

Indigenous Knowledge in the Production of Early Twentieth Century American Popular Culture: Distributed Creativity between “Frontier” and “Middle Ground”

Cora Bender, University of Siegen

1. Introduction

“Distributed creativity” is a complex term that can be used to explore a whole range of different cultural and social settings, from global art to changing workplace environments and transcultural mediaspheres (Schüttpelz and Giessmann 2015).^{*} For an anthropologist like myself, applying a term like this to a set of empirical data always bears the risk of coercing an abstract academic cover over highly contextualized and “messy” material for the sake of the concept, not the material, and much less for the people whose lives we as anthropologists explore in our research. However, distributed creativity seems an interesting exception in that it can be applied not only to different cultural settings in the present but also to historical cultures of the past. Therefore, it enables us to reflect on the present by mirroring it in the past. In my view, distributed creativity— though the latest wave of globalization has accelerated it considerably—is not a feature unique to media culture in the present. By analyzing the ways in which Native Americans participated in and actively contributed to the shaping of post-frontier American culture at the turn of the twentieth century, I argue that present forms of distributed

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creativity, such as modern indigenous media and indigenous art, are preceded and pre-shaped by earlier forms. In my view, a nuanced analysis of the past is crucial for an understanding of present forms of distributed creativity across global cultural spheres.

Appropriation, collaboration

In my special field of inquiry, the media anthropology of Native North America, distributed creativity, first of all invokes ambiguous concepts that reflect the colonial history of all cultural exchange between Native and non-Native groups: appropriation and collaboration. The concept of appropriation has a long history in European philosophy, pedagogy, and art history, which I am not going to review here.¹ In present-day Native North America, appropriation has an eminently political dimension. It is used to denote the imitation without permission of Native culture by non-Natives, such as printing Navajo design styles on underwear and liquor flasks, or using fake “Indians” as sports teams’ mascots. Likewise, certain types of “collaboration” of indigenous and minority groups in the production of mainstream popular culture such as music, films, dance shows, and arts and crafts, is seen by many as a type of cultural performance that ultimately reproduces the debilitating stereotypes the dominant society forces onto the subaltern, and colonialism forces onto the colonized. However, reality is more complex. Two recent publications, among others, provide thoughtful reflections on this issue. One offers ethnographic case studies of transnational Romani music, the other a joint indigenous/non-indigenous discussion of Australian indigenous involvement in cinema. Referring to Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity (1990, 1993), and to Judith Okeley’s article “Trading Stereotypes” (1979), Carol Silverman’s *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics and Balkan Music in Diaspora* discusses the meaning of Romani engagement in non-Romani popular culture: “(...) when Roma play the part of Gypsy musicians, that is, deliver the stereotype that is expected, are they reinscribing ethnic and racial norms or subverting them?” (Silverman 2013: 5). Huijser and Collins-Gearing’s *Representing Indigenous Stories in the Cinema: Between Collaboration and Appropriation* (2007), also distinguishes between two forms of collaboration: “Colonial collaboration is the white person’s power to work with Indigenous peoples and knowledges. Non-colonising collaboration would not be dependent on the power of one white man, but on the sharing, reframing and renewal of Australian stories and experiences.” (Huijser and Collins-Gearing 2007: 1).

¹ See, for instance, Silverstone and Hirsch 1992; Blume 2013; Hahn 2011; Thomas 1991.

In the present article, I am concerned with a related field—that of indigenous collaboration in the post-frontier American popular culture of the two decades flanking the turn of the twentieth century. I am using data from my long-term fieldwork and archival research concerning the knowledge culture of a particular reservation, the Ojibwe community Lac Courte Oreilles in northwestern Wisconsin (see also Bender 2011). My aim is to develop a differentiated view of Native engagement with media and popular culture by focusing on the historical period between the 1880s and the 1930s, which is generally characterized as a time of serious Native population decline and cultural loss under American domination. Such loss is acutely felt, for instance, in the disappearance of Native languages and ceremonies, and the concurrent appropriation of Native arts, decorative styles, and modes of performance into the non-Native mainstream, e.g. the art market and the emerging American *Kulturindustrie*. Focusing on the strategies of the indigenous actors rather than on those of their white counterparts, and using thick data from my in-depth case study in Lac Courte Oreilles I seek to reconstruct Native agency under such difficult conditions in all its complexity. However, in the course of my work with the data and against the backdrop of my research into present-day Native media activism, I came to find it increasingly hard to separate between what could be clearly identified as practices of re-inscription of power and practices of its subversion.

Quite to the contrary, as I have sought to demonstrate in an earlier article on media-ethnographic research in the context of indigenous sovereignty in the U.S. (Bender 2015), framing what actors do or do not do as either/or-dilemmas can become problematic in itself. I agree with Huijser and Collins-Gearing that not all cultural collaborations that white people consider to be politically correct are in reality taking place on anything resembling an equal footing. I also agree that there may be a vast difference in how a certain collaborative project is seen by the Native and the non-Native collaborators, respectively (see, for instance, the documentary “Weaving Worlds” about the marketing of Navajo rugs by local businessmen in the American Southwest (Klain 2008)).

But I differ in that I doubt the usefulness of representing the positions, motivations, and strategies of the actors in the framework of a dichotomy. If a certain collaborative media project is branded as “colonial collaboration” (as has been, for instance, the film “Nanook of the North”), then how do we account for and make sense of the Native actors’ decisions to get involved? Silverman asserts that “resistance is neither singular nor pure; as Ortnor (1995) points out, it is always paired with collaboration.” (Silverman 2013: 145) “Roma embrace a surprisingly modern cosmopolitan sensibility while

dutifully fulfilling their multiple roles: either as Europe's last bastion of tradition or as New York's vanguard of punk fusion." (Silverman 2013: 268) Huijser and Collins-Gearing see the problem of morality, too: "It is not the intention here to raise questions about morality, ethics, guilt, and rightness." (2) Still, the problem remains crucial: in what ways do we, by branding certain types of collaborations "colonial," implicitly portray the Native actors that participate in them as too weak to make other choices? In my view, the question whether indigenous performance re-inscribes stereotypes or subverts them, or whether collaboration is colonizing or non-colonizing, can actually block the view on collaboration from the perspective of the Native people involved. As an anthropologist researching popular culture, it is my aim to reconstruct their perspective (even though that might prove difficult for scarcity of historical documentation). In order to do this, I think it is necessary to try and depart from the either/or-dilemma haunting so many articles on the Native condition, and seek a different route in discussing Native self-representation. The concept of distributed creativity can assist in this effort to identify cases that do not conform to the dichotomy. Analyzing my historical and ethnographic data in the light of distributed creativity, I found Native cultural strategies to be transcending or cutting across the criteria that we use to characterize something as stereotypical. For instance, as I will reconstruct in more detail below, in the 1920s, the people of Lac Courte Oreilles used the stages and props of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and other shows they participated in as actors, to revitalize and continue ceremonies that were outlawed and prosecuted under the 1883 Religious Crimes Code. Many years later, they bought an old cook-shanty formerly used in Historyland, an open-air exhibit of lumberjack days in the vicinity of Hayward, Wisconsin, in which their parents and grandparents had staged tourist dances. They brought it to the reservation and used it as a hall for communal ceremonies. Practices like these, in my view, challenge our idea of what makes a stereotype, of dichotomies of collaboration vs. subversion as well as compartmentalizing and separating between the domains of ceremony, pop culture, and politics. I argue that by participating in popular representations of the frontier (Turner 1894), Native people sought to recreate what historian Richard White has termed the "middle ground" (White 1991), a historical period and geographical space of collaboration from the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries, not devoid of power, but open for negotiation and practices of distributed creativity. By focusing on collaboration from this point of view, I mean to shift attention from political and economic structures that victimize Native people to a practice-centered understanding of how Native people succeeded in maneuvering such a difficult terrain in the past, and how they laid the groundwork for continuing to do so today.

Outline

In order to make my point I have to approach the subject in a somewhat circular manner. I would like to ask those readers who are not familiar with the history of Native North America or with the history of anthropology, to bear with me while I highlight some key context to my argument. In my first section I provide a short overview of some of the meanings of aesthetic practices in historical cultures of Native North America and show how a concept of distributed creativity can apply in these settings, some of which differ vastly from our own. I will recapitulate how Native artistic practices changed in the course of European encroachment and colonial domination. In doing so, I will be careful not to reinforce the old Western stereotype of Native people as hapless victims of a radical historical change over which, according to the colonial ideology of the time, they had no control. Instead, I wish to argue that by participating in popular representations of the frontier (Turner 1894), Native people sought to transgress the dichotomies of frontier society, and instead recreate an earlier historical period in which stages were open for negotiation (White 1991).

The frontier is a key concept in American white identity. The historian Frederick Jackson Turner, born in Portage, Wisconsin, advanced the idea that American society was formed by the American frontier, that is, through the process of conquering a continent presumably free for the taking: “American democracy was born of no theorist’s dream (...). It came out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier.” (Turner 1894: 293). In this view, the frontier is what shaped the progressiveness, egalitarianism, and violence of American society. However, Turner’s text, which became the basis for theorizing American history for decades to follow, is also the founding document of the deliberate omission of the role of Native people in shaping frontier culture. In Turner’s view, America struggled to win an empty continent seen as *terra nullius*, and ultimately, America struggled with itself. That conflict is the foundational narrative of mainstream frontier-histories. In contrast, White’s *The Middle Ground* describes entirely different processes. First of all, it outlines a geographical location: that of the multicultural encounter of different Native and European groups in the fringe area between the Great Lakes and the Great Plains; secondly it outlines a certain time period, the years from the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries, which represents a historical backdrop against which I interpret my own data. Thirdly, it describes the historical emergence of a stage for interaction between different Native and non-Native cultures:

On the middle ground diverse people adjust their differences through what amounts to a process of creative, and often expedient, misunderstandings. (...) They often misinterpret and distort both the

values and practices they deal with, but from these misunderstandings arise new meanings and through them new practices—the shared meanings and practices of the middle ground. (White 1991: XXVI).

A certain protocol enabled the parties involved to interpret their respective actions in a whole range of often contradictory ways without, however, evoking the threat of war and cultural annihilation which later came to dominate Indian-white relations at the frontier. My point is that Native involvement in post-frontier popular culture evokes the interpretive practices of this middle ground and should therefore be seen as an array of collaborative strategies rather than a case of cultural decline and appropriation of Native culture by non-Natives.

In my second section, I will situate Native artistic practices historically in the context of what media scholar Erhard Schüttpelz has termed “the five waves of globalization” (Schüttpelz 2009). My case study highlights some key features specific to the era of imperial globalization around the turn of the twentieth century that was, like our present wave, characterized by the emergence of new media technology such as photography, film, and new forms of exhibitions. Anthropology, established around this time as an academic discipline, responds to these deep-running shifts in aesthetic practices by developing a new system to arrange and represent cultures as “culture areas” (Kroeber 1939) on maps and in visually attractive exhibits. This conceptual shift from evolutionist stepladder models to diffusionist area models corresponded to an increase in leisure travel and a growing tourist industry. In the third section, I will substantiate my argument by looking closer at some of the rich archival and ethnographic data I was able to collect over many years of fieldwork with the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, an Ojibwe community of some seven thousand members located in the woodlands seventy miles south of the shores of *gichi gami*, i.e. Lake Superior. Lac Courte Oreilles has always been a hotbed of political activity and can boast a long history of Native media use. We will get to see an intertribal peace conference in the backstage area of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show (Loew 1998), an outlawed Native ceremony in the disguise of an “Indian Dance,” and a revitalization cult in the context of a seemingly all-American patriotic post-World War I homecoming celebration. In the fourth section, I discuss the historical repercussions of the “middle ground.” Participating in tourist dances and fairs, Native people trained themselves in the arts of confident self-representation on stage, which, from the late 1960s on, fed into the self-confidence of Native political activism, the founding of Native owned and operated media, and the fight for indigenous political sovereignty. In my fifth and final section, I will sum up how the story comes

full circle. Media—as in Latin: “the middle”—can be seen as the new “middle ground,” the stage on which Native people of the past and present appear in order to express their values, enter relationships of exchange, and assert their rights. At this point, appropriation comes back into the picture, but this time we encounter it as a highly contested practice: Using their own as well as mainstream media enables indigenous activists to criticize and in many cases also file law suits against the theft of cultural styles in the production of clothes, jewelry, and furniture. The featuring of fantasy “Indians” as sports team mascots, and the use of team names reminiscent of the 19th century Indian Wars (Berman 2008; Fonseca 2011). From this perspective, it is ultimately the practices of distributed creativity that provide the platform to criticize and demand the discontinuation of appropriation.

2. Native American artistic expression

“None of the native languages of North America seem to contain a word that can be regarded as synonymous with the Western concept for art, which is usually seen as something separable from the rest of daily life.”

(Feest 1992: 9).

North American traditional tribal art was an aesthetic practice closely connected to everyday life.² People decorated their clothes, houses, cooking utensils, tools, weapons, ceremonial paraphernalia, and bodies in accordance with their religious beliefs, social position, status, age, gender, and personal preferences. Artistic specialization was common in certain geographical areas, for instance the North West Coast or the Southwest. However, most Native groups in North America did not need professional artistic performers, with the exception of religious specialists with their elaborate ceremonial knowledge. How to make and decorate the sacred objects used in a ceremony, how to conduct the ritual, which songs to sing, or how to dance was artistic knowledge crucial to the maintenance of society and was in many cases the result of years of training, fasting, and dreaming. In many instances, this kind of knowledge cut across domains that in modernity are kept in distinct compartments: science, sociality, and interpretation (Latour 1993). By way of the aesthetic practices of ritual, Native religious performers manipulated natural surroundings that were also the habitat of numerous supernatural forces. But artistic practice was not limited to ritual. Even in the everyday aesthetic practice of making clay

² Literature about Native North American art is abundant. For a first overview, I recommend, for example, Dockstader 1961; Feder 1965; Wade 1986; Penney 2004; Feest and King 2007; Berlo and Phillips 2014; Holm 2014, and, in general, *The American Indian Art Magazine*.

pots, sewing moccasins, or painting hides, certain ritual precautions had to be observed; and the decoration of things was held to endow them with spiritual power. Artistic practice can thus be seen as a form of distributed creativity, in that creativity was a joint endeavor of a human being and a supernatural guide or helper. On the other hand, many groups regarded this kind of religio-artistic knowledge as the property of certain individuals, secret societies, or kin groups that had received it exclusively from the supernatural agent with whom they were connected. They limited access to the products of this artistic collaboration, because the knowledge of the supernatural in many cases was considered dangerous and therefore only safe in the care of people who were rightfully entitled to it. European encroachment brought new—and sometimes destructive—dynamics into the artistic sphere of Native cultures. First it changed the things and the practices and then separated them from each other. As Native American things (clothing, pottery, beadwork, etc.) became objects of Euro-American collecting, and eventually made their way into the curiosity cabinets and museums of the world, Native American religious performance went underground for many decades, threatened by laws, missionaries, and government agents determined to “civilize” the people they regarded as their fosterlings. Next to the inhumane boarding school policy, probably the most serious blow in this context was the U.S. Religious Crimes Code of 1883, which outlawed religious ceremonies of all Native people, especially dancing and shamanistic practices of any kind, on the territory of the United States. This legislation was in force until the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act abolished the concept of forced assimilation altogether and replaced it with more progressive ideas of Indian self-governance. The formal revocation happened as recently as 1978 when the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed under President Carter (Irwin 2000). Between the early 1880s and the mid-1930s, however, Native religious practice had to go underground to survive. The objects and their proper use were thus separated; while the objects were disintegrated and subsequently re-integrated into the Euro-American arts and crafts discourse of the 20th century, the cultural practice of their original makers and users became invisible, obfuscated, and prosecuted during the same period—a matter of import only, it seemed, for a handful of salvage anthropologists interested in the memories of old people. Later, the split between anthropologists who focused on what until the 1970s was considered “real tradition” and those concerned with the victimizing effects of acculturation, especially Christianization, pauperization, and cultural loss, contributed to the pervasive perception that Native American cultures underwent a serious break, if not complete extinction, around the turn of the 20th century. This split vision, ultimately a negligence, is one of the factors that makes research into Native cultures around the turn of the twentieth century difficult.

During this time many Native groups struggled with European diseases and abject poverty. Tuberculosis, trachoma, and whooping cough were rampant on the reservations and caused their population to decline dramatically. Many converted to Christianity. They had easy access to missionaries but rarely to modern health care. Therefore, traditional curing knowledge—songs, dances, medicinal plants—remained widely current for many decades among Christian as well as non-Christian Indians, often carefully hidden from Euro-American eyes so as not to be ridiculed and rendered powerless by exposure. Visibility in general was dangerous.

However, in this bleak historical moment Native cultural productivity was far from disintegrating altogether. The symptoms of “decline” diagnosed by researchers, such as the use of a sacred dance drum in a tourist show, the abbreviation of ceremonial cycles in order to conform to the demands of wage-labor, or the Christian conversion of a ritual specialist who subsequently decries his former belief as “evil,” may have in many cases actually taken place over the course of fifty, sixty years. But the use of the term “decline” to delineate changes in practice and style is problematic because it also implies that an Indian person appearing on a show stage, taking Christian baptism, or working a sixty hour work week in a lumber mill ceases to be Native, and therefore is no longer of interest to anthropology.

Contemporary anthropology, especially the sub-disciplines of media anthropology (Dracklé 1999) and the anthropology of art (Morphy and Perkins 2006), takes a different stance. Our research consultants teach us what it means to live their lives at a certain historical moment in time. What they do or do not do we discuss with them in the light of their own basic concepts, values, and goals. Some of our informants, especially when they are older, may speak of a decline when commenting on the change of certain cultural practices they remember from their youth; but this does not induce us to place their whole group on a slanting scale. Rather, we want to understand why it makes sense to our informants to actualize and re-actualize certain cultural strategies while abandoning others, especially in times of rapid economic or political change. We look at them as makers, agents, and commentators on culture, especially media culture, not as its victims.³ From this point of view, it is safe to say that poverty and economic stress notwithstanding, Native people from diverse cultural backgrounds all over North America at different periods in their historical encounter with Euro-Americans developed myriad new objects and new styles to decorate them—from beadwork with patriotic

3 See, for example, Lavie, Narayan and Rosaldo (1993); Liep (2001); or the themes of recent anthropological conferences such as “Freedom, Creativity, and Decision: Towards an Anthropology of the Human Subject,” Cambridge 2.–4. April 2012.

American motifs to Christian wigwam tabernacles to intertribal, pan-Indian powwow songs and dances, to name but a few.

There are a number of ways to reconstruct and find a framework for these cultural performances around the turn of the twentieth century. One way is to conduct archival research into mainstream media for the traces of these performances (Loew 1998). Another way is to draw parallels between the things collected in museums and the various dimensions of cultural performance. Expanding Christian Feest's 1992 seminal definition of four basic kinds of Native American art—"tribal, ethnic, Pan-Indian, and Indian mainstream art" (Feest 1992: 14)—we can speak of a Native American art history that includes both objects and performances in at least four spheres of meaning-making and social interaction: first, a local tribal community or network with its own life-world and systems of culture-specific knowledge (Bender 2011); second, a sphere of inter-cultural exchange with so-called "white people" (the Native term for people with Euro-American ancestry) and people from other tribes that takes place in public ceremonies, tourism, and related activities (Bender, Hensel, Schüttpelz 2008); third, a pan-Indian sphere that merges elements from different tribal traditions into a new Native American style and has become most apparent in the intertribal powwow dance feasts (Bender 2003), and fourth, Native artistic practice within a transcultural global art sphere ("artists who happen to be Indians" [Feest 1992: 16]). To this might be added a fifth sphere of what is called non-European or, more specifically, indigenous art produced locally and marketed globally,⁴ such as Australian Aboriginal art (Myers 2002). The emergence of indigenous art on a global scale is closely connected with indigenous media activities such as film, video, radio, and newspapers (Ginsburg 2002). Native visibility in the non-Indian mainstream and the emergence of a global indigenous cultural and political sphere of action are unthinkable without the means of Native self-representation: Native media, Native sovereignty movements, and Native political representation (Strong 2008). These different spheres—or scapes (Appadurai 1990)—may or may not overlap as Native people develop and employ different kinds of knowledges to maneuver through them in the course of their daily lives. In fact, the socioscapes of a local tribal community and that of its white mainstream neighbor, for instance, can be shown to be separated by powerful boundaries working in two directions, while the second and third spheres—as defined above—are usually more permeable and accessible from more than one direction.

4 See, for instance, the 2013 exhibition "Sakahàn" featuring international indigenous art with more than 150 recent works by over eighty artists from sixteen countries in the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. <http://www.gallery.ca/sakahan/en/> [Accessed on 25. April 2014].

In the following, I address the issue of how modern Native American self-representation, that is nowadays so strongly present in Native media and Native institutions, emerged in the course of an active engagement of Native people with post-frontier American popular culture. In doing so, I refer to some key thoughts in the media anthropological scholarship of Eric Michaels and Faye Ginsburg. In his work on Australian Aboriginal media activities, Michaels points out that we are used to naturalize Western media history—from oral to print to electronic media—as universal. We assign respectability to certain cultural forms. Literacy, for instance, is in the popular view, “a pro-social, pro-development medium” whereas video and television are regarded as “antisocial and repressive” (Michaels 1994: 311). The same is true for certain cultural performances. Cultural performances of the aforementioned first and the fourth kind—tribal and fine arts—are considered respectable, whereas artistic expressions of the second and the third kind—such as tourist art and pan-Indian art—seem inauthentic and shaped by outside expectations about and commercial interests in “Indian style.” Steeped in the colonial discourse underlying early tourism in America and a product of the commodification of culture, they seem, ultimately apolitical, conformist, and conservative in their social content, as well as placatory rather than disruptive of dominant cultural paradigms. However, Michaels argues, aboriginal and other non-Western cultures do not conform to the historical sequence of media or the accompanying moral verdict of this construction. Aboriginal cultures produce media and art histories quite different from that underlying the Western view.

In her analysis of Inuit work in film, especially in the shooting of “Nanook of the North” (1922), Faye Ginsburg points out that the turn-of-the-century media engagement of Native people is often obfuscated (Ginsburg 2002). Traces of their agency are eliminated from the documentation on which mainstream media history relies (see also Nicks and Phillips 2007). Therefore, it appears as if there were no continuity in Native media history—no history of present-day Native media activities that could be traced back into the past beyond thirty years or so—as if all Native media activities suddenly sprang into life in the course of the Native political activism of late 1960s and early 1970s. In fact, the Red Power movement⁵ is usually credited with being

5 Red Power is a blanket term used for the political movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s among Native people living in the big urban areas of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Chicago, and San Francisco. Especially Native soldiers returning from Vietnam and Korea were no longer willing to tolerate the ever-present mainstream racism and systematic discrimination by the people for whose “freedom” they had fought. Part of the Red Power movement was the American Indian Movement (AIM), a radical political organization founded in Minneapolis/St. Paul in 1968. Originally established to combat anti-Indian police harassment, AIM soon took to more visible political actions such as the occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1968, the Trail of Broken Treaties protest march, and the ensuing occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. in 1972.

the first successful Native use of modern media for their own purposes of representation (Champagne et al. 1997; Johnson 1996; McDonald 2010; Nagel 1996). Taking my cue from Ginsburg, I argue that Native media activities have a much longer history that reaches back well into the nineteenth and early twentieth century. An in-depth historical case study into the media history of a single Ojibwe community suggests that a collective Native understanding of the importance of self-representation emerged much earlier—in the context of the second and third spheres of inter-cultural Indian-white and pan-Indian exchange that took form in the post-frontier American culture of the wild west shows, Indian fairs and pageants. This was, I argue, the first arena in which Native representational agency appeared center stage and from then on, it emerged into what later became known as political and cultural revitalization of the 1970s, the political Treaty Rights campaigns of the 1980s, and, ultimately, the indigenous media professionalism of the present.

3. Anthropology and globalization at the turn of the twentieth century

As media scholar Erhard Schüttpelz noted, the present globalization—that is, the present mobilization of people, signs, and things—is not the only global turn the world has experienced so far. In his view, there have been five global turns altogether: first, the “Out of Africa” period, the primordial global dispersal of humanity; second, the emergence and *longue durée* of part-world systems such as the Meso-American empires or the Silk Route; third, the European globalization beginning with the sixteenth century; fourth, the Age of Imperialism from approximately 1880 until World War I, and fifth, the present global turn that originated with the end of the Cold War, the deregulation of the global economy, and the advent of digitalization and the internet. With the exception of the first, the “Out of Africa” dispersal of humanity, each turn had an earlier predecessor that, in some ways, provides a template for its characteristic forms of transformation. The present global turn shares some distinct features with its predecessor, the global turn towards the age of imperialism at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially the fact that a revolution in media technology was one of its driving forces (Schüttpelz 2009). According to Schüttpelz, the new media emerging in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century generated spirited debates in Europe about modernity and the “modernization” of trance practices in the West, such as spiritism and the emergence of modern esoteric religious movements around 1900 (Schüttpelz and Hahn 2009: 7).

In this context, non-western cultures, especially India and Egypt, became important sources (some would say: quarries) for the renewed strong interest of the moderns in the supernatural after the colonial conquest of the North

American continent seemed accomplished and modernity in conjunction with industrialization, mechanization, urbanization, had destroyed pre-modern social structure in Europe and coastal North America. In the United States, people started to look toward those Native American groups that, like the Hopi in Arizona, had survived centuries of colonization, war, and diseases with their social and religious systems relatively intact, and to those Plains groups that had been depicted for decades by painters such as Karl Bodmer, George Catlin, and Seth Eastman. Photography followed in the footprints of the painting tradition, but it was much more widely available. Tourists in large numbers began to travel to places far in the interior of the North American continent to witness, for instance, the Hopi ritual *Tsu'ti'kive* that became known as the Snake Dance (Bender, Schüttpelz und Hensel 2008). These events even acquired a distinct patriotic tone. The new media, especially photography and film, seem to reflect this. Two of the most prominent subjects of early cinema were all things urban—lights, movement, masses of people—and all things exotic and “other” (McLane 2011). The invention of leisure for the urban masses coincided with the closing of the frontier and a profound political and cultural reorientation. National identity became a dominant discourse not only in education, but also at fairs, exhibitions, rodeos, pageants, Wild West shows, and other events ranging from the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago to the 4th of July Fair in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

This opening of boundaries was followed by a thorough conceptual remapping of America. This was also the time when cultural evolutionism gave way to diffusionist models in anthropology, and the concept of the culture area replaced older, hierarchical stepladder models of cultural evolution. A culture area in anthropology usually denotes a large geographical region whose inhabitants share similar or related culture traits, such as locally specific subsistence patterns, material culture, social organization, and religion.⁶ The concept emerged in the course of American anthropology’s search for spatial representations of the indigenous cultures of North America in exhibition spaces after the closing of the frontier (Boas 1887a, 1887b, 1887c, 1893, Mason 1887, 1894, 1896). The dominant model of Native North America with ten distinct culture areas goes back to Alfred Kroeber (1931; 1939), a student of Franz Boas and professor of anthropology at Berkeley. The concern of anthropologists around the turn of the twentieth century and into the next two decades was to move anthropology away from evolutionist armchair speculation and turn it into an academic discipline firmly positioned in universities and museums:

6 Language, however, is not a part of the culture area concept. In some areas, such as the Northwest Coast, societies with very similar economies and social organization spoke totally unrelated languages, whereas in other cases, societies as diverse as the foraging bands of Ute and the Aztec empire spoke languages belonging to the same stock (Darnell 2004).

[...] modern anthropology is an inductive science with a minimum of speculation; [...] it aims at truly historical reconstructions and is beginning to achieve them; and [...] it lies in the nature of its tasks to distinguish and analyze the several native culture-areas or local types of Indians before proceeding to conclusions based on combinations. (Kroeber 1922: 10).

A second concern, related to the professionalization of the discipline, was to popularize its findings. Anthropologists sought to educate the public and replace both the European romanticisms of the noble Indian and the American wartime stereotypes of the fierce, cruel, blood-thirsty savage with more sober and differentiated images and knowledge about the Native tribes of North America:

[A generation ago] few anthropological monographs on Indian tribes had been written, but it is doubtful if such publications are to be found in New England village libraries even today, and it is more than doubtful that if they were in the libraries anybody would read them; anthropologists themselves have been known not to read them. Between these forbidding monographs and the legends of Fenimore Cooper, what is there then to read [...] for anyone who just wants to know more about Indians? (Parsons 1922: 1)

From there, the culture area concept quickly made it into popular science literature, especially books about “Indians” written for children and young adults. Today, the culture area mainly surfaces as a convention of representing cultures in maps in the context of museum and historical representations.

The culture area was a dominant culture concept and an ambitious intellectual endeavor. It is relevant for the issues discussed in this article because it reflects the contradictory situation wherein anthropology as a discipline benefitted from and yet challenged the legitimacy of conquest and colonialism. Mapping cultures in geographic synchronicity rather than placing them on an evolutionary stepladder means to assign each culture an “original” territory. It is an ambivalent reconceptualization of the relation between culture, time, and space. It suggests an isomorphism of culture and location and a bounded coexistence of cultures—a concept strangely out of sync with the blend and mixture of people, practices, and objects that were the cultural reality in turn-of-the-century America. By now the culture area concept has been thoroughly criticized in the course of the self-reflexive turn in anthropology (Gupta and Ferguson 1992 and 1997). At the time, however, it was the wrong concept to represent the right idea: talking to the American public and to a globalizing scientific community, not to the indigenous people it sought to represent, it

made an important departure from the evolutionist legitimization of conquest and colonization. The culture area concept demonstrated visibly that the North American continent prior to the conquest was not a *terra nullius*, a land belonging to no-one. Quite to the contrary, it was still inhabited by people who had been there *before* the advent of Europeans, and contrary to contemporary stereotypes, it proved that these people had been using the land successfully in accordance with its natural features for a very long time.



Fig. 1: Typical example for an image of Native American culture areas.

Paradoxically, at the same time as this concept gained its foothold in anthropology, many indigenous people had been displaced coercively, or they started to dislocate. For a whole array of reasons, many left their homelands and traveled to the urban coastal centers or to Europe as performers in Wild West shows, fairs, and “Völkerschauen” (ethnic exhibits). Others, such as the Inuit hunter Allakariallak, performed in films such as *Nanook* (1922) directed by Robert Flaherty, or *In the Land of the Headhunters* (1914) directed by the famous photographer Edward Sherriff Curtis. The exploitation of Native people in the production of their own representations in the context of American post-frontier popular culture has been thoroughly criticized in recent years: representations of Native Americans in turn-of-the-century new media reinforced the colonial gaze and founded a tradition in the Western

media of commodifying Native people and their culture, turning them into victims of distorted images (Dilworth 1997; Francis 1992; Hirschfelder 1999; Howard and Pardue 1997; Wrobel et al. 2001; Weston 1996). However, beyond what most authors assume to be the prime motivating factor, namely the economic pressure on the poverty-stricken Indian reservations, this tells us very little about the motives that induced Native people to engage in these popular stagings. With the following case study I aim to provide a “thicker description” (Geertz 1973) of Native engagement in American post-frontier culture. I want to show that despite the adverse conditions, Native people were far from disappearing or breaking down culturally during the reservation period and the globalization wave around 1900. Instead, they participated in the staging of American pop culture and infused it with their own agency.

4. Lac Courte Oreilles: an alternative media history

Ojibwe-Dakota contact and conflict and the forced pacification of the “middle ground”

In terms of the culture area concept, the Ojibwe, Chippewa, or Anishinaabe Indians of what today is the U.S. State of Wisconsin can be said to inhabit a fringe area, a historical and cultural “middle ground” on the border between the “Northeast” (also called „Eastern Woodlands“) and the adjacent western “Plains.” As already outlined in the introduction, by “middle ground,” Richard White means a certain space, the Great Lakes area of the United States, as well as a certain period of time, roughly between 1650 and 1815, in which Europeans and Indians met and, in the course of the all-encompassing fur trade, and against the odds of alienness and non-understanding, constructed a common, mutually comprehensible, and, more importantly, mutually accommodating world. The “middle ground” consisted of creative misunderstandings in which Indians and Europeans attempted to build a set of mutually understandable practices. Following this phase, White asserts, accommodation and shared meaning broke down and the Indians were recreated as alien and exotic (White 1991).

The Native people living in the woodland area of the Great Lakes traditionally hunted, fished, gathered wild rice, and cultivated small gardens. They made skilled use of birch bark (“wigwass”) to construct lightweight containers (“wigwassi-makak”), frame boats (“wigwass-tchiman”), and characteristic dome-shaped houses (“wigwassiwigamigon”), today known as “wigwam.” In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Algonquian-speaking Ojibwe located around Sault Ste. Marie acted as middlemen, traders, and brokers between the French colonists in the East and the Siouan-speaking Dakota in the West, acquiring for themselves a comfortable position in the

trans-regional fur trade. The Dakota were at that time economically adapted to the Woodlands, hunting, fishing, and gathering wild rice just as their Eastern Ojibwe neighbors did in the area of Wisconsin and Minnesota. However, when the French by-passed the Ojibwe in the course of the mid-eighteenth century and started trading directly with the Dakota, the cooperation between the groups came to a screeching halt and the region west and south of the western tip of Lake Superior became a contested territory in a long-lasting guerilla war between Ojibwe and Dakota hunters. As the Dakota were driven west, their culture changed. They adopted the characteristic Plains culture of specialized bison hunters that had evolved after the introduction of horses by the Spanish in the seventeenth century. In the course of the eighteenth century, the Ojibwe extended their hunting and trapping range into the interior of the woodland south of Lake Superior, which the Dakota had been driven out of, and around 1745, a group of Ojibwe hunters formed a settlement at the lake known to the French as Lac Courte Oreilles.⁷ This settlement became permanent and grew in size after the French trader Michel Cadotte, who had married into an influential Ojibwe family, established a trading post at Lac Courte Oreilles.

In 1825, the United States invited the Ojibwe, Dakota, and other Indian groups to meet at Prairie du Chien to negotiate a treaty of “peace and friendship.”

In actuality, the federal government was interested in stabilizing the area for western expansion and acquiring land from the Ojibwe. However, before it could begin cession treaties, it first had to establish tribal boundaries. Ojibwe-Dakota enmity was a convenient pretext. (Loew 2001: 58).

In ensuing treaties of 1837 and 1842, the Ojibwe were forced into surrendering a vast territory, “almost two-thirds of present-day northern Wisconsin, a portion of central Minnesota, and much of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula” (Loew 2001: 60). Another treaty signed in 1854 established four Ojibwe reservations in Wisconsin,⁸ among them Lac Courte Oreilles with its rich hunting grounds, hundreds of little lakes, and ample wild rice beds. However, the fur trade which had contributed to the expansion of the Ojibwe into Wisconsin and to their acquiring European goods such as wool blankets, metal axes, knives, kettles, firearms, and alcohol, did not last forever.

7 The term “Lac Courte Oreilles,” (Lake of the Short Ears), goes back to the French name for the Ottawa who they called *courte oreilles*, short ears, because they did not adhere to the custom of wearing long, heavy earrings like other Native groups and, therefore, did not have long earlobes.

8 At the time, two Ojibwe groups, the bands at Sokoagon (Mole Lake) and St. Croix, were left out because they did not sign the treaty of 1854. They remained landless until the mid-1930’s when small reservations were parceled out for them under presidential executive order (Lurie 2002; Loew 2001: 78).

After the boom years: tourism in the former cut-over district

Soon after the establishment of reservations, timber companies began “harvesting” the forest in northwestern Wisconsin, resulting in what today is known as an almost complete cut-over at the close of the nineteenth century. After unsuccessful attempts to farm the so-called “cut-over district,” local business began to look at other sources of income, mainly tourism.⁹ Forest regeneration was an important context to this new development (Kates 2001). The former stopping posts used by lumberjacks on their way to work were turned into vacation cabins. Situated in scenic spots, they had sufficient infrastructure to appeal to the many day- and weekend trippers that were drawn to the area by railway from the 1890s onwards. The main attraction were the many little lakes with their large population of muskellunge and walleye, large predatory fish which were (and still are) particularly attractive to sport fishermen. Even Chicago mobster Al Capone had a vacation home in the backwoods of the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Indian Reservation in Wisconsin, and his hit men went on outdoor trips hunting deer with machine guns (Bender 2011: 85; Swift 1953: 1).

The people of Lac Courte Oreilles who participated in the newly emerging, post-frontier culture like everybody else. They went to the movies, played basketball and organized dance nights (Loew 1998). They also tried to gain a foothold in the new tourism business and worked as tour and fishing guides, rented out cabins, and engaged in “Indian dances” staged specifically for tourists (Rasmussen 1998). They also made some money by selling deer to sport hunters who had spent their weekend drinking and partying with their buddies, and, come Sunday afternoon, were pressed to obtain a deer or two to take home to their wives as evidence for their actually having gone hunting (gaiashkibos, personal communication, September 2013). As tourism became the most important source of revenue in Northwest Wisconsin, local business succeeded in organizing bigger events, such as large Wild West shows and Indian Fairs, in order to draw tourists.

The “middle ground” and cultures of feasting

In the Native cultures of the Great Lakes area, feasting traditionally accompanied (and still accompanies) the main stages of life: the naming of a baby, the coming of age of young people (especially first-kill ceremonies for boys), marriage, and death (Densmore 1910–1913; Ritzenthaler and

9 For accounts of contemporary Native tourism engagement, see, for example, Lindner 2013; Ryan and Aitken 2005; West 1998; and, closest to the point I am trying to make, Phillips 1998.

Ritzenthaler 1970; Ritzenthaler 1978; Vennum 1982). The seasonal ceremonies of the Big Drum society and the passing of individuals through the different hierarchical stages of the Midewin healing society are also accompanied by feasts, i.e. drumming, singing, dancing, and the preparation and communal consumption of traditional food such as wild rice and venison. This culture of Native feasting came in touch with and fed into tourism and American popular culture; the Native strategy of dealing with this seems to have been a compartmentalization. While some types of feasts went out of sight, others changed and came to allow for the encounter with different cultural influences that had been present in the area since the years of early colonization. In the arenas of these public celebrations, the “middle ground” was revived.

Making peace during the war game

An important model for big shows in this area was Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, a kind of traveling circus which came to the southern shore of Lake Superior in 1896, 1898, and 1900. “Buffalo Bill,” whose real name was William Frederick Cody (1846–1917), was an U.S. army scout, professional bison killer, and show man who became famous for the Wild West shows he organized. Cody drew the largest crowds and seeing himself as an “instant popular historian of the American West and a conciliator between the old enemies” (Christian F. Feest, personal communication, November 2015), he enlisted Native people in large numbers to participate on stage even though Indian commissioner Cato Sells did not approve of it because he found the practice “dangerous” and detrimental to his ambitions to turn them into regular U.S. citizens (Loew 1998: 203–206). The show’s program usually consisted of re-enactments of frontier wars. However, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West was not only a “show” or “fake” in the sense that Theodor Adorno would use the term “Schein” in his critique of the *Kulturindustrie*. Cody himself had been an army scout and seen combat, just like some of the people appearing on stage, both Indian and white, had really participated in historic battles, such as the famous Lakota leader Sitting Bull or the cavalry officer Captain John Gregory Bourke, an early anthropologist who wrote the first account of the Hopi Snake Dance (Bourke 1884). Also, as the Ojibwe historian and journalist Patricia Loew reconstructed from old newspaper publications, in 1896 the Native people used Buffalo Bill’s stage for an important historic reconciliation. They induced Cody to facilitate “an historic ‘peace treaty’ between the [Ojibwe] and representatives of the Sioux [...] who were traveling with him.” (Loew 1998: 206–207) This peace ceremony concluded approximately two hundred years of intermittent war over land and resources between the Dakota and the Ojibwe. A reporter who had been invited by Cody described the proceedings in detail:

The Sioux chiefs repaired to their tepees, put on their (face) paint and feathers, produced their pipes and other paraphernalia and awaited their guests. The Chippewa similarly prepared, marched into the space reserved for the meeting, several hundred strong, and the representations of the two great tribes met face to face (...). (Loew 1998: 206–207).

The Indians formalized the peace agreement not with a written document but with the presentation and exchange of sacred pipes.

There was no levity, no laughter. Every Chippewa and Sioux listened intently, with solemn faces (...). The ceremonies were as formal and impressive as a meeting between the representatives of foreign governments. (Loew 1998: 206–207).



Fig. 2: Photographic image, probably cut-and-pasted from other photos, reconstructing the peace conference between the Ojibwe and the Dakota as a postcard motif.

Indian Fairs: Patriotism and Native Ritual in Disguise

Another public arena that Native people redefined for themselves in the early decades of the twentieth century were so-called Indian Fairs, which took place in many reservations all over the country. Serving exactly the opposite purpose of the Wild West shows with their celebration of a glorious past, an Indian Fair was a kind of local agricultural and industrial show, usually organized

by an Indian agent in cooperation with his network, i.e. the government farmer, in order to demonstrate to the outside world and the Native people alike the latter's progress on their way to "civilization" by becoming farmers after abandoning their traditional hunting and gathering activities. However, most Native people in the Great Lakes area did not see themselves as passive wards and pupils of a "civilized" lifestyle. They maintained (some even well into the present) a mixed economy combining wage labor, hunting, fishing, gathering wild rice, and selling bead work, birch bark products, and maple sugar to tourists. This agency translates into how they presented themselves at Indian Fairs. The reporting in the Sawyer County Record (SCR), the local newspaper of the Hayward-Lac Courte Oreilles area since the early 1900s, demonstrates that it took Lac Courte Oreilles-people only a couple of years to get the Indian Fair into their own hands and re-define it into a well-known Lac Courte Oreilles arts and crafts show.

Indian Fairs in Lac Courte Oreilles

The first Lac Courte Oreilles Indian Fair took place on October 14 and 15, 1914 in the village of Reserve. The voice of the local news report is patronizing, and the Native people seem more or less the objects of this event.

That the Indians on the Court Oreilles reservation can accomplish as much as their white brothers in the agricultural line is evident from the first annual fair. (Hayward Republican, 15.10.1914)

The center of attention is the Indian Commissioner mentioned earlier, Cato Sells, who appears as the prime agent of the show:

The interest taken by the Indians is a gratifying indication of the responsive sentiment among the Indians to the appeal of Commissioner Cato Sells, looking toward the industrial advancement and self-support. (Hayward Republican, 15.10.1914)

Over the years, the news reporting became more extensive as well as more enthusiastic in tone. In 1916, the Sawyer County Record devoted three front-page columns and two-thirds of a page in the inner section of the paper to the Indian Fair, which took place on September 29 and 30. The report offers an impression of the events and atmosphere. The Fair program started each morning at 10 am and went on until 4 pm. After a morning "Parade by Indians headed by Band," the first day was devoted to funny games or tournaments such as "climbing greasy pole by boys," "sack race, potato race, elephant race, tug of war," and also footraces and boat races. On the second day, the

parade was followed by an agricultural exhibit and the presentation of awards, a parade of the prize-winning livestock, a game of the Indian ball sport Lacrosse, a game of baseball “Reservation Indians vs. School” and a “toggle game between women.” The fair committee and the award jury consisted, with only a few exceptions, of people from Lac Courte Oreilles as can be inferred from their last names such as Gokey, Billyboy, Cloud (Anakwad) and others. The Sawyer County Record also provides a long list of the winners in competition categories specially referring to Native arts and crafts such as “best pair beaded moccasins,” “best beaded belts,” “best hand made reed mat,” and “best Indian costume” for men and women. A school demonstration (“best 20 sentences about the horse”) and a “Baby Show” granting an award to the prettiest, best-nourished baby completed the agricultural show in 1916. In 1917, the fair was advertised by the first ever photographic picture printed in the Sawyer County Record, an image that must have met Ojibwe approval: it shows an Ojibwe man of middle age in a self-assured, confident posture wearing traditional Ojibwe clothing with floral embroidery and moccasins.

A 1919 soldier’s homecoming celebration

The biggest Indian Fair in Lac Courte Oreilles took place after the end of World War I on June 19, 1919, honoring forty-six homecoming soldiers. “The committees in charge are completing the plans for this big event which will draw large crowds from various places in Northern Wisconsin,” the Sawyer County Record announced. A Catholic mass by Reverend Doherty from St. Paul was followed by a procession and a big feast for all the Indian soldiers. Afterwards, speeches were given by Billy Boy from Lac Courte Oreilles, and by guests from other reservations: Horace Greeley from Bad River, Frank Bressette from Redcliff, and Frank Wishcob from Lac du Flambeau. The speeches were then responded to by addresses by the Senator of the State of Wisconsin, the Sawyer County sheriff, and the Indian Commissioner. Finally, even the governor of Wisconsin, who had already welcomed a delegation from Lac Courte Oreilles in 1915, spoke.¹⁰ The speeches were followed by “Indian Victory dances and Indian games” and music by the Hayward City Band. Pictures taken at the event capture the spirit of the occasion as a multi-layered event between solemn ceremony and cheerful festivity.

On one picture, the young World War I soldiers can be seen standing in a half circle around a group of elderly men in festive dress. Some of them wear Plains-style feather headdresses. In the center foreground, Ira O. Isham, the Ojibwe-English interpreter of Lac Courte Oreilles, presents himself, reclining

10 Photograph “Gov. Phillipp & Chippewa in conference (Nov, 1915 – 21),” State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison: Whi (W6) 6329.

to one side like a Roman patriarch. Other, more snapshot-like pictures show people from Lac Courte Oreilles and non-Indians enjoying the outdoor party, the nice weather, and the crowd.

Although they are monochromes, the images suggest the brightness of the Native regalia, some of which look not at all “traditional.” A group of five women, for instance, present themselves in flashy dresses and face the photographer with confident smiles while in the background an American flag is flying in the wind.



Fig. 3: Snapshots from the 1919 homecoming celebration honoring Lac Courte Oreilles soldiers who participated in World War I.

Photographs of important Chippewa spokespersons, such as Johnny Frogg who is introduced as “Chippewa Dancer,” and Billy Boy, introduced as “Chippewa Speaker,” show the mixing of styles. Billy Boy is wearing an outfit that features a mix of Western, Ojibwe, and Plains-style elements: a Plains-style straight-up feather headdress and an Ojibwe-style, richly beaded bandoleer bag with floral pattern on a bright background. Even the corpulent governor, who was, on this occasion, adopted into the tribe, wears a feather headdress.

Last Thursday was the biggest day ever experienced on the Court O’Reilles [sic] reservation when on that day 2.500 people assembled in a Victory celebration in honor of the Indian boys who served in the world war. The Indian village was tastefully decorated for the occasion [...]. Chief Billy Boy, who was master of ceremonies held by the Indians, made our governor one of the chiefs of the Chippewa tribe, giving him the name of Pug-o-ne-gi-zik, meaning, Hole in the Day.¹¹ Three moving picture machines were busy throughout the day making films of this unique celebration.¹² (SCR 26.06.1919)

But the solemn patriotism and the carnival party atmosphere were only two layers of an event that seems to have been even more complex. In the background, unbeknownst to the Indian Commissioner and the governor, an important revitalization cult, a ceremony fostering peace and regeneration, took place: Lac Courte Oreilles received a sacred instrument, a drum that would be used in a kind of ceremony called either Dream Dance or Drum Dance. Gaiashkibos, grandson of one of the World War I-veterans, recalls:

My grandfather, Alec James, was one of the soldiers honored at that occasion. He was in that war. And at the time of that Victory Celebration, a Dream Drum was given to us. That’s where that Soldier’s Drum came from. (gaiashkibos, personal communication, April 2014).

The Dream or Drum Dance is a religious complex or cult that originated on the Plains and was brought to the Ojibwe of Wisconsin by their Western neighbors, the Dakota, in the 1870s. It is based on the story of a young Dakota girl who tried to flee white soldiers after a battle but was trapped

11 Hole-in-the-Day seems to be an ambivalent name in Ojibwe historical context. It means “solar eclipse” as well as “rays of sunlight shining through a round hole in the clouds.” It is also the name of an important historical leader of the Leech Lake Ojibwe in Minnesota who had pleaded that his people join the Dakota Uprising in Minnesota, the so-called “Sioux Wars” in 1862 (Warren 1885: 504).

12 I researched the films in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, but unfortunately, it seems that the film reels have not survived.

in a lake. This story is also illustrative of the traditional Ojibwe concept of distributed creativity in human-spirit interaction in the creation of a new ritual performance:

There she stayed for 6 to 10 days, hidden by lily pads, neither eating nor drinking. Finally, the spirit took her up to the sky, where he told her about the Drum Dance. He explained how the ceremony was to be carried on and gave certain ethical instructions; he told her that peace would occur between all Indians and Whites if she induced her people to perform this ritual. Although she had been close to death, when she awoke, she was cured. (Ritzenthaler 1978: 755–756)

The ceremony itself revolves around a number of sacred drums. These drums have a long and partly legendary history of migration, a trans-tribal ritual circulation throughout the Upper Midwest:

Tailfeather Woman's revelation was explicit in its instructions for the future: the Drum was to be passed on to establish intertribal peace and brotherhood. In accordance with the wishes of the Great Spirit, then, the Drum Dance was actively disseminated from the Ojibwa to other tribes and within the next fifty years the proliferation of Drums would be great. As Drum members describe it: 'Them Drums, they keep travelling, keep travelling. They got to keep them so long; maybe four years. After four years come, you know, you got to pass them on.' (Vennum 1982: 70)

With the help of his interlocutor John Bisonette, ethnomusicologist Thomas Vennum reconstructed the path of the drum throughout the Midwest:

Since the Sioux presented the first Drum to the Ojibwa, its travel was set in motion from west to east. Once the Wisconsin Ojibwa, Menominee, and Potawatomi had been reached circa 1875–1880, the line of travel turned to the south, toward the Winnebago, and then west. The Fox in Iowa, who had received it from the Wisconsin Potawatomi, in turn transferred it to the Potawatomi in Kansas, who then brought it to Oklahoma, and so on. (Vennum 1982: 73)

Among the drums that appeared in Lac Courte Oreilles was the Soldiers' Drum, the Veterans or Warriors' Drum:

Many Tribal People ask about the Drum as it makes its way through the Indian Community. The Drum itself was constructed in the early

1900's about a year before the end of World War I. As the story goes, an Indian woman named 'Nazhinequay' had re-occurring dreams and had approached a Tribal elder for interpretation of the dream. She was told that one of the servicemen would not return from overseas, and did not want people to forget about those soldiers who would not return. So this Drum was constructed for those who had given their lives to preserve freedom. (Honor the Earth Powwow Committee 1991).

According to the memories of Lac Courte Oreilles tribal member Donald Wolf, it was his grandmother Angeline Wolf (Maingan) whose dreams initiated the construction of the drum; therefore her family kept the watch over the drum as it was passed around:

The Wolf family has taken care of the drum ever since but the veterans have a say as to where it will go and for what purpose. (History Comes Alive n.d.)

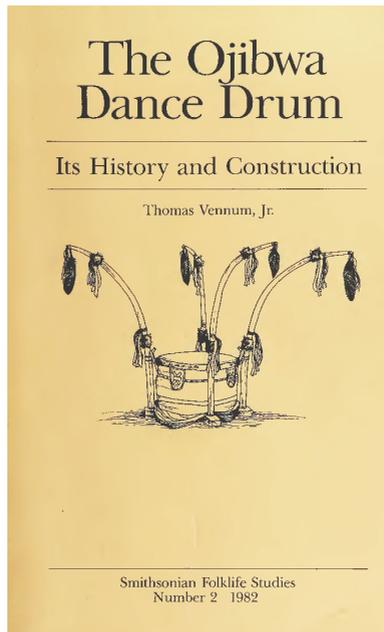


Fig. 4: Sketch of an Ojibwe dance drum on the cover of Thomas Vennum's classic on Ojibwe drums (Vennum 1982). The drums are characteristically supported off the ground with four stakes and decorated with symbolic paintings, beadwork, and, on ceremonial occasions, also with eagle feathers.

The appearance of dances accompanied by large drums worried the local whites, especially reservation personnel, because they sounded like rebellion and war. Many confused these new circulating dances with the Ghost Dance, the messianic pan-Indian movement that swept the reservations in the late 1880s until it was suppressed in the massacre at Wounded Knee (Mooney 1896). Moving the ceremony away from the public and making sure that whites had no access to it, ensured its survival through the decades. Today, the ceremony formerly known as Dream Dance is called Big Drum and take place four times a year at the changes of the seasons. Like many religious activities in Native communities, Big Drum, even though attended by many people, is not open to the public in the same way that a Catholic mass is. In part, this secrecy serves to protect the ceremony from people, be they Indian or white, who attend without the proper attitude of peace, responsibility, and mutual help. However, the anxiety with which these ceremonies are kept out of sight is also a result of the legislation that outlawed Indian ceremonial activities under the pain of imprisonment in the 1880s.

The Apostle Island Indian Pageant (1924–1928)

Sacred drums similar to the one that was at the center of the hidden ceremony on June 19, 1919, also appear in the context of another big public event that was staged on the shores of Lake Superior between 1924 and 1928: the so-called *Apostle Island Indian Pageant*. Madeline Island, located approximately three miles off the southern coast of Lake Superior, is the largest of the Apostle Islands and a sacred place for the Ojibwe. According to one of their most important legends, they were led to this place in ancient times and shown to the ample rice beds of the adjacent Chequamegon Bay. The history museum on Madeline Island, which is operated by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin,¹³ provides documentation of a series of big shows staged in the area between 1924 and 1928, the *Apostle Island Indian Pageant*. It began as an event to attract motoring tourists to the Bayfield area. Pageant officials in cooperation with steamship companies, railroads, and tourism bureaus organized what they advertised as the “number one tourist entertainment of America for 1924” at Red Cliff Bay:

Seven hundred members of the Ojibwe tribe from the four northern Wisconsin reservations built scenery, handcrafted props, made costumes and performed in the pageant. In 1924, pageant promoters predicted the audience for the event at over 200,000 people, sparking a flurry of campground and hotel development. Crowds

13 The website of the *Madeline Island Museum*, a Wisconsin Historic Site, <http://madelineislandmuseum.wisconsinhistory.org/> [Accessed on 14. December 2015].

fell well short of that goal, numbering around 15,000 and leaving the corporation in debt. The pageant recovered temporarily, staging its final performances in 1928. (Madeline Island Museum text)

Ojibwe people from all reservations participated in these events. At the time of my ethnographic research between 1997 and 2007, of course, most of the original participants had already passed away. Still, in 2001, I talked to Alex Gokey, an aged Ojibwe gentleman from Redcliff, the small Ojibwe reservation on the southern shore of Lake Superior. Alex Gokey recalled that as a child, he participated in a big Indian pageant in Ashland, where hundreds of Indians in splendid Native regalia performed dances for tourists. The most important event he recalled, however, was that he got to witness several religious rituals that were under criminal prosecution of the Religious Crimes Act, but were on this occasion conducted safely in the disguise of “Indian Dancing.” Some pictures taken during the pageant show a group of Ojibwe in traditional regalia gathered around a ceremonial drum. Its proper use, however, was outlawed by the patronizing Indian administrators, who feared that Indian dancing could revive defiant practices such as preparation for war or shamanistic rituals.

I can see & understand how our people would hold a ceremony right under the nose of the Indian agent. Bill Baker¹⁴ and my Dad told me they used to put blankets over the windows & have ceremonies in the dead of night! (gaiashkibos, personal communication June 2014)



Fig. 5: Men posed around sacred drum at Apostle Island pageant, probably 1924.

14 William Bineshi Baker, Sr., was also Tom Vennum’s most important consultant (Vennum 1982).

Staging myth: The 1949 Mammoth Pageant in Lac Courte Oreilles

Over the years, Native leaders and organizers overtook the organization and successfully staged Indian pageants themselves. Among the participants appearing on the stages of these Indian-organized shows and dances are some who later became important in the political history of Lac Courte Oreilles of Indian Country as a whole. In fact, some of the leaders, activists, and spokespeople who engaged themselves in the American Indian Movement of the 1970s and in the seminal legal battle known as Treaty Rights struggle or “Walleye War” (Nesper 2002), first trained their attitude and demeanor in the context of touristic presentations. The 1949 Mammoth Pageant in Lac Courte Oreilles can be seen as one of these events. It also throws light on the important role of Native women as organizers and contributors to these events.

In 1949, the local newspaper Sawyer County Record announced in its first July issue the beginning of the seasonal Indian powwow dances on Thursday night. This year, the paper promised, the Indians would stage a special event, a “mammoth pageant,” a big narrative show that was going to be staged every Saturday and Sunday on the big fair grounds in Hayward.¹⁵ The newspaper report is unusually wordy:

The pageant opens with an Indian powwow as one sees in modern times. Sam Frogg, narrator, leads his grandson, one of the solo dancers, to a hill where he relates to him the legend of the tribe from the time previous to the coming of the white man up to the present. The dancers immediately change back in character to those of their forefathers and the action of the story begins. Throughout the story many beautiful ceremonies are enacted. Richard DeNemie, who plays the part of the chief, tells many stories in sign language. (SCR, 07.07.1949).

Among others, we find the name of a young boy who would later grow into the prominent Ojibwe medicine man, political activist, and cultural educator, Edward Benton-Benai:

Edward Benton is the star dancer. He gives the audience an Eagle Dance of the Southwest and a Hoop Dance. It took a little 3-year-old boy in Indian costume to steal the show from an array of excellent

¹⁵ It seems that staging myths as plays was not an uncommon means used by Native groups who attempted to make the Native point of view understood by a non-Native audience. Feest, for instance, reconstructs the adoption of the Pocahontas myth in a play staged annually between 1881 and 1915 by Pamunkey Indians of Virginia (Feest 1987).

dancers. The small boy dances with the men and uses a hoop in a solo dance. After the narrator carries us from early history to the present time, the pageant ends with the same *powwow* of modern times that one saw at the beginning of the evening. (SCR, 21.07.1949).

Edward Benton-Banai is one of the founders of the American Indian Movement, arguably the most influential movement that has led to self-identity, pride, and revival of American Indian culture for the last generation of Anishinabe people,¹⁶ and acted as its spiritual leader. He is the presiding Grand Chief of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge, a healing society with its own homepage. He is also active in education: he holds a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Minnesota and founded the Red School House, an Indian-controlled school for children from kindergarten to high school diploma located in Minneapolis (Davies 2013). He published a children's book series about traditional Ojibwe culture, the *Mishomis Book*, *mishomis* meaning "grandfather" in Ojibwe (Benton-Banai 1979).

Usually, the Sawyer County Record did not mention the name of the organizer of the Indian Dances, unless he was a white person. It seemed that the Indian Dances just took place without any considerable organizational expertise to get them on stage. However, in this article we find the name of the organizer, Saxon Grace Benjamin, "a member of the local tribe who has directed other pageants in North Dakota and Oklahoma." (SCR, 07.07.1949). I spent a considerable amount of time researching this name in the archives, until I found it by accident—in my own ethnographic interviews. In the year of 2000, I had interviewed Saxon St. Germaine, the mother of former Lac Courte Oreilles Tribal Chairman and University of Wisconsin professor of Native American History, Rick St. Germaine. I had become aware of her as the co-editor of a couple of small activist newsletters, *We-Sa-Mi-Dong* and *Bimikawe*, produced in Lac Courte Oreilles in the 1990s. In the notes to my interview, I read that her father's name had been Ernest Benjamin. At this point, it dawned on me that I had spoken to the woman who was the organizer of the Lac Courte Oreilles-mammoth pageant. In the interview she mentioned that her father, who was of Scottish descent, had run one of the first self-organized day schools for Indian children in Lac Courte Oreilles. Her mother, an Ojibwe woman born in Redcliff on the shores of Lake Superior in 1914, had been a gifted crafts person, determined to get herself an education:

My mother [...] was always determined that she was gonna be educated. She bought a book called 'High School Self-Taught' [...]

16 <http://www.three-fires.net/tfn/leadership.htm> [Accessed on 25. April 2014].

and I would sit there and explain it and she would ask questions and finally she'd say, 'I got it!' and she had it. And she wouldn't forget it, either. She was always reading the newspaper. She could do anything. They'd always get a 'First' at the Fair, they'd set up a booth and she'd decorate it [she smiles]. She just surprised a lot of people because she was very dark, you know. (Interview Saxon St. Germaine 2001)

The last remark of Saxon St. Germaine about her accomplished, gifted, self-taught mother who "surprised a lot of people, because she was very dark," illustrates the everyday racism of the time. "Dark" meant "dark-skinned," i.e. a person without or with only little Euro-American ancestry. Such "full-bloods" were construed to be more traditional, withdrawn from outside contact, and inclined to cling to the "old ways." However, in the case of Lac Courte Oreilles' engagement with local tourism we can see not only Saxon Benjamin-St. Germaine's mother but also other traditional people, especially some known as "medicine men," act as agents and brokers of cultural representations on public stage.

Thursday powwows in Historyland

An important broker cooperating with the Ojibwe people from Lac Courte Oreilles was the local Italian businessman and entrepreneur Anthony Wise. Wise founded the vacation park Telemark in 1947, and in 1973 brought the international Birkebeiner Cross Country Ski race to the Hayward area. Together with elders and medicine people from Lac Courte Oreilles, among them the well-known and widely respected James "Pipe" Mustache, Wise designed Historyland, a culture center on the outskirts of Hayward where Lac Courte Oreilles-people sold arts and crafts and staged dances for tourists (SCR, 21.11.1974).

Many people who later became leaders and political representatives of Lac Courte Oreilles, earned their first money and received their first training in self-confident representation on this stage, among them, for example, gaiashkibos, who later was to become Tribal Chairman and President of the National Congress of American Indians, the oldest and most important national political representation of Native people in the United States. After Historyland was abandoned, gaiashkibos initiated the purchase of one of the buildings from Historyland, the reconstruction of a lumber cook shanty. For years, the "show building" served an important spiritual purpose: it was used as a Big Drum Hall, an assembly house for the ceremonies of the Big Drum society until it was destroyed by arson by a tribal member in June 2012. The assault caused heated emotional debates within the reservation public about

the motifs of the perpetrator and those that were purportedly “behind” his action, but the circumstances remain too mysterious to allow comment from the perspective of anthropological research at this point.

Pipe Mustache, one of the medicine people who had been instrumental in the development of Historyland, was an important mentor and spiritual guide for Paul DeMain, the Ojibwe-Oneida CEO and Managing Editor of *IndianCountryTV.com* and the national bi-monthly newspaper *News From Indian Country*. Before he started his own media business in 1986, Paul DeMain was the editor of the tribal newsletter of Lac Courte Oreilles and served as the first State of Wisconsin Policy Advisor on Indian Affairs of then Governor Anthony S. Earl. In order to support DeMain spiritually in this key position in the political communication between the tribes and the political establishment of Wisconsin, Pipe Mustache gave him the spiritual name “skabewis,” meaning “messenger.” This term is also the designation for the assistant and apprentice of a main ritual specialist during a ceremony. For many years, a portrait of Pipe Mustache wearing a Plains-style feather headdress was part of the newspaper logo of one of Paul DeMain’s publications, the regional paper *Ojibwe Akiing* (Bender 2011).



Fig. 6: A 2004 front page of the Native newspaper *Ojibwe Akiing*, featuring, in the upper left corner, a picture of the Ojibwe medicine man and spiritual advisor of editor Paul DeMain, James “Pipe” Mustache wearing a Plains style feather headdress.

5. Traditions of self-representation: continuities into the present

The continuities from tourism to political representation and the circulation of elements between tourism, Native religious practice, and politics are not accidental. In the 1970s and 1980s, Lac Courte Oreilles became an important site of indigenous political activism and, together with other Ojibwe communities, spearheaded the Treaty Rights movement that resulted in a partial restoration of indigenous rights to the use of resources on the vast lands ceded in a series of treaties made with the U.S. government in the course of the nineteenth century. The Native media that emerged in the course of this Native self-affirmation, especially the community radio station WOJB, the print and online media of *News From Indian Country*, the works of editor Paul DeMain, and several official tribal newsletters and tribal online representations, continue to present a Native voice in the canon of mainstream media of the Upper Midwest. The cultural revitalization movement that accompanied the political activism resulted, ultimately, in a tribally controlled and operated education system offering education from kindergarten to a college diploma.

In the regional tourism business, the main imagery employed until today is that of the by-gone Golden Age of the lumber boom celebrated for instance in the annual “Lumberjack Festival.” Sport fishing is represented in grand style by the Hayward Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame, a museum of fishing housed in a giant muskellunge-fish.



Fig. 7: Hayward Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame and Museum, the museum of sport fishing, housed in a giant replica of a muskellunge fish,

However, with the opening of its casino the reservation became the central factor in regional tourism. Under the Reagan-administration of 1981–1989, social benefits in general and financial allocations to Native communities in particular were severely reduced. To cover the financial losses, some tribes decided to establish gaming facilities to generate revenue. The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 empowered tribes to run gaming operations, provided the respective federal states permitted gaming. Under the chairmanship of a then-member of the Republican Party, Gaiashkibos, Lac Courte Oreilles was among the first tribes to seize the opportunity and to open its casino facilities in 1995. By 2001, the casino already employed a workforce of 340 Indian and non-Indian workers and payed wages of about \$ 7 million annually (SCR 25.04.2001). The casino also stages cultural events, such as concerts and dances, and provides space for all kinds of tribal meetings, from political conferences to diabetes education and crime prevention.

6. Native American media and distributed creativity

Powwows are originally from Buffalo Bill [he smiles]. [...] The Indians would [...] get in their regalia and put on their feathers and they'd put on a good show for the people that were watching. That's where today's powwows came from. During a time when to practice any other type of ceremony could mean imprisonment [...], these Wild West Shows became the only place the drum beat could be heard. (Interview Joe Martineau, Fond du Lac, 2001)

The historic case studies in the present article illustrate my concept of distributed creativity. Artistic practices of the four different categories listed at the beginning of this article —“tribal, ethnic, Pan-Indian, and Indian mainstream art” (Feest 1992: 14)—co-existed simultaneously as a cultural repertoire to which individuals and groups had different degrees of access. Distributed creativity does not mean that this kind of cultural production took place in a field devoid of power. To the contrary, power was always one of the forces driving circulation and exchange. However, people rarely conformed to the images produced by stereotypical, power-fuelled dichotomies such as “christian vs. pagan” or “traditional vs. progressive.” Instead, they chose among different cultural strategies aimed at participation in the staging of a culture of the “middle ground:” culture-specific rituals, pan-Indian ceremonies, educational efforts, and Native engagement in the post-frontier culture. They infused this “middle ground” with their own agency. In the backstage of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show—the touristic Indian representation par excellence—they conducted a pan-Indian political peace conference. In the backstage area of a patriotic post-World War I homecoming ceremony,

they conducted an important revitalization ceremony. They also inserted themselves into the American discourse of patriotism and sought their own, Native version of it. They sidestepped religious prosecution by disguising their own tribal ceremonies as “Indian Dances.” Participating in tourist dances and fairs, Native people trained themselves in the arts of self-confident self-representation on stage which later fed into the self-confidence of political activism and the fight for indigenous political sovereignty.

The fifth artistic strategy, “indigeneity” as the material manifestation of a conscious global commonality of indigenous people, is ultimately a result of this distributed creativity. “Indigeneity” is the modus in which Native people appear in the global media sphere. Currently most prominent is the recent movement Idle No More that originated in Canada in 2012 in opposition to new environmental legislation affecting Native sovereignty. It quickly spread to reservations and urban Indian communities in the US. In the course of its political action, Idle No More has brought the Native hand drum to public attention through a series of strong-voiced flash mobs performing Native drumming and singing in urban shopping malls in order to make Native claims heard.¹⁷



Fig. 8: Idle No More: Native flash mob protesting in Ottawa shopping mall, December 2012.

17 See, for instance, cell phone videos posted on YouTube and Facebook: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zy-Vp_DDgRw [Accessed on 24. June 2014].

However, the global indigenous movement is aware that distributed creativity also has its perils. Indigenous artists and culture conservation specialists reinforce the concept of cultural authorship and cultural property in order to battle appropriation and limit the “almost exclusive one-way flow of indigenous cultural property into western civilizations” and alleviate the effects of decades and centuries of dispossessing Native communities of their objects (Kuprecht 2014: 5). Designers copy Native designs, such as Navajo rugs, to produce bed-linens, table-cloths, and curtains, while life style magazines advertise these products with stereotypical descriptions. One example can be found in a German magazine, where such items are referred to as “wild und stark” (wild and strong), evoking “Abenteuerlust” (“longing for adventure”) and “Träume von Freiheit” (“dreams of freedom”) (Schöner Wohnen 2014: 24–30). The media circulation of images also enables Native protest against cultural appropriation. Digital media can help facilitate Native access to objects, images, and sounds stored in university archives and museums. However, the general availability of digital images and music recordings becomes problematic when indigenous communities or indigenous cultural professionals decide that the content—rituals, or sacred songs, magic objects—is not suitable for public access. Since these media are usually not controlled by Native communities themselves but by powerful institutions of knowledge, cultural property rights are sometimes a disputed matter between unequal partners. Again, indigenous media engagement is a crucial factor in making these claims visible and audible and strengthening the Native voice in the international museumscape (Lonetree and Cobb 2008; Shannon 2014).

In the view of Ojibwe media professional and historian Patty Loew, the Ojibwe-Dakota peace ceremony in the backstage area of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show underlines claims to indigenous cultural and political sovereignty: “In the minds of the Chippewa, the tribe retained not only a government-to-government relationship, but a separate identity from the United States.” (Loew 1998: 212). From the point of view of media anthropology, it is important to stress the fact that Native people around 1900 were not latecomers from an isolated American interior that struggled to understand media. They were there when media first happened and collaborated in making them happen. In this, they used their technical ingenuity, their stories, and sense of humor. Thus, it does not suffice to speak of an appropriation of Western media through indigenous use. Rather, turn of the century American media and popular culture has to be seen as the result of a cultural collaboration of Native and non-Native actors in the context of power relations—a form of distributed creativity.

List of Images

Fig. 1: Nikater, *Classification of indigenous peoples of North America according to Alfred Kroeber*, 2007. Vector graphic. Wikimedia Commons, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4d/Nordamerikanische_Kulturareale_en.png [Accessed on 19. June 2014].

Fig. 2: *First Peace Council ever Held between Chippewas and Siouxs*, ca. 1896. Postcard, photographic print, 5.5 x 3.5 in. Madison, Wisconsin Historical Society, Whi-95716.

Fig. 3: Snapshots from the 1919 homecoming celebration honoring Lac Courte Oreilles soldiers who participated in World War I. Madison, Wisconsin Historical Society, GW 902 R43–12.

Fig. 4: Thomas Vennum, Cover of *The Ojibwa Dance Drum*, 1982. http://www.sil.si.edu/smithsoniancontributions/Folklife/pdf_lo/SCFS-0002.pdf [Accessed on 16. December 2015].

Fig. 5: Pfefferkorn Studio, *Men in Native Dress Posed Around Sacred Drum at Apostle Island Pageant* [caption on the back: Official Apostle Island Indian Pageant Photo], probably 1924. Postcard, 8.8 x 13.9 cm. Milwaukee, Marquette University, Raynor Memorial Libraries, BCIM image 00885.

Fig. 6: A 2004 front page of the Native newspaper *Ojibwe Akiing*, featuring, in the upper left corner, a picture of the Ojibwe medicine man and spiritual advisor of editor Paul DeMain, James “Pipe” Mustache wearing a Plains style feather headdress. Photo by Cora Bender, 2010.

Fig. 7: Hayward Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame and Museum, the museum of sport fishing, housed in a giant replica of a muskellunge fish, Hayward, WI. Photo by Cora Bender, 2001.

Fig. 8: Idle No More: Native flash mob protesting in Ottawa shopping mall, December 2012. Photo by Aloys Neil Mark Fleischman, Huffington Post.

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