultures are internally differentiated and never static (…) our subjectivities are formed within heterogeneous discursive practices. A variety of subject positions will emerge within a single cultural context….” Identities shift depending on wholly individualized vantage points, clearly far more complex than simply identifying as “Native.” Despite efforts to specify location in increasingly localized (and multiple) ways, even that specificity does not engender an identity that can be evenly understood. Coalitions realized by means of a “politics of identification” rather than a “politics of identity,” categories proposed by Brah, thus present themselves as far more nuanced models for creating allegiances. These bold and honest presentations of identification also become models for forming strategic relationships or communities based on gender politics. The works presented by the artists featured in this chapter provide an armature for ideas based on transnational and diasporic understandings of identity, gender, and home.

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409 Hewitt, 89.
410 Brah, 92.
411 Brah, 93.
Let’s Dance! is not an overtly feminist work. Notwithstanding, dance is a bodily art form, and gender distinctions are commonly understood as originating at the level of the body. Yet to streamline the performer’s body, the dance, and feminist consciousness on a single track is to limit the possibilities for a broader reading of this work and the larger narratives inherent in the work that have implications for feminism and for Native women’s art practice. Just as the political space of feminism is multifarious so too is the socio-cultural space of Native women. Further, it is important that Remix includes this work, particularly given that it makes a Native woman artist visible (through Tsouhlarakis’ appearance in the video), given the serious under-representation of women artists in the exhibition. Tsouhlarakis and Nadia Myre were the only women in a cohort of fifteen artists. Let’s Dance!, then, can be understood, metaphorically, as analogous to feminism, with these strands of difference and coalescence representing the parallel struggles of feminism. Understood this way, the performance’s relationship to feminism evokes a potentially productive tension, in Elspeth Probyn’s sense of an “ethics of antagonism.”

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Kim Anderson, a scholar of indigenous feminism, posits that self-definition occurs for Native women in stages. She identifies these four steps as resist, reclaim, construct, and act. Native artists of earlier generations may have, out of necessity, been more concerned in their practices with the first two steps. While the need for resistance and reclamation persists, a younger generation of artists, a wave to which Tsouhlarakis (and Lord, Blondeau and Hupfield) belong, may, in part because of the work of more established artists like Tsinnahjinnie, Alanis Obomsawin, Shelley Niro, Faye Heavyshield, Kay Walking Stick, Emmi Whitehorse, and Gail Tremblay to name only a few, focus their practice on the second pair of Anderson’s steps. Yet construction and action do not eclipse resistance and reclamation; we might do well to add reflect or revisit to this list. Without straying too far from the original context of Anderson’s remarks, this is a useful addendum in the realm of Native women’s art practices: artists draw on the work of their predecessors, mining it for new meaning and for inspiration. How Native women – or Native women artists – self-define is not exclusively about positioning themselves against non-native women (though this politics of difference remains important), but also about the interpretation of a Native-generated politics of identity.

Not only do the contexts of diaspora and globalization shed new light on the work of the Native artists I have cited in this discussion, the expansive, transnational possibilities of this framework create new critical and artistic communities for theorization and identification. These cross-cultural identifications are underlined

414 Anderson, A Recognition of Being, 15.
here – quite subtly, at times – by feminism and gender politics. Griselda Pollock reminds art historians that “feminism is not synonymous with simply collecting and exhibiting works by women artists and that it also implies a shifting of paradigms, including going beyond notions of gender (men and women artists) and engaging with difference: sexual[,] ethnic, cultural, geographic, generational, orientational and so on….” Engaging the work of Native women artists in a discussion of identity as it relates to home and which crosses borders of nation and culture is thus part of a valuable, wider project of re-working feminist scholarship with regard to Native women, and expanding art historical contexts for Native art scholarship.

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Figure 5.3. Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, *Aboriginal World View with Aboriginal Dreams*, 2002. Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, “Videos.”
http://www.hulleah.com/Video/Videos.htm

http://www.hulleah.com/Video/Videos.htm
Figure 5.5. CIA recruitment campaign advertisement, *Native Peoples* magazine, March/April, 2006.
Figure 5.7. Studio photograph of the Navajo weaver Juanita and a weaving with an American flag design, likely made by Juanita; on the right is Indian Agent W. F. M. Arny. Photograph taken by Charles M. Bell in Washington, D.C. in 1874. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, neg. 2405.

Figure 5.8. Curio loom with unfinished weaving; probably made by Navajo weaver Juanita, c.1874. Collection of the Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, cat. no. E016494, acc. no. 00003675.
Figure 5.11. Opening page of *Native Peoples* magazine (November/December 2001):
Figure 5.12. Mrs. Isabell Bellecour, White Earth Photograph Collection ca.1915. Minnesota Historical Society. Location no. E97.1B r4 Negative no. 6785.
Figure 5.15. Anna Tsouhlarakis, *Let’s Dance!* (Day 16: Bangra), 2004. Video, 15 minutes. Anna Tsouhlarakis, “Portfolio: Video/Performance.”
http://www.naveeks.com/perform_letsdance.html

Figure 5.16. Anna Tsouhlarakis, *Let’s Dance!* (Day 30: Lovchansk Ruchenista), 2004. Video, 15 minutes. Anna Tsouhlarakis, “Portfolio: Video/Performance.”
http://www.naveeks.com/perform_letsdance.html
Figure 5.17. Anna Tsouhlarakis, *Let’s Dance!* (Day 29: Whop), 2004. Video, 15 minutes. Anna Tsouhlarakis, “Portfolio: Video/Performance.”
http://www.naveeks.com/perform_letsdance.html

Figure 5.18. Anna Tsouhlarakis, *Let’s Dance!* (Day 6: Indian Two-Step), 2004. Video, 15 minutes. Anna Tsouhlarakis, “Portfolio: Video/Performance.”
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