

1. 'Will making movies do the sheep any good?' The afterlife of Native American images

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In 1966, under the auspices of a National Science Foundation grant, anthropologists Sol Worth and John Adair, with their research assistant Richard Chalfen, travelled to Pine Springs, in Dinétah, Arizona, to teach Navajo students how to use film technology for the creation of community-based films and, according to Randolph Lewis, 'to see if the results would reveal a uniquely Navajo perspective' (2012, p. 126). The students produced a series of short, experimental and documentary films, many of which have been preserved. They are important because they demonstrate a Navajo visual aesthetics that diverges from that of mainstream cinema culture. According to Lewis, the filmmakers exhibited 'a sense of intercultural respect that had often been absent from Western ethnographic films about Navajo people' by eschewing close-up shots; filming mock ceremonies rather than actual healing events to avoid offending community members; and shooting long, non-diegetic landscape sequences (p. 127). Although the resulting films might be interpreted by a mainstream audience as boring, confusing, and/or less personal, the Navajo filmmakers used new technology to produce the kinds of visual images that reflected their personal and collective interests and ways of perceiving the world.

Prior to selecting the students, the anthropologists visited Sam Yazzie, a silversmith and healer from Pine Springs, in his *bogan* (traditional Navajo home) to request permission to begin the project. Yazzie asked the filmmakers, through his interpreter, an oft-cited series of questions about the 'use' of film: 'Will making movies do the sheep any harm?' After Worth assured him that it would not, Yazzie asked, 'Will making movies do the sheep any good?' Again, Worth said that it would not. Yazzie responded, 'Then why make movies?' (Worth and Adair, 1997, p. 4). The anthropologists admitted, 'Sam Yazzie's question keeps haunting us' (p. 5). I would like to return to this important provocation, nearly 50 years later, to think about how film, like the work of any cultural production created by or about Native people, impacts upon the world. If we imagine films and other forms of visual culture as 'living' things that change with each screening and with each spectator's interpretation,

then what is at stake when we make, watch, and engage with images of Indigenous peoples? How do we, Indigenous and non-Indigenous spectators alike, continue to be haunted, like Worth and Adair, by the ‘afterlife’ of Native American images? And what kind of public pedagogy do these haunting images – the multiple products of national fantasies such as those attending the Thanksgiving holiday spectacle, Hollywood Indian stereotypes, and the compelling counter-narratives produced by Native American filmmakers – provide us with?

Yazzie did not own any sheep and was not speaking literally about the ways filmmaking would benefit or hurt the actual sheep his neighbours herded. He was posing a theoretical question about the point of filmmaking, one that speaks to Hollywood cinema’s persistence over the last one hundred years in making films about Native people that have been suffused by stereotypes and misinformation. In an attenuated form, Yazzie was asking how filmmaking might do something good for his local community at Pine Springs, the Navajo Nation, and Native people in general – through supporting their values, cultures and languages, or through changing the dominant culture’s perceptions of these peoples. Conversely, he was also questioning whether filmmaking can potentially harm Native people and contribute to the stereotypes already in circulation. Many scholars have argued that Hollywood has created harmful images of Native Americans, even while involving them intimately in filmmaking since its inception, and that these images have negatively impacted the lives of Indigenous people.¹ The first half of this chapter begins with a cautionary tale, a personal anecdote, and extends into an analysis of what is at stake in filmmaking that takes issue with the spectacle of indigeneity. The second half takes up Yazzie’s provocation – whether films ‘do the sheep any good’ – and asks what kinds of responsibilities Native American filmmakers may or may not have towards achieving that aim.

I initially delivered a version of this chapter in London at a conference called ‘Recasting Commodity and Spectacle in the Indigenous Americas’, held on 22 November 2012, the date of the Thanksgiving holiday in the United States. The irony of being a Native American in England on Thanksgiving was not lost on me. A multitude of stories surround this particular holiday – the national fantasy of the peaceful feast that brought together pilgrims from England and Wampanoags from what is now known as Massachusetts in 1621; the practice of English Puritans offering up thanksgiving prayers for the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the 1630s and 1640s; the institution of Thanksgiving as a national holiday by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 in an effort to quell tensions between the North and South in the wake of the Civil War; and, of

1 See, for example, Aleiss (2005), Bataille and Silet (1980), Buscombe (2006), Churchill (1992), Friar and Friar (1972), Kilpatrick (1999) and Singer (2001).

course, the thanksgiving prayers offered up by Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas for millennia to recognise and honour all forms of life on Earth. To this list of Thanksgiving stories, I offered a personal anecdote about the celebration as a segue to discussing the intersection of Native American images and settler colonial popular culture in the US. It was designed to provoke thinking about the production mode of Indigenous films, their distribution, and the mass public's recalcitrant refusal to consider Indigenous history through a different lens (and what this might mean for Native American mediamakers and film scholars).

In November 2008, shortly before Thanksgiving, I submitted the revisions of a book manuscript about Native American directors, actors and spectators from the silent era to the present, and the problems and pleasures of representations of Native Americans in both Hollywood and independent film (Raheja, 2011).² Ironically, within a week afterwards, I became intimately aware of the persistent, sometimes violent afterlife of mainstream images of Native Americans, despite the decline in popularity of the Western and a resurgence in Indigenous filmmaking over the past 20 years. In November 2008 my daughter's kindergarten class reenacted the popular, if completely fictive, Thanksgiving spectacle with children cast as 'Indians' dressed in phantasmic redface costumes and others cast as pilgrims representing friendly, harmless neighbours. This annual event, designed to teach American history and commemorate the national holiday, is part of a 40-year-old school tradition in Claremont, the small college town in southern California where I live. When I asked the school about why this practice persisted when the histories it taught of other marginalised peoples were much less offensive, the ensuing uproar instigated local and national news coverage, threats of violence against my family, and various forms of electronic harassment that have persisted for several years.

Given that so many schools and elementary school systems have given up the racist practice of playing Indian, it was dismaying to learn that it still persists in a number of places in the United States (and continues to this day in Claremont). Imagine, for example, a public school tradition in Germany of dressing children up in Jewish concentration camp costumes and Nazi military regalia in order to teach national history and celebrate the Holocaust. Or dressing children up as African-American slaves and white masters to learn about and commemorate the long, brutal history of slavery in the so-called New World. In response to what was to me an equally surreal spectacle, I consulted with other parents whose children were in the same school district, local Tongva tribal members, colleagues who teach Native American Studies at university level, the Title 7

2 Publication was delayed in order to release the book in the Fall 2011 catalogue with other Indigenous-themed books.

Indian Education organisation in the Los Angeles School District, the National Indian Education Association, and students at my campus's Native American Student Program, all of whom opposed, in particular, the costuming aspect of the school's holiday celebration. As a result of these conversations, I sent a private email to my daughter's teacher expressing surprise at the planned pageant, which would perpetuate misleading mythologies of 'reconciliation' and US history, and constitute what Jonathan Walton calls 'intellectual child abuse' (Walton, 2008). In the email, I explained why my daughter would not be attending school on the day of the spectacle and suggested some age-appropriate alternatives to commemorate the season and teach children more sensitively about values of friendship and expressing gratitude.³

Stereotypical images of Native Americans are predicated on a persistent, wilful ignorance of the richness and diversity of their communities and their manifestation of what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor terms 'survivance' (2008, p. 1) in the face of the world's most devastating genocide, one of epic proportions both in terms of the sheer number of individuals affected and the length of time Native people were subject to colonial and national efforts to eradicate them. The Thanksgiving costumes children typically don are cartoonish and historically inaccurate, as they borrow heavily from Plains Indian visual aesthetics, not those of tribes of the East Coast (although the issue is not really the verisimilitude of the costumes as the performance would be equally troubling were the regalia actually 'authentic'). The school's website features photographs from past years of children dressed up in Indian simulacra: war-painted faces and generic vests fringed with brown paper, pasta-shell necklaces and feathered headdresses.

Without my knowledge or consent, my child's teacher forwarded the email, with my name and that of my daughter, to the principal, who subsequently brought the unredacted message before a meeting of kindergarten teachers and parents. Following this meeting, the email was leaked to and read on the *John & Ken Show*, an incendiary, conservative talk programme that spun the story into a narrative about 'elitism' (a code word for critical thinking) and fears about the loss of white privilege in the aftermath of Obama's election. The show also ridiculed Native victims of epidemics such as smallpox.⁴ Nationally syndicated newspapers and television news agencies such as the *Los Angeles*

3 There are hundreds of print and online sources about the teaching of Thanksgiving myths to children and finding alternatives to masquerading as 'Indians'. These include Bigelow and Peterson (1998), Keeler (1999), Williams (2009), Dow (2006) and Swamp and Printup, Jr. (1997). Debbie Reese, a Nambé Pueblo scholar, writes an engaging and important blog on this issue, 'American Indians in children's literature: critical perspectives of Indigenous peoples in children's books, the school curriculum, popular culture, and society-at-large'.

4 John Chester Kobylyt and Kenneth Robertson Chiampou are the hosts of the *John & Ken Show*, which is broadcast on KFI, AM-640 in southern California.

Times, FOX and CNN, as well as internet blogs and local news outlets, covered the story with varying levels of veracity. While there were plenty of messages of support, I also received almost a thousand hateful and threatening telephone calls, faxes, emails and letters, many of which labelled me in misogynist terms, demonstrated a profound ignorance of US history, and verbally supported the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Some messages even advocated violence of various forms against my daughter (a threat that I took seriously, given that at least a third of all Native women are sexually abused in their lifetimes and sexual violence is used against women in general as a form of intimidation and silencing) (Williams, 2012). It is ironic that the defenders of the Thanksgiving myth, which purports to celebrate peaceful coexistence, would employ hate speech and threats of violence and intimidation in an attempt to stamp out any open discourse about this holiday.

The *Los Angeles Times* printed a vertiginous editorial on Thanksgiving day that both acknowledged the violence of the pilgrims towards Wampanoags in the wake of the so-called 'first Thanksgiving' and also advocated the spectacle of stereotypical costumes, noting that 'making Pilgrim hats and Indian headbands out of construction paper is a lot of fun' (2008). Failing to apprehend the difference between destroying the innocent fun of childhood and not wanting children to witness racist images during an extracurricular event, the editor concluded that the masquerade was amusing and should continue to be staged, though he did concede that 'Raheja and other Claremont parents angry about the pageant can be forgiven for wanting their children to understand the real story of North America's colonization and conquest'. Timothy Lange, a Seminole tribal member living in Los Angeles, replied to the editorial:

'Forgiven' for wanting their children and others to know the truth? Wow. Are you arguing that there is no age-appropriate way of teaching young children historical truth, and that therefore half-truths masquerading as fun are proper substitutes? Your view that complaining parents are 'oversensitive' insults us Indians and all Americans who want our children to understand history. We're lucky to live in a nation where we can observe our past without being shackled to it. Presenting the original Thanksgiving in its ironic context can be accomplished without harming 5-year-olds, without making anybody feel guilty and without stealing anybody's fun.⁵

Adding to the irony, the *Los Angeles Times* printed an article that contradicted the editorial's position on the opposite page. In it, historian Karl Jacoby contends that the US Thanksgiving holiday as currently celebrated is a post-Civil War fiction (2008). He also briefly details how the descendants of the

5 Letter to the editor, *Los Angeles Times*, available at: www.latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-le-tuesday2-2008dec02,1,752092,full.story (accessed 2 Sep. 2013).

Wampanoag present at the fabled 'first Thanksgiving' were executed, sold into slavery and abused in the decades following. While there is much emphasis placed on the comforting narrative of hospitality in celebrations of the pilgrims' settlement, few Americans know the tragic fate of many Wampanoags and other Indigenous people living in 'New England'.

Although the principals at both schools eventually decided to forgo the stereotypical costumes in favour of the children dressing in their respective school t-shirts to visually emblematised encountering the 'other' (a decision that would be reversed in subsequent years), some parents, as well as teachers, dressed children (and in some cases, themselves) in costume. Some parents even circulated flyers notifying others that costumes would be made available to anyone who wanted them, and one parent, who identified herself as Choctaw and whose son participated in the previous year's event, claimed, 'my son was so proud. In his eyes, he thinks that's what it looks like to be Indian' (Mehta, 2008). This comment alarmed me most because it indicates the way national propaganda predicated in part on Hollywood images stands in for any modicum of truth when it comes to Native images, even for Native people themselves.

My daughter attended school on the day of the event as a result of the principals' decision; however, when her father dropped her off at her classroom, another parent, who had come to the school dressed in a fringed paper vest and wearing red 'war paint', accosted the kindergarteners and their parents waiting outside the classroom door. She proceeded to perform a 'war dance' complete with 'war whoops' around the parents and children and then told those gathered to 'go to hell'. With no trace of irony, this individual threatened five-year-olds and their parents with what amounted to a thinly veiled threat of violence. As public pedagogy, this performance was intended to demonstrate to the children assembled that Native Americans are racially inferior – they don't communicate using words, but through war whoops and the occasional curse. In a perversion of Bakhtin's notion of carnival, redfacing and other forms of racial masquerade, with their attendant 'anonymity', were presented as acceptable ways to act out violence against subordinate and/or resistant, non-assimilationist groups that pose a threat to the discourse of white supremacy.

This parent engaged in a long-standing, contradictory practice of defining US national identity (and 'tradition') both in opposition to and closely identified with Native American culture. On the one hand, standard pedagogy on American origins, from elementary school to college, begins with either Columbus's landfall in 1492 or the Pilgrim Fathers' disembarkation at Plymouth Rock in 1620, conveniently eliding thousands of years of Indigenous history and presence in the Americas. On the other, Americans have created a national identity through appropriating fantastical revisions of Native history

and culture. As Rayna Green argues, 'one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of American cultural expression, indeed one of the oldest forms of affinity with American culture at the national level, is a "performance" I call "playing Indian"' (1988, p. 30). The parent in redface exemplified this love/hate relationship by performing a dance sequence patterned on Hollywood films, while at the same time disavowing concerns expressed by parents that this tradition promotes cultural and historical ignorance and stereotypes.

The elementary school found many imaginative and accurate ways of teaching Martin Luther King Junior's contributions to American society and his experiences of racism without resorting to dressing children in blackface. Surely there are equally creative and educational ways of helping young students understand other equally fraught histories of the United States. Dressing children up in stereotypical costumes rehearses traumatic histories and underwrites models of colonial power and white supremacy. In his study of numerous historical moments of playing Indian, Philip Deloria writes, 'From the very beginning, Indian-white relations and Indian play itself have modelled a characteristically American kind of domination in which the exercise of power was hidden, denied, qualified, or mourned. Not surprisingly, Indian play proved a fitting way to negotiate social struggles within white society that required an equally opaque vision of power' (1999, p. 187). In this fashion, elementary school Thanksgiving costume pageants stage colonisation as accidental, and even welcomed; the emphasis on cordial relations elides the specific history of the Wampanoag and other Indigenous communities throughout the Americas in the wake of European invasion, even while they provide the backdrop for white performances of power.

The contemporary pageants of Thanksgiving indicate that the US as a nation has created, and is deeply invested in, comforting fantasies of racial harmony that are underpinned by historical amnesia. If the dominant culture continues to violently perpetuate and relentlessly support the egregious stereotypes generated during Thanksgiving, by sports mascots, or other forms of visual culture such as film, then there remains little room for Native American self-representations to be visible. What happened at my daughter's school is not an isolated or anomalous incident. In 2006, an Omaha parent who requested that her son's San Francisco-area school not perform Thanksgiving reenactments was also intimidated; in 2008, a young Chumash man in Santa Barbara County received death threats and hate mail for protesting about his high school's stereotypical Indian mascot;⁶ and Wampanoag docents at the Plimoth Plantation historical site continue to

6 See the following news sources for information about these two events: Cholo (2002) and Murillo (2009).

be subjected to verbal insults and ignorance.⁷ These cases illustrate why early Native American cinematographers, performers and artists operated primarily within the bounds of hegemonic discourses out of fear of violent reprisal, while also subtly critiquing Indian images.

The experience of publishing a book about Native American images on the eve of the Thanksgiving debacle helped me to elucidate the ways in which Indigenous media might not be effective in terms of its public pedagogy in a historically amnesic state. It is common knowledge that images of Native Americans have deeply influenced settler colonial visual culture since at least 1492. From engravings depicting the putative cannibalism and savagery of Indigenous peoples through the 16th and 17th centuries, to silent cinema and Western films in the 20th century, to historical revisionist movies in the first decade of the 21st century, Native Americans have been central to European American colonial and nationalist fantasies.

Indigenous peoples have visually represented their own cultural practices for thousands of years, and have also been depicting colonialism since the invasion of their homelands. A growing transnational project of Indigenous film has recently emerged that is geographically dispersed throughout the 'Americas' but nevertheless politically linked and networked. The list of filmmakers engaged in this project is far too lengthy to detail here. Iglolik Isuma, Shelley Niro, Chris Eyre and *Video in the Villages* are perhaps the best-known examples of individuals and collectives who challenge entrenched stereotypes about Indigenous peoples and offer original, engaging and insightful representations of historical and contemporary communities.

In thinking through the 'afterlife' of the images that have shaped contemporary representations of Native Americans, I would like to investigate what kind of impact, if any, this growing body of important, Indigenous-authored work has had, particularly on the mass public in the United States (since this is the primary site of my research). In other words, do these films represent work that Yazzie would consider beneficial for Native Americans? Native directors have been producing documentary and fiction films with Indigenous content since the silent era, yet have the lived experiences of these peoples improved as a result? And in what ways, if any, have settler/colonial attitudes towards Indigenous peoples changed as a result of filmic self-representations by Native artists? Concomitantly, we should ask what kind of

7 For a contemporary Wampanoag perspective on Thanksgiving and Indian costumes, see Fifis (2008). According to that article, Linda Coombs and Paula Peters, Mashpee Wampanoag docents at the reconstructed Plimoth Plantation and descendants of the Native Americans whose homelands the Puritans colonised, regularly face the dominant culture's ignorance about their community. Peters states that visitors often remark, 'I thought we killed all of you', and that staff constantly have to ask children not to come to the site dressed in Indian costume.

burden we place on Indigenous filmmakers by expecting them to undo the racist imagery that has been in circulation for the past 500-plus years. To what extent are Native filmmakers charged with the responsibility of representing indigeneity in ways that engage Indigenous knowledges and how might this be accomplished through non-conventional, tribally specific methods? And, lastly, given the constraints Native filmmakers face in terms of content, form, economic pressures and limited circulation, is it possible for their films to change public opinion?

With the exception of *Smoke Signals* (1988), directed and coproduced by the Cheyenne/Arapaho filmmaker Chris Eyre, documentary film has been the most prevalent vehicle for offering Native perspectives to a wide spectatorship. Such film performs a self-consciously pedagogic function, typically attempting to educate its audience (usually assumed to be non-Native) about some aspect of Native history or culture. Documentary cinema conventionally seeks to present a social reality in order to compel the spectator to take a particular action, whether that action spurs new forms of intellectual production or political activism. According to Bill Nichols, this form of cinema operates as a 'vehicle[] of domination and conscience, power and knowledge, desire and will' (2001, p. 36). It is invested in representing a version of the world that masquerades as the 'real', a generally sober, putatively objective vision of a series of events or social issues.

Contemporary documentary films by Native filmmakers employ the conventions of the genre to the same ends. Navajo filmmaker, activist, and musician Klee Benally's 2005 film *The Snowbowl Effect*, for example, documents the desecration of the San Francisco Peaks, a mountain range in the Four Corners area of the American Southwest that is sacred to over a dozen Native communities. The film employs testimony by environmentalists, biologists and Native activists to make a case against the expansion of the Snowbowl ski resort and the use of wastewater to create snow, a process that the resort argues is necessary as a result of global warming. This film describes a non-fictional series of events by representing a particular constituency (accentuated by the fact that Benally is personally involved in direct actions against the Snowbowl expansion project) and by entreating the audience to take action against the project by writing letters, screening the film, and occupying/blocking the new roads and wastewater pipelines that the resort is building.

The five-part documentary series *We Shall Remain* (2009), also directed by Chris Eyre and produced under the auspices of the US Public Broadcasting System (PBS), is another important cultural and political achievement. Native directors, producers, scholars and actors on every level were involved in the series. It begins with an episode about the events surrounding the pilgrims' invasion of Wampanoag homelands and ends with one on the FBI's 1973

siege of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation. *We Shall Remain* is part of PBS's ongoing and popular 'American Experience' series. It has very high production values, the result of generous funding by philanthropic organisations such as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. It has also been endorsed by Native American Public Telecommunications, the National Indian Education Association and Native Public Media. The PBS is a large, institutional, fairly mainstream organisation that often offers watered-down, politically empty content and whose intended audience is 'viewers like you', a tagline that obscures the class, race, education level and age demographics of its spectatorship. Yet, unlike most documentary makers working on Native American subjects, the producers of *We Shall Remain* successfully collaborated with Native filmmakers and community members on a project that is critical, to some extent, of settler colonialism and of media representations that confine Indigenous peoples to the past.

We Shall Remain's most remarkable attributes, however, are probably its holistic and comprehensive distribution and pedagogical strategies. The episodes were screened on many local public broadcasting channels, so were viewed by a broad-ranging and large spectatorship. Additionally, the PBS website provides an opportunity to watch clips of the episodes in the series, purchase the DVD collection and learn more about contemporary Native history and culture through other multimedia projects. 'Beyond Broadcast', a teacher's guide to the project, features an interactive map detailing shoot locations and communities featured in the episodes; a listing of *We Shall Remain* initiatives in different states involving Native community centres, local libraries, museums and universities; and information about organisations that support the work of the series. This link encourages viewers to become involved more intimately and on a more sustained level with the issues raised in the series. Most importantly, PBS creates a reciprocal relationship with Native communities through two Indigenous-focused projects launched from the *We Shall Remain* website. 'ReelNative' is a link that offers emerging Native filmmakers, such as Keely Curliss, Michael David Little and Rebecca Nelson, the opportunity to showcase their fiction shorts in a respected and prestigious national venue. It also empowers viewers to tell their own stories in an interactive format through local PBS affiliates. Additionally, the 'Native Now' link features current news coverage and documentary film under three critical rubrics: language, sovereignty and enterprise.

While PBS and Native and non-Native documentary filmmakers perform admirable work attempting to educate a wide audience about historical and contemporary Indigenous issues, there are a number of critical problems with the documentary form in representing Native knowledges. These include

the conventionality of the expository format with its presumed non-Native audience; use of 'expert' testimony (often by a non-Native scholar) to explain, interpret and mediate the ascribed alterity of the subject; and the lack of suitable idioms and conventions within the confines of the genre for presenting Indigenous epistemologies on Indigenous terms. For example, Benally in *The Snowbowl Effect* foregrounds the environmental effects of using wastewater to create snow within the various ecosystems in the fragile Four Corners area, but also the more ephemeral, less scientifically visible or verifiable issue of the sacred relationship many Native Americans have with specific cultural and physical landscapes. The 'land as church' analogy works to some degree, but it is nearly impossible to convey exactly what it means to think of land as sacred in a conventional documentary format.

Series such as *We Shall Remain* are also limited in the cultural work they do insofar as they always situate Native history and culture already within the context of the US state, often within the discourses of 'multiculturalism' and ethnic and racial 'inclusion'. In this respect, the documentaries have fostered a somewhat mistaken belief that Natives pine for recognition as Americans with full civil and legal rights (a rhetoric often associated with African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latina/os) rather than recognising the autochthony of Native peoples with cultural practices, knowledges and sovereignty that pre-existed the settler/colonial nation state. The *We Shall Remain* website describes the series as 'spanning three hundred years' to 'tell the story of pivotal moments in US history from the Native American perspective'. Within the documentary film tradition, Native history is rarely, if ever, conceived as *a priori* to the founding of settler colonial states such as Canada, the US, Mexico and so forth, and it is rarely, if ever, presented on Indigenous terms. In other words, an Indigenous presence, when it is marked at all, appears somewhere on the timeline of a settler/colonial history originating in 1492 that always privileges a white perspective as the point of entry.

The constrictions of documentary as a form, and economic concerns within the circuitry of marketing and funding, present challenges in representing the complexities of Indigenous histories and cultures in critically engaged, nuanced ways. The work of Arnait Video Productions, an Inuit women's film collective based in Nunavut, Canada, is a striking exception to conventional documentary filmmaking traditions. For example, films such as *Anaana (Mother)* (2001), a biopic about Vivi Kunuk, codirected by Mary Kunuk, her daughter, portray traditional Inuit practices such as seal hunting (evocative of *Nanook of the North*, the classic 1922 silent docudrama), but do so by acknowledging both cultural continuity and change. The film opens with an Inuit family riding snowmobiles to get to their summer camp. Later, the main protagonist, Vivi, harpoons a seal with a hockey stick outfitted with a blade while displaying

her keen – perhaps particularly Inuit – sense of scatological humour. The film unapologetically offers up a view of contemporary Inuit culture through its use of (subtitled) Inuktitut and its depiction of elements such as the ingesting of raw meat – often associated with more primitive societies as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1958) famously noted – and the playing out of gender relationships that might be viewed by non-Inuit to be queer or atypical, all without the mediation of ‘expert’ testimony, a conventional plot trajectory, or explanation of much of the film’s content.

Fiction films present alternative ways of representing Indigenous history and reaching a wider audience, as the case of *Smoke Signals* has proven. Although much more costly to produce, they make possible more imaginative renderings of Indigenous culture. I would argue that this genre is effective at responding to Yazzie’s questions about the ‘work’ of filmmaking because it has the potential to portray Native people as complicated characters and can provide a point of entry for a more complex audience response by casting Native issues within a broader emotional, cultural, physical and spiritual realm than is usually presented within the more narrow concerns of documentary. For example, Arnait’s best-known fiction film, *Before Tomorrow* (2008), dramatises the poignant story of an Inuit grandmother and her grandson who starve to death following a devastating smallpox epidemic in the early 19th century. The story, narrated in Inuktitut, shot on location in Nunavik and involving intense collaboration between the community and the production team, features long, slow shots of the landscape that might not be interpreted as part of the plot by spectators accustomed to Hollywood-style filmmaking. *Before Tomorrow* also supplies precisely the kind of individual, personal story that would garner sympathy and do the kind of work that the television series *Roots* performed for African Americans in the late 1970s and the various films based on *The Diary of Anne Frank* did for Jewish people in personalising the Holocaust. Arnait’s films employ what Steven Leuthold terms ‘indigenous aesthetics’ to narrate Inuit history for both an Inuit and non-Inuit audience through the use of a specifically Inuit plot, form and mode of production. ‘Indigenous aesthetics’, according to Leuthold, ‘is primarily synthetic, involving a search for and appreciation of the connections between categories of experience ... Continuity of expression – whether its source is historical, religious, conceptual, generational, tribal, or cosmological – is a central ingredient’ (1998, p. 190).

Fiction films that are more experimental in nature present even more possibilities for representing Indigenous culture, notions of time and space, ontologies and individual perspectives through an Indigenous aesthetic. One film that exemplifies how experimentalism can be harnessed as a vehicle for Indigenous aesthetics is Iglulik Isuma’s critically acclaimed feature *Atanarjuat/*

The Fast Runner (2001). Like *Anaana* and *Before Tomorrow*, *Atanarjuat* features Inuktitut dialogue and long, slow, seemingly non-diegetic shots of the landscape. Its amateur actors do not conform to Hollywood standards of beauty, there are very few action sequences, and some of the scenes, sub-plots and Native humour might not 'make sense' to a non-Inuit spectator.

Some Indigenous filmmakers have utilised experimental cinematic techniques in order to present Native knowledges on Native terms, often through staging dream sequences, non-linear plots and oral narratives, as well as by using animation. According to Edward Small, experimental film can be defined as having one or more of the following five characteristics: a small production crew; low or ultra-low budget; shorter length than a full feature film (which makes them harder to broadcast on television, play in a Cineplex or schedule for festivals); abstract imagery; and the tendency to subvert classical cinematic storytelling through non-linear structure, unfamiliar plots, shocking imagery and/or unusual camera angles (1995). Experimental film is particularly effective because of its ability to convey a sense of Indigenous 'feeling' through cinematic forms more suited to Native knowledges. For example, Chris Eyre's first film, *Tenacity* (1995), produced while he was a student at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, is a short black-and-white production that evokes the sense of imminent violence that plagues reservations. Shelley Niro's experimental film *It Starts with a Whisper* (1993) likewise creates a sense of Indigenous 'feeling' in the opening sequence with its Mohawk language voiceover and extreme close-up shots of Haudenosaunee beadwork and a camp fire. Niro's specific perspectives could not be achieved within the confines of the documentary form. Her later film, *Suite: Indian* (2005), also highlights Haudenosaunee representations of matriarchal relationships, prophecy, cosmology and time, along with kinetic understandings of origin stories. Experimental film (or experimental work in any artistic genre) is limited, however, because it can be so unfamiliar to spectators that it is dismissed as too strange or esoteric. This kind of film rarely reaches a wide audience because of content and length and Indigenous filmmakers are hard-pressed to find funding for work that is non-traditional and unlikely to generate revenue.

Electronic media has become an avenue for disseminating both documentary and fiction film for Indigenous artists. Sites such as YouTube and Rezkast offer free content to spectators with an internet connection all over the globe, making it possible for Indigenous filmmakers to provide self-representations and other artistic content on their own terms. Electronic media also allow Indigenous artists who can afford even the cheapest of video technologies to work from their home community, instead of a studio in a metropolis. The limitation of this form of media is that there is so much content on the web

that it is hard to compete for an audience that has to sift through so many videos. The Inuit production company Igloodik Isuma addressed this concern by creating Isumatv, a television broadcast station tailored to address specifically Indigenous concerns and thereby build Indigenous visual culture. IsumaTV offers courses in Indigenous languages, truth and reconciliation interviews, experimental shorts, media workshops and access to work by Indigenous mediamakers in places ranging from Sapmi in northern Europe to Mapuche territory in South America.

In addition, electronic media can provide a broad, transnational space for conversations about issues of importance to Indigenous communities. The Native American comedy group, the 1491s, for example, produces low-budget shorts, public service announcements and music videos that address a full range of Native concerns – from the devastating rates of sexual abuse of Native women to the appropriation of Native imagery by corporations such as Urban Outfitters. The group, composed of Dallas Goldtooth (Navajo/Lakota), Sterlin Harjo (Seminole/Creek), Migizi Pensoneau (Ponca/Ojibwe), Ryan Red Corn (Osage) and Bobby Wilson (Dakota), critique Hollywood representations of Native people and, more importantly, how the latter have embraced stereotype as ‘tradition’. The 1491s’ videos provide a kind of ‘virtual reservation’ that invites spectators to engage critically with the images that are being screened. They also open the possibility for the creation of video responses and off-screen conversations about Indigenous issues for an audience that is much broader and more diverse than that of film spectators.

Recently, the 1491s engaged in a video critique of ‘Indian’ spectacles by releasing a ‘Halloween responsibly PSA’ (public service announcement) featuring ‘Matt Kull, concerned white man’, a character who implores his fellow white people not to wear Indian simulacra costumes such as those created by school children for Thanksgiving and Halloween celebrations. Kull calls the costumes a ‘disingenuous, culturally racist façade that reduces real human beings to hypersexualized, turkey feather douche bags ... a cultural skid mark on the underwear of America’. (The intertitles read: ‘Here are some big words, I hope you read books and stuff’.) The 1491s conclude the video by dressing Kull in blackface and an Afro wig, ostensibly demonstrating how Indian costumes are just as offensive and racist. A number of highly emotional blogs and YouTube comments responded to the video: some expressed outrage that a Native American comedy group would use such a charged and patently racist image of blackface for any purpose; others saw blackface as the only effective tool to teach how equally problematic redface is.⁸

8 See, for example, YouTube videos ‘1491s on blackface’ (2012a) and ‘One Indigenous perspective on 1491’s use of blackface’ (2012), and the tumblr video, ‘Please stop with the blackface comparisons’ (n.d.).

In response to the heated debate caused by their 'PSA', the 1491s issued a video rejoinder: '1491s on blackface',⁹ in which the group films a woman dressed in a stereotypical Utah Utes Indian sports costume at a University of Utah event. She identifies herself as 'half Navajo and half African American' and states that she has no problem with sports teams that appropriate Native American imagery. Yet when she is asked if she would dress in blackface for a team, she responds that she would not and has 'absolutely no idea' why redface is permissible but blackface is not. Perhaps the 1491s could have presented the connections between blackface and redface differently – Rob Schmidt suggested in his Newspaper Rock blog that it might have been more effective to juxtapose historical photographs of actors in blackface next to contemporary photographs of hipsters in redface or to also dress up in blackface at a Utah Utes rally to gauge fans' responses to both racist costumes (2012). Yet what is perhaps most critical is that the video has produced some vital dialogue on race, racism and spectacle in the US, placing individuals from various walks of life in sometimes-civil, sometimes-hostile conversation with each other. The YouTube commentary, for example, illustrates a range of responses, with some writers expressing how their ideas have changed in response to others' comments, and some refining their original thoughts on the subject of costuming as they read the reactions posted. In turn, these comments and blog posts motivated the 1491s to reframe their presentation of blackface through the subsequent video that defends the style and content of their original PSA. This internet dialogue demonstrates how the videographers take their own public pedagogy and what Yazzie would call 'the sheep' seriously.

Disappointingly, beyond videos produced for the internet, Native films in the US continue to have limited distribution, only a small and generally already sympathetic audience and decreased funding opportunities in a nation state that is increasingly unwilling to finance the arts. Despite its achievements in creating and putting forward a range of dynamic representations, increasingly in the realm of YouTube and other electronic media, Indigenous filmmaking has done little in its first one hundred years to change a public opinion that swings from ignorant to hostile when it comes to Native issues. Nevertheless, I am critical of expecting Native filmmakers to carry the burden of undoing over five hundred years of misrepresentation. Although limited, the kinds of work Indigenous films do is crucial to our communities. The process of creating the films performs important functions for the filmmaker as both an aesthetic and a political project. Indigenous spectators benefit from seeing positive representations of themselves on screen and films play an important part as a kind of love letter to future generations who can use this visual archive in ways we may not be able to imagine today.

9 See YouTube video, also entitled '1491s on blackface' (2012b).

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