Virgil Ortiz: American Indian Artist, Representational Trickster, and Identity Shapeshifter

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ABSTRACT

This study opens the door for a re-thinking of how discourse shapes American Indian representation and identity. As such, contemporary American Indian artist, Virgil Ortiz, his art, and the discourse surrounding both art and artist are examined to reveal the strategies and tactics employed in his constitution of a politics of representation that broaden the spectrum of considerations of American Indian identity.

Critical invention is the orientation through which two methodological approaches are intertextually applied. A critical rhetorical approach is employed to analyze both the vernacular discourse produced by Ortiz and the dominant discourse constructed by the dominant culture. Sorrells (1999) theoretical and methodological approach to reading intercultural imagery is also applied to conduct a visual analysis of Ortiz’s art.

To contextually frame an understanding of Ortiz and his work, a literature review and a historical chapter are included. The literature review details the linking of American Indian cultural identity, collective identity, and cultural sovereignty to the production of American Indian art; examines art and American Indian identity; and investigates art and the production of a politics of representation. The historical chapter reveals the poetics and politics of American Indian discursive constructions by both the dominant culture and American Indians.
The theme of sadomasochistic dominance and submission (SMDS) is explored in Ortiz’s art to understand how it communicatively operates through vernacular discourse. Ortiz’s marketing through branding and personal branding is analyzed to understand how Ortiz both subverts and complies with the dominant culture’s current entrenchment in commodity capitalism and in stale American Indian representations.

The measure of representational sovereignty that Ortiz asserts is evident in the mediums and the media in which he participates. This study reveals that Ortiz produces a counter discourse that disturbs hegemonic notions of American Indians; promotes more prismatic considerations of American Indian identity, rather than one-dimensional stale stereotypes or two-dimensional restraining binaries; and offers alternative American Indian archetypes for consideration. Ortiz draws from the mainstream to the margins and the surface to the subterranean to create a politics of representation that promotes an understanding of multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and multiple American Indian identity articulations, which move American Indians closer to signification self-sovereignty.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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DEDICATION

*With respect and love for Bebe.*
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: DISCOVERING ORTIZ, REVEALING MYSELF, AND UNVEILING THE STUDY

America never became postcolonial. The indigenous inhabitants of North America can stand anywhere on the continent and look in every direction at a home usurped and colonized by strangers who, from the very beginning, laid claim not merely to the land and resources but to the very definition of the Natives (Owens {Choctaw, Cherokee, Irish American\(^1\)}, 2003, pp. 14-15).

It is through the arts that our angry hordes of stereotypes may be broken down into their innumerable possibilities (Rolling, 2004, p. 882).

Crystalline ice carvings, cinnamon-dusted bizcochitos, and steaming hot chocolate in the town plaza; glowing farolitos, crackling piñon fires, and warm pear schnapps on Canyon Road – Christmas in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Every year my family and I converge in this enchanting city to celebrate the season. My dissertation was born during such a sojourn at the La Fonda hotel.

While waiting on my mother to join me on a last minute shopping errand, I picked up an old *Santa Fean* from the coffee table and began thumbing through it (see Figure 1).

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\(^1\) Regarding tribal identifications, I have made every effort to include the self-avowed tribal affiliation of the American Indian people who are cited or referenced. Spellings and specificities of American Indian tribal affiliations are often contentious. Where possible, I include the individual’s self-avowal(s) and incorporate the individual’s version of the spelling of his/her tribal affiliation, as garnered from the individual’s personal webpage, college faculty webpage, and/or book and journal notes.
Figure 1. Homegrown Haute Couture, August 2005

Popping from the page was a jaw-dropping American Indian\textsuperscript{2} man wearing a rich red suede shirt with black and tan tattoo-like graphics. His soulful stare and edgy attire

\textsuperscript{2} After careful review and consideration of Sahnish (Arikara) and Hidatsa First Nations scholar, Yellow Bird’s (1999) article; the Kim, Lujan {Kiowa and Taos Pueblo} and Dixon {Cherokee} (1998) study; and Kiowa scholar, Horse’s (2005) essay, the term \textit{American Indian(s)} will be used to represent the Indigenous Peoples in the United States. This choice is not to suggest that deciding upon a moniker is an easy task, given the identity politics in the naming of any people, especially considering a people that have endured more than 500 years of oppression.

According to a 1995 U.S. Department of Labor survey entitled, \textit{Preference for Racial and Ethnic Terminology: By Group}, included in Yellow Bird’s article, almost half of those Indigenous People in the United States surveyed preferred the term \textit{American Indian}, with second place awarded to the term \textit{Native American}. Both terms are problematic in that these misnomers are the result of Christopher Columbus’ “erroneous geography” (Yellow Bird, p. 4). Horse questions the term \textit{Native American} when she points out, “I know now that anyone born in this country can rightfully claim to be a native American” (p. 62). Horse also adds, “Those born before 1950 tend to be
captivated me. I peeled my eyes away from the distinctive image to read the title of the article, *Homegrown Haute Couture: These Four Native American Designers are Pushing the Boundaries of Fashion while Remaining True to their Cultural Roots* (Heard, 2005, p. 87). Quickly I turned the page to learn that contemporary American Indian artist, Virgil Ortiz, designed the sensual suede shirt that American Indian actor, Michael Spears, was modeling. I raced through the rest of the article to locate all of the fashions attributed to Ortiz. Leather jackets, denim pants, and metal adorned leather handbags graced striking models with what I would come to discover are his signature graphics.

Finally, I settled down and actually shifted from scanning images to reading about Virgil Ortiz. I discovered that Ortiz is a celebrated Cochiti potter. I also learned that Ortiz was approached at Santa Fe Indian Market by fashion mogul, Donna Karan, to collaborate with her on her DKNY spring 2003 line. Heard comments, “That turned out to be one of Karan’s best-selling seasons, and the megawatt career of fashion’s Native American enfant terrible was born” (p. 88). At this point, I knew that I had happened on an artist that was injecting American Indian art and culture with a jolt of cutting-edge, rock and roll – words I never previously associated with American Indians. The thought dawned on me that I had somehow fallen prey to accepting the stereotypical American Indian representations circulating in books, via the media, and on film.

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comfortable being called American Indian” and “those born later in the twentieth century seem accustomed to the term Native American” (p. 66).

Using the advice of Horse, that “it is through agreement and usage among speakers of a given language that words acquire their meaning,” I proceed in calling the Indigenous Peoples in the United States, American Indian(s), to permit easier recognition by the general reader in accordance with the above scholars’ suggestions. American Indian(s) will specifically refer to those Indigenous Peoples in the United States and their descendants.
Upon arriving home and still curious about this *enfant terrible*, I conducted an Internet search on Ortiz. I discovered that although he is widely known for his pottery, he participates in a myriad of mediums including but not limited to: sculpture, fashion, painting, graphic novel designing, monoprinting, hat design, filmmaking, jewelry designing, body painting, costume design, photography, and is founder of a modeling agency based in Los Angeles called V.O. Models Inc. (Morris, 2007). I pulled up a number of on-line articles about him and pictures of his work with the common thread being that Ortiz is a boundary pusher. Assistant Curator of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian Ash-Milby {Navajo} (2006), describes Ortiz as follows:

Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti, b. 1969) is an artist whose work defies easy definition. He is a ceramicist, sculptor, jeweler, painter, fashion designer, trendsetter, and provocateur. Situated between the traditions of his Native-community and the expansive frontier of the international art world, Ortiz’s work is personal, electric, and audacious. (p. 2)

In fact, one of the most often used monikers for Ortiz is that of *provocateur*, yet in the same breath Fauntleroy (1999) points out, “His clay work adheres meticulously to traditional methods” (p. 28). These types of dualistic statements that suggest that Ortiz is at the same time trendsetting and traditional prompted me to begin thinking about exactly what it is that Ortiz and his work are provoking with regards to American Indian representation and identity. Both Ortiz and his art provoke many questions concerning American Indian representation and identity and elicit questions about the cultural politics invoked by these two issues.

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According to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (as cited in Hall, 2003) representation has two definitions that are simple, effective, and applicable to my study.
Researcher Positionality

I address my positionality because any analysis incorporates interpretations that involve a researcher’s values, attitudes, history, and beliefs (Wodak, 1999). Therefore, transparency and self-reflexivity are important to my research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Goodall, Jr., 2000; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Langsdorf, 1994).

My way of seeing comes through the eyes of a woman who spent summers in the cool pines of Ruidoso, New Mexico one mile from the Mescalero Apache reservation and the rest of the year in the hot urbanity of Dallas, Texas ten miles from downtown. These summer days in New Mexico sparked my initial interest in American Indians. As a child, I heard many stories both positive and negative about the Mescalero Indians, their lands, and their culture. As I grew older, I began to think more critically about these narratives. Who was doing the telling and who the listening? Who stood to benefit by their telling? Why were certain details included and others omitted? Who determined inclusion and omission? How were American Indians constructed via the discourse?

For example, one highly inflammatory, cautionary tale warned people living in the Upper Canyon near one entrance to the reservation to lock up their liquor cabinets, as “drunken Indians” (Leuthold, 1998, p. 23) frequently invaded homes to raid the alcohol stashes and party. As I became more savvy and critical of systems of power and as follows: 1) “to represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses…” and 2) “to represent also means to symbolize, stand for, to be a specimen of, or to substitute for…” (p. 16). A more complex unpacking of representation occurs in my literature review.
privilege, I understood that the dominant culture\textsuperscript{4} told these tales to perpetuate old stereotypes, maintain essentialized depictions of American Indians, and continue to attempt to position American Indians as the negative Other\textsuperscript{5} in order to perpetuate the dominant culture’s position, power, and privilege that come along with the contrastive positive construction of Us/Them.

Were there actual documented cases of such breaking and entering? Were there similarly reported cases of the dominant culture’s breaking and entering, and if so, what spin was put on those stories? Might have such American Indian alleged actions been a result of the poverty experienced by many reservation members prompting people to seek warmth and shelter elsewhere? In other words, such a simple story spurred a commitment to investigating the who, what, when, where, and why of representations of American Indians as constructed by the dominant culture as well as by American Indians themselves.

\begin{footnotesize}
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The dominant group or dominant culture refers to the shared communicative practices by those people residing in the United States who associate themselves with “Euro-American traditions” (Senier, 2001, p. 19). As such, I refer to the dominant group or culture, as the people that both associate with and/or enact Euro-American traditions in keeping with Western philosophies. By this token, the dominant group or culture primarily consists of those who identify as white, but are referred to in my research as the dominant group or culture in order not to exclude those who do not identify as racially white but are in accord with Euro-American traditions and Western thinking.
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The Other stems from Said’s (1978/2000) construct of “Orientalism” (p. 112). According to Said, Orientalism positions European identity as superior in comparison to all other non-European peoples and cultures. This positioning sets up a symbolic binary construct of “good-bad, us-them, attractive-disgusting, civilized-uncivilized, the West-the Rest” (Hall, 1992, p. 308). Hall explains, “By this strategy, the Rest becomes defined as everything that the West is not – its mirror image. It is represented as absolutely, essentially, different, other; the Other” (p. 308).
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I recognize that in taking on this topic that involves an ethnic group other than my own, I walk a slippery slope that invites circumspection. There has been much written about the problematic of non-Natives researching and writing about American Indians. As Shawnee; Sac and Fox; Seminole, and Muscogee Creek professor Fixico (1998) points out:

Whether racially prejudiced or guilt-ridden, patronizing, paternalistic, or romantic, Indian history mainly has been perceived from a white perspective, based on the idea that ‘the conquerors write the history.’ More than 30,000 manuscripts have been published about American Indians, and more than 90 percent of that literature has been written by non-Indians. (p. 86)

It is tricky and often treacherous work for a non-Native to attempt to understand and/or interpret the Other.

Scholars who participate in such work face intense scrutiny from both American Indians and non-Natives alike. Common thematics that American Indian scholars stress when non-Natives pursue investigations into American Indians and their affairs include but are not limited to the following: 1) the need for tribal issues to be interpreted by and through American Indians; 2) the importance of American Indians not to be viewed as merely “objects of study” (Mihesuah\{Oklahoma Choctaw\}, 1998, p. x); 3) that as careful attention be paid to what is omitted about American Indians in scholarly work as to what is included; 4) that no objective point of view regarding American Indians exists nor will ever be in existence; 5) to avoid a myopic scope in order to not essentialize American Indians remembering that they are group of widely varied peoples; 6) to “consider the world-view of an Indian group to comprehend its members’ sense of logic and ideology” (Fixico, 1998, p. 94); 7) and to remember to give back to those peoples and/or communities from which the scholarly investigation was birthed (Champagne
Keeping all of the above and more in mind, I venture to walk the path of the non-Native that delves into American Indian affairs. I do not claim to speak for American Indians. I do not claim to speak for Virgil Ortiz. I only offer my ideas on the discursive production of American Indian identity through representation.

I take encouragement from Chippewa scholar, Champagne’s (1998) words that “one does not have to be a member of a culture to understand what culture means or to interpret a culture in a meaningful way” (p. 182). By undertaking this study, I seek to become an ally to American Indians. This project works to keep the problematic of American Indian representation and identity visible and voiced rather than shadowed and silenced. Adding something meaningful and carefully considered to the body of knowledge regarding American Indian identity and representation could, at best, provoke more artists and scholars to invoke creative ways of expressing and thinking about themselves and their communities and, at least, perpetuate the discussion and raise public awareness about the dangers of hegemonic, simplistic American Indian representations.

On a more far-reaching level, I intend to use my research to broaden the spectrum on notions of American Indianness and to question whether such a state exists through the examination of the discursive processes involved in its attempted creation. I want to crack open the door for American Indians and non-Natives, scholars and laymen alike to reconsider and re-think how discourse shapes identity and representation, specifically in the area of American Indians. Temporarily fixing identities can serve the purpose of increasing solidarity and awareness of an issue or group of people. However, continuing
to fixate and cement those identities provokes a creative stoppage wherein people become symbols and icons rather than dynamic, creative cultural forces for life celebration and life change.

Significance of Representation, Identity, and Cultural Politics

The weighty topics of representation, identity, and cultural politics are worth probing because their interrelationship brings attention to the significance of representational politics for American Indian culture and highlights important forms of resistance to stereotypical representations. By offering a glimpse of the strategies and tactics that are currently being employed by the dominant culture and American Indian artists and outlining how they are operating in these representational and identity contestations, this study explores moves towards American Indian representational sovereignty. Through exploring both colonizing forms of representation and American Indian artists’ attempts at self-definition that contest the dominant terms of representation; power dynamics are revealed, which open spaces for representational régime changes.

Barker and Galasinski (2001) point out that “cultural politics involves the struggle over ‘naming’ and the power to re-describe ourselves” (p. 56). Specifically, they suggest that cultural politics is about the following four powers: “the power to name, the power to represent common sense, the power to create ‘official versions,’ and the power to represent the legitimate social world” (p. 56). If American Indians can succeed in shifting these four powers of signification back to their dominion, they will have re-exerted the authority to control their own identity, representation, authenticity, and truth.
This possibility fuels my desire to conduct an investigation of American Indian representation, identity, and cultural politics through an art lens.

In the case of American Indians and other marginalized groups, “these questions of cultural power translate into the practical purposes of identity politics” (Barker & Galasinski, p. 56). The power of self-signification is both priceless and precious. The dominant culture is fully aware of this fact and is engaged in an ideological battle to constrain the use of signification by those who would challenge its hegemony such as marginalized cultures. According to Naipaul, American Indian “mimic men”\(^6\) (as cited in Owens, 2003, p. 23) know of signification’s power and engage in representational mimicking of the dominant discourse anyways in hopes of experimenting with a type of voice that they think thwarts the dominant culture’s expectations. American Indian artists, scholars, and tribal elders are painfully aware of the power of signification, as evidenced by their attempts to persistently gain and re-gain representational power.

One of the most compelling reasons for American Indians to seek control of self-signification is due to the financial consequences that come along with that control. The power to signify normative ethnic identity is often translatable to economic and cultural capital in the case of American Indians. Reservations are some of the most poverty-ridden areas in the United States\(^7\). American Indian representations exuding exoticized

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\(^6\) American Indian writers who are accused by other American Indians of using the dominant culture’s favored representations of American Indians in their work.

\(^7\) According to Merskin (2007), American Indians are the “most economically destitute of all ethnic minority populations” (p. 22) with nearly 30% living below the poverty line.
American Indianness that play into dominant stereotypes can bring in big dollars – money that can maintain an individual, a family, and sometimes a tribe, for a long period.

Currently and for much of America’s history, the dominant culture consistently attempts to assume the role of controlling signification. I posit that the dominant culture employs eight strategies, often knowingly and sometimes unknowingly, which enact Barker and Galasinski’s four powers. These eight strategies are as follows: 1) fixation (Grande {Quechua, Spanish, French, and Peruvian}, 2000; Hatt, 1997; Peroff, 1997; Skoda, 1996); 2) categorization (Barker {Lenape Nation-Delaware Tribe}, 2003; Garroutte {Cherokee}, 2001; Harlan {Laguna/Santa Domingo/Jemez Pueblo}, 1995; Hapiuk, 2001; Paredes, 1997); 3) standardization (Büken, 2002); 4) authentication (Garroutte, 2001; Grande, 2000; Hapiuk, 2001; Lawrence {Mi’kmaw}, 2003; Mithlo {Chiricahua Apache}, 2004); 5) regulation (Garroutte, 2001; Lawrence, 2003; Barker, 2003); 6) misrepresentation (Harlan, 1995; Rader, 2003; Skoda, 1996; Smith {Comanche}, 1995; White 1997); 7) commodification (Aldred, 2000; Merskin, 2001; Sorrells, 2003); and 8) appropriation (Aldred, 2000; Merskin, 2001; Shanley {Assiniboine Nakota scholar}, 1997). An example that addresses the strategies of commodification and appropriation and the tactic of stereotyping is demonstrated in Merskin’s (2001) work that looks at how established brand names such as Jeep Cherokee, Land O’Lakes Butter, and Crazy Horse Malt Liquor use American Indian representations produced by stereotypes to help sell their products. Numerous examples that address categorization and authentication are contained in such legislative acts as the 1887 Dawes Act and the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act that rely on blood criteria as basis for
claiming American Indian identity, which is unpacked in more detail in Chapter 4 (Barker 2003; Garroutte, 2001; Grande, 2000).

Tactics utilized in tandem with these strategies include essentialism, exoticism, marginalization, fetishism, naturalism, reductionism, and stereotyping. A poignant example that addresses the tactics of exoticism and fetishism occurred in 1904 at the World’s Fair in St. Louis when the great Apache chief, Geronimo who spurred the Apache War participated in a living display wherein paying customers could be photographed with him (Hatt, 1997). Hatt says, “There proved to be no shortage of whites eager to have a souvenir image of themselves posed with him; and others even bought the buttons off his coat as more tangible mementos of the old warrior” (p. 93). These strategies and tactics work interactively with the ultimate outcome of rendering American Indian collective identity and representation subject to external determination and domination.

The dominant culture’s command of signification constrains American Indian cultural identity. American Indians find themselves left with limited discursive spaces in which to represent their cultural meanings. The dominant frame represents American Indian culture and artwork as the dead or dying remains of a once robust, rich, and varied culture. For example, in the 1904 World’s Fair mentioned above, the American Indian display also included other tribes’ people, sculptures of American Indians, and artifacts. Hatt (1997) points out, “All these spectacles made the same point: that the Indian was something of an anachronism in the midst of the progressive modern United States, and because, he was no more than a relic of a past age, he would soon vanish completely” (p. 93).
This potential cultural genocide prompts my use of Foucault’s notion of power/knowledge régimes as a framework for my investigation of Ortiz and his art because Foucault is concerned with how “knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to ‘make itself true’” (as cited in Hall, 2003, p. 49). Both the dominant culture and American Indians are battling over the truth, which is actually a struggle over representation. By investigating American Indian representation, identity, and cultural politics through an artist and his work, I am supporting the premise that this battle over signification rights should only end when American Indians preside over their own representation, identity, and meaning making.

Jongh (as cited in Leppert, 1996) speaks to the importance of representation. He says, “We cannot ‘escape’ the web of representational devices – they are what allows us to make our way in the world” (p. 5). This web consists of verbal, textual, nonverbal, and most relevant to my research, visual representational devices. By incorporating art and art discourse into a conceptual architecture for visualizing the operation of identity and representational politics within the American Indian culture and between American Indians and the dominant culture, a more holistic, synergistic picture can be revealed.

My study examines the world of American Indian art as a way of exploring this connection between American Indian representation and identity. Specifically, I look at the work of contemporary American Indian artist, Virgil Ortiz, to outline how his art and the discourse surrounding both art and artist produces, perpetuates, and expands notions of American Indian representation and identity. By spotlighting the work of contemporary American Indian artists, with Ortiz and his work as the focus of my
examination, I reveal additional spaces for creating more profound, nuanced, and
dynamic understandings of American Indians.

Research Questions

The struggle over sovereignty of American Indian identity and representation
continues today between the dominant culture and American Indians. Often colonization
is thought of as a process that only deals with taking, settling, and controlling foreign
lands and their indigenous inhabitants by a power from afar. However, colonization is a
process that involves far more than stripping geographic sovereignty from Indigenous
peoples. In many instances, colonization additionally entails attempts at or actually
seizing Indigenous peoples’ cultures through the imposition of systems of identification
that stem from a Eurocentric, colonizing mindset (Olson & Simile, 2002).

Moreover, colonization continues via acts of cultural commodification and
appropriation. American Indian resources are being re-colonized by the dominant culture
through a variety of means including but not limited to the following: kitsch roadside
curio shops hawking Indian goods produced by non-Natives; reputable museums
parading sacred American Indian objects that belong on the reservations; retail catalogs
advertising American Indian jewelry that is actually produced in China and; non-Native
spas offering traditional sweat lodge experiences conducted by non-Native people.

Through these destructive acts and via a variety of other masterful strategies and
tactics, the dominant culture continues to attempt to control American Indian
representation, and subsequently, identity by trying to permanently fix meaning. In
response, contemporary American Indian artists negotiate representation and identity by
exercising often liquiessent\textsuperscript{8} counter strategies and tactics through their art that keep meaning in flux. Ortiz participates with the other contemporary American Indian artists in the production of these counter discourses to expand notions of American Indian representation and identity and to transcend dominant expectations.

The purpose of my research is to explore how contemporary American Indian artist, Virgil Ortiz, his art, and the discourse surrounding both art and artist, creates a politics of representation that impacts the communication of American Indian identity. Thus, the following three research questions will direct my inquiry. First, I inquire, “How do Ortiz, his art, and the discourse surrounding both art and artist negotiate prevailing notions of American Indian representations?” Then I probe, “What affects do Ortiz’s representational politics have on popular notions of American Indian identity? Finally, I investigate, “How do Ortiz, his art, and the discourse surrounding both art and artist communicate expanded notions of American Indian identity?”

\textsuperscript{8}Liquiessent is a term from digital media studies that refers to virtual architecture and/or structures. Transarchitect and professor, Novak (1991/2002) seeking to expand the definition of architecture to include electronic space, originated the concept of "liquid architectures in cyberspace” (p. 272). Novak defines liquid architectures as follows:

Liquid architecture is an architecture that breathes, pulses, leaps as one form and lands as another. Liquid architecture is an architecture whose form is contingent on the interests of the beholder; it is an architecture that opens to welcome me and closes to defend me; it is an architecture without doors and hallways, where the next room is always where I need it to be and what I need it to be. Liquid architecture makes liquid cities, cities that change at the shift of a value, where visitors with different backgrounds see different landmarks, where neighborhoods vary with ideas held in common, and evolve as the ideas mature or dissolve. (p. 284)

In other words, the structures appear solid but are not remotely finally fixed. It might be useful to think of American Indian identity negotiation and tactics associated with its representation as being liquiessent, meaning of or like a liquid. Liquiessence offers formation options in that liquid has the ability to solidify or vaporize into a gas or to remain a liquid as determined by its circumstances.
Significance of Study

My research contributes to communication and American Indian studies in the following four ways: 1) demonstrates how one artist can create a disturbance in the way people define themselves and other cultures; 2) shows how Ortiz utilizes American Indian-inspired strategies to take a unique position that adds to American Indian counter discourses and unsettles notions of American Indianness; 3) enables a more multi-faceted reading of American Indians through art; and 4) further legitimizes the use of art to study representational politics by revealing its constitutive role in meaning production by cultural communities.

First, although art has been used to study representational politics (Kanouse; 2007; Moss, 2005; Sorrells, 2003), my research focuses on an American Indian artist that pushes representational boundaries to evoke identity articulations. My study demonstrates how one American Indian artist, Virgil Ortiz, and his work creates disturbances in both traditional and contemporary conventions that the dominant culture and American Indians use for defining American Indian representation and identity.

Moreover, this study shows how Ortiz adds his unique spin to the current American Indian counter discourses. My research outlines the strategies and tactics employed by both artist and his art that claim cultural sovereignty in ways that unsettle mainstream society’s and American Indian traditionalists’ notion of American Indianness. Ortiz employs novel, indigenously-inspired representational methods. Using American Indian-inspired discursive tactics such as tricksterism and shapeshifting, he expands political representational strategic options. These mysterious yet effective
maneuvers can serve as representational alternatives for other marginalized groups to model to their own cultural specificities.

Next, current theories provide a limited array of options for envisioning American Indian representation and identity with few exceptions. Mendoza’s (2005) work that draws upon Hall’s theory of articulation (1996/1985) is one such exception. She explains:

Theoretically speaking, then, the theory of articulation allows us to propose non-essentialist ways of understanding discourses on identities without discounting the need, at certain points, for more bounded identity articulations based on the strategic demands of a given historical situation. It likewise suggests productive ways of transcending (if not necessarily resolving) the tension between structural-functionalist determinations, on the one hand, and the ungrounded grounding of more poststructuralist invocation of identities, on the other hand, in the constitution of a radical cultural politics that can help move groups and collectivities towards mutual transformation and reciprocity in intercultural encounters. (p. 252)

My study, like Mendoza’s, attempts to fill the space between these essentialist and nonessentialist positions by pointing to the fact that cultural sutures need to be maintained long enough to establish an identity, take a representational position, and create a politics but not be held together so long that representation and identity become permanently fixed.

In his book, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*, Berkhofer, Jr. (1978) explains that American Indians were given a variety of labels according to the historical period, beliefs at the time, political agendas, etc. Berkhofer’s list of labels includes the following: bad Indian, stoic Indian, good Indian, Noble Savage, bloodthirsty redskin, infidel, Red outlaw, heathen, wild Indian, barbarian, ignoble Indian, Native American, and Red man. Not only do these monikers share the condition of being descriptive and evaluative, but also, unfortunately,
they share the condition of being extremely limiting. My study enables a more multi-
faceted reading of American Indians.

Lastly, my research further legitimizes the use of art in the analysis of the study of
representational politics by articulating and theorizing art’s operation in this process. This
study explains the complex relationship between representation and identity by revealing
how art plays into the relationship by functioning constitutively to produce meanings. As
Calafell and Delgado (2004) explain, “As a visual medium, art has the ability to
communicate because it can collect images and artifacts of cultural and ideological
resonance and reposition them within a given frame to echo long-held sentiments while
articulating new meanings” (p. 5). In other words, art can operate as a transformative
medium that provides representational and identity possibilities.

Outline of Study

Chapter 2 details my research design including my orientation and
methodological approaches to Ortiz and his work. I account for my orientation choice of
critical invention to this intertextual data. Then, I explain how pairing a critical rhetorical
approach to the discourse surrounding both art and artist with Sorrells’ (1999)
methodological and theoretical approach for visual analysis of Ortiz’s work combine to
produce critiques of both vernacular and the dominant discourse.

Chapter 3 contains my review of literature that addresses the following three
issues: linking American Indian cultural identity, collective identity, and cultural
sovereignty to the production of American Indian art; art and American Indian identity;
and art and the politics of representation.
Chapter 4 functions as an historical contextual chapter that provides background on the discursive construction of American Indians. In this chapter, I address the poetics and politics of pivotal dominant discourses stemming from the legal and popular realms produced by the dominant culture regarding American Indians. I also reveal the poetics and politics of significant American Indian counter discourses emanating from the popular realm that serve as sites of resistance to the dominant discourses. I explain how each type of discourse shapes American Indian identity and representation, and impacts tribal/cultural sovereignty. Investigation into these discourses also frames an understanding of Ortiz and his work.

Chapter 5 explores how Ortiz uses the theme of sadomasochistic dominance and submission (SMDS) to shape an artistic message that surreptitiously persuades his audience to consider transformative constitutions of American Indian art, representations, and identities. First, I explain the terms involved and outline pertinent background information of the SMDS theme. Then, I identify examples of Ortiz’s work within three mediums – sculpture, pottery, and fashion – that carry SMDS referents and explore how this anchor theme is communicatively operating throughout them.

Chapter 6 analyzes how Ortiz both subverts and complies with the dominant culture’s current entrenchment in commodity capitalism and in stale American Indian representations. I outline how Ortiz maneuvers this consumer capitalist conceived marketing maze using branding and personal branding. Specifically, I explore how Ortiz designs, packages, promotes, and publicizes both himself and his art.
Chapter 7 summarizes my findings and returns to address my three research questions. I conclude by explaining the limitations and implications of my study and providing applications for future research.
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN: MAPPING A MATRIX FOR EXAMINING ORTIZ’S REPRESENTATIONAL AND IDENTITY POLITICS

A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. (Shelley, 1904, p. 34)

When trying to devise a method through which to address Ortiz, his art, and the discourse surrounding both, I realize that the study requires both an orientation that permits creative freedom rather than constraint and a methodological approach that is capable of tackling a breadth of material types. Critical invention serves as such an orientation. I selected two approaches to properly address the imagery and text that constitute this study’s data. Critical rhetoric as a methodological approach to the discourse concerning Ortiz and his art paired with visual analysis as a theoretical and methodological approach to Ortiz’s art surface as techniques that are capable of adeptly addressing the intertextuality and complexity of this project.

Ortiz – while well known, prolific, and award winning – is not the only American Indian contemporary artist to create provocative and analyzable work. Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland (1994) explain, “… the choice of a text should be made on the belief that a critical analysis of that particular text has something to offer – a different way of understanding or acting – to the community the critic addresses” (p. 5). Ortiz and his work deem attention because they offer transformative American Indian representations that are consequential in broadening the spectrum of identity considerations for American Indians and dominant culture.
Due to their significance, I analyze both Ortiz’s work and the discourse surrounding both art and artist. First, I look at representative pieces from a variety of mediums and genres in which Ortiz engages. I select these pieces on the basis of the following three criteria: 1) the possibility to view the piece(s) in person and/or 2) the appearance or repeated appearances of photographs of the piece(s) in texts and/or 3) the presence of accompanying written information about or explanation of the piece(s).

Specifically, I investigate examples from the following mediums: his Trail of Painted Ponies sculpture; exemplars of his pottery including his monos\(^9\) and vessels; his fashions, both in collaboration with couture designer, Donna Karan, and his own VO™ clothing and accessory lines; his body paintings and costume designs applied in advertisements and fashion shows; and his ever-evolving website.

Ortiz and his work not only add to the avenues already constructed to address American Indian representational politics, but also expand those pathways by pushing the boundaries to question how and why people understand American Indians and, in turn, themselves as they do. Moreover, an analysis of Ortiz’s work and the discourse surrounding both art and artist offers an alternative model to re-imagining and possibly re-negotiating power dynamics between the dominant culture, American Indians, and for that matter, other marginalized groups.

As such, my choice to look at Ortiz, his work, and the discourse surrounding them is a calculated one in order to contribute to theory and to participate in civic life by

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\(^9\) *Monos* is a term that Ortiz (as cited in Shaw, 2006) coined to title his often caustic contemporary clay figures for which he is most known that revive a previously banned (from Indian Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1910) type of tall standing figure that parodied Pueblo visitors in the late 1800s.
offering options to an audience to think or act differently with regards to American Indian representation and identity. I utilize critical invention with its “diversity of practices” (Nothstine et al., 1994, p. 8) as an orientation for probing these unusual or even subversive American Indian representational and identity articulations as constructed by Ortiz and his work.

Critical invention preserves the delicate balance between maintaining theoretical and methodological rigor and exercising “individual imagination, judgment, and intuition” (Nothstine et al., p. 11). This orientation enables me to investigate themes that wander through Ortiz’s work and through the artist himself that add to the existing scholarly conversation, yet at the same time push that conversation to the outer limits through creative imaginings that entwine with academic theories.

Critical invention also enables my research to self-imbricate, enfolding in on itself while unfurling to engulf existing theoretical constructs. This orientation embraces complexity and transformation. It permits a work to evolve rather than follow a prescribed path to reach an end goal. By stipulating that all critical questions or goals are “provisional,” (Nothstine et al., p. 11) critical invention invokes spontaneity, creativity, and freedom. Thus, critical invention is an orientation that is in keeping with my aim to offer transformative understandings of American Indians.

Critical Rhetoric

Benjamin (as cited in Evans & Hall, 1999) suggests that people need to have a critical understanding of the relationship of image and word/text and that they need to take a critical approach to visual and verbal communication because the image and word/text are becoming increasingly prevalent, interdependent, and relevant. In heeding
his advice, I balance my visual analysis with a critical rhetorical approach to the discourse surrounding Ortiz and his art.

First, I clarify what I mean by critical and address what a critical rhetorical approach to discourse entails. I begin by unpacking McKerrow’s (1989) standpoint on a critical rhetorical approach to discourse and end with Ono and Sloop’s (1995) shift towards a critique of vernacular discourse that aligns with my study. I also address how race and other identity articulations complicate a critical rhetorical approach, as these identifications are significant factors in the construction of American Indian representations. Then, I detail Sorrells (1999) theoretical and methodological approach to imagery that I use to conduct my visual analysis. I conclude by connecting how both approaches, visual and critical rhetorical, enhance my study.

By critical, I define the term in the same manner as Wodak (1999). She argues, “Critical does not mean detecting only the negative sides of social interaction and processes and painting a black and white picture of societies. Quite to the contrary: Critical means distinguishing complexity and denying easy, dichotomous explanations” (p. 186). I demonstrate how the discourse concerning Ortiz and his art functions prismatically (or in other words, a multi-faceted rather than in a two-sided manner) engaging criticism to illuminate the complex workings of power. McKerrow states, “The task of a critical rhetoric is to undermine and expose the discourse of power in order to thwart its effects in a social relation…” (p. 98). Through incorporation of this approach, I expose the oppressive regulatory régimes enacted by the dominant discourses that constrain American Indian representations to outline how Ortiz disturbs and resists them.
McKerrow explains that a critical rhetorical approach to discourse offers the following: “As theory, a critical rhetoric examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world….In practice, a critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power” (p. 91). He terms these two “complementary perspectives” as a “critique of domination” and a “critique of freedom” (p. 92).

Briefly, McKerrow addresses these critiques as having separate foci. He explains that a critique of domination focuses on the ideologies that sustain the social power of the dominant group and serves to “demystify the conditions of domination” (p.91). He says that the focus of a critique of freedom is on the permanent criticism of these dominating power structures with an aim to “promote a realignment in the forces of power that construct social relations” (p. 91). A critique of domination and a critique of freedom share four features that comprise a critical rhetoric as follows: 1) a “critical spirit;” 2) an “effectivity of communication in the exercise of social power;” 3) a focus on “something which it is against;” and 4) a consequential nature (McKerrow, 1989, p. 92).

Ono and Sloop (1992) argue for a merging of these two types of critiques by explaining, “Our first order of business, then, is to highlight the idea that freedom and domination and their respective critiques are actually two perspectives on the same phenomenon” (p. 49). They highlight the unity of the two critiques in their statement; “…We encourage the critic to work to initiate new relationships, to imagine new ways of constructing the world, and to replace the logic of dichotomies with alternatives” (1992, p. 50). Considering that Ortiz attempts to disturb the dominant culture’s binary
constructionism with regards to American Indians, my study benefits from approaching these critiques together.

According to Ono and Sloop (1992) the problem with separating these two approaches rather than addressing them in tandem is that while undertaking a critique of freedom, a critic can get trapped in a whirlpool of “constant self-reflection and self-criticism” (p. 52) leaving the critique without position or direction. Therefore, they call for a commitment to telos or in other words, a critical rhetoric must remove itself from skepticism long enough to “commit to a purpose” (p. 53). Ono and Sloop (1992) explain:

The critic in our conception maintains a commitment toward telos through which criticism is directed, while simultaneously recognizing the contingencies of this goal. One of the results of this configuration of a critical rhetoric will be the transcendence of the critiques of domination and of freedom; our critic will recognize that all criticism, because it shifts the current relations of power, critiques forms of domination by transforming them into new forms of power. The critique of domination and critique of freedom are effectively one, and are little more than different perspectives about a single discursive struggle. (p. 52)

Their commitment to telos within contingency insures that a critical rhetoric “is part of a larger performance toward anticipated ends” (1992, p. 57) that permits social movements to spawn rather than perpetuating critiques that merely serve as exercises in critical posturing. Their insistence on a commitment to telos pairs well with my intentions to have this study move beyond the theoretical realm of contributing to the scholarly conversation and into the material realm of transformative possibility.

Whether delineated by McKerrow or unified by Ono and Sloop, a critical rhetorical approach to discourse is, by nature, critical of something and serves to impact the knowledge of the social world in which it exists. Also, this approach offers to outline options for action by the participants within that social structure. Given that my hope for
this study is to provoke more artists and social activists to take up where the scholar leaves off, a critical rhetorical approach to the discourse surrounding Ortiz and his art is productive.

Although Ono and Sloop’s (1995) approach has some elements in common with McKerrow’s critique of freedom, Ono and Sloop’s shift towards a critique of vernacular discourse better aligns with my research. Just as Calafell and Delgado (2004) argue “that a visual rhetoric…can also function as a critical rhetoric rooted in the vernacular expressions found in the cultural margins” (p. 5), I argue that Ortiz’s body of work including his art and marketing can function as vernacular articulations of American Indians.

Ono and Sloop (1995) define vernacular discourse as “culture: the music, art, criticism, dance, and architecture” that reverberates from “historically oppressed communities” (p. 20). They state, “We argue that a critique of vernacular discourse is necessary to render power relations among subjects visible; this approach, we believe, will allow critics to move beyond challenge to transformation” (1995, p. 21). They explain that the same measure of skepticism must be applied to vernacular discourses as is applied to dominant discourses.

In that I examine Ortiz’s art and marketing to understand how they operate in relation and juxtaposition to the dominant discourses in order to provoke representational transformation, a critique of the vernacular discourse emerges as an insightful choice for attaining this goal. They add that while the end goal of criticism of vernacular discourse may seem to suggest only favorable representations and liberatory political identities and subject positions, this advantageous state is not always revealed. Rather, they explain:
…we note that the practice of the criticism of vernacular discourse should have as its goal a critical framework that works to upend essentialisms, undermine stereotypes, and eliminate their representations of culture. Criticism that essentializes or “reifies” (stabilizes signification within a system of discourse so that it becomes rigidified) should be displaced and altered in order to avoid further marginalization of vernacular communities and to allow for a critical reading of the effects of vernacular discourse. (p. 25)

In other words, the criticism of vernacular discourse allows the critic to keep it real by allowing discourses to operate in transition rather than remaining ensconced in perpetual opposition to hegemonic discourses (Trinh, as cited in Ono & Sloop, 1995).

As a final note on vernacular discourse, Boyd (as cited in Ono & Sloop, 1995) cautions that before undertaking a critique of vernacular discourse, an historical and cultural context that outlines how representations come to be must be outlined, hence, my decision to include Chapter 4, which functions as historical contextual grounding for American Indian representations and identity articulations.

A critical rhetorical approach to discourse in its quest to spotlight “the various workings of power, dominance, subordination, and marginalization” directs considerable attention to issues of race (Flores & Moon, 2002, p. 183). Flores and Moon pose a construct termed “the racial paradox” that allows for “the tension between imagining identities beyond race while still recognizing the material reality of race as a fundamental organizing construct” (p. 181). I suggest that this paradoxical construct could just as easily apply to a variety of identifications including those based on culture, gender, and sexual orientation. With Ortiz’s art and marketing being marked by intersecting identities, applying a critical rhetorical approach provides a way of unpacking these identities to show how they are used to both subvert and comply with dominant notions of American Indians.
Whichever identity is functioning paradoxically, Cloud (1996) reminds us that transformative discursive constructions of race do not always translate into transformative material experiences and/or lived realities of race. An additional caution comes in the form of a measure of emphasis on or attention paid to identity categorizations. On the one hand, by placing too much emphasis on identity categorizations, the criticism of essentialism can be argued. On the other hand, by paying too little attention to identity categorizations or by avoiding addressing multiple intersecting identities, the option of claiming political solidarity around that identity/those identities is minimized or erased. Claiming political solidarity around an identity and/or multiple intersecting identities creates “mobile subject positions willing to engage in border crossings” (hooks, as cited in Flores & Moon, p. 186). Hall’s (1985/1996) notion of strategic “articulations” (p. 141) suggests that these identities be momentarily claimed and sutured to permit solidarity in the name of political action, social mobility, power negotiation, etc. while avoiding miring those identities in the confines of essentialism.

I position the discourse concerning both Ortiz and his art as my objects of focus. This discourse includes applicable examples that address the following: 1) a particular Ortiz piece; 2) a specific medium that Ortiz engages in; and/or 3) Ortiz both personally and professionally. Any source that discusses, promotes, investigates, or critiques Ortiz and/or his work serves as a viable communication text for investigation. I refer to texts in McGee’s (1990) terms of thinking about them as “formations” (p. 287) as he explains that this strategy “has the power to account for discourse produced in consequence of the fragmentation of culture” (p. 288). He says:
I like the term ‘formation’, but I want to keep clear that we are dealing with *fragments*, not texts, and that we mean to treat a ‘formation’ as if it were a singular text – only then can we interpret, analyze, and criticize. (p. 287)

In light of McGee’s framing I draw from a variety of sources in order to assemble a formation including but not limited to the following: websites; art magazines; books; American Indian scholarly and mainstream journals and magazines; advertisements; gallery and museum brochures; and press materials.

Statements about Ortiz whether contradictory or in accordance with one another are closely examined. As such, I pay close attention to the denotations and connotations of the vocabulary used in the discourse surrounding both art and artist as well as the overall vocabulary choices to illuminate how the discourse functions.

**Visual Analysis**

To complement my critical rhetorical approach, I employ a method of visual analysis. Horn (1998) states that “combinable visual elements” or “visual language” encourages more “multitrack, integrated, multidimensional, synergistic, holistic ways of considering problems and provides frameworks for interethnic and intercultural understanding” (p. 246). Sorrells (1999) theoretical and methodological approach to reading intercultural imagery aligns with Horn’s notion and offers a unique way to conduct a visual analysis that seeks to provide inter and intracultural understanding.

Sorrells’ (1999) approach proposes a three-step engagement with imagery involving four disciplinary perspectives that spawn relevant points for analysis evolving from six different areas. Sorrells explains that the three-step engagement proceeds with the following: “1) engagement with the piece as a whole; 2) application of a synthesized
multidisciplinary framework; and 3) integrated re-engagement with the piece with the newly informed perspective” (p. 8).

She clarifies her initial step by explaining that engagement with the piece as whole is an immersive phase that entails a kind of gestalt connection with it that avoids deconstructing the piece into parts. Sorrells warns that it is important to suspend judgment about the piece by resisting the urge to immediately dissect it. She encourages the researcher “to engage with the created form” (p. 8). Sorrells promotes such actions as walking around the piece, experiencing its exterior and interior, and touching the piece if the work itself and/or the venue that the piece is displayed permit those actions.

Sorrells details her second step by explaining that her framework draws from four disciplinary perspectives (rhetorical, critical, semiotic, and visual anthropology), which serve as a larger analytic framework for positing questions from each paradigm’s standpoints that draw from the following six categories: “communication participants, context, form, medium, function, and content” (p. 21). For example, the critical perspective generates a content question that reads, “How is the text a site of contested interpretation?” (p. 21). On the other hand, the semiotics perspective produces a content question that says, “What are the meanings of the symbols?” (p. 21). The visual anthropology perspective occasions a function question that reads, “What sociocultural purpose does the piece/text serve?” (p. 21). Whereas, the rhetorical perspective provokes a function question that asks, “How does this text function?” (p. 21). From these examples, one can glean that each perspective produces questions unique to their scholarly paradigm that are designed to serve the communication discipline.
I apply Sorrells’ questions drawn from her four disciplinary paradigms that probe communication participants, context, and function to not only Ortiz’s art but also to the discourse surrounding both art and artist. For example, I ask questions concerning the discourse as follows: 1) who is the text’s communicator and audience? 2) does the text operate as a site of resistance? and/or 3) what ideology is maintained by the construction of the text?

Sorrells’ final step encourages the researcher to re-engage with the piece as a whole, with an improved level of visual literacy following her second step, which opens up the possibility of having a new experience with the piece, wherein previously unnoticed aspects emerge. By having undertaken the first two steps, Sorrells points out that the researcher “may be more aware of what to look for” (p. 15) and better skilled at looking.

Overall, Sorrells’ work fills a research gap by creating a more structured approach to interpreting and critiquing intercultural visual communication. Furthermore, the questions that her framework elicits are not only applicable to the visual components of Ortiz’s work that encompass the medium, form, and content but also address the metalinguistic elements of his work that deal with the communication participants, context, and function. By utilizing Sorrells’ method, I am able to create a critique of Ortiz’s work, which functions as a vernacular discourse.

Ultimately, this study employs critical invention to illuminate how one artist, through his work, impacts how American Indian representation and identity are understood. By taking a critical rhetorical approach to the discourse surrounding both Ortiz and his art, I aim to illuminate how historical, economic, and cultural contextual
factors are functioning within these texts in order to paint a more holistic picture of the
operation of representational politics. In the end, a critical rhetorical approach to the
discourse surrounding Ortiz and his art is combined with Sorrells’ method of visual
analysis to produce both critiques of vernacular and dominant discourse that allow for the
operations of representation and power to be revealed and carefully considered. These
considerations create spaces for alternative American Indian identities to emerge.
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW: AMERICAN INDIAN IDENTITIES, SOVEREIGNTY, ART, AND POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

...For until then only the language of the oppressor is available, and most oppressors have had the wit to teach the oppressed a language in which the oppressed will sound crazy – ‘even to themselves’ – if they describe themselves as oppressed (Rorty, as cited in Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p. 57).

As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes (Bakhtin, 1923/1990, p. 23).

The literature review provides a foundation for understanding three key relationships that factor into this study as follows: the linking of cultural identity, collective identity, and cultural sovereignty to the production of American Indian art; art and American Indian identity; and art and the politics of representation. Examining each of these three components in depth and understanding the way in which they operate together lays the groundwork for my study which tracks how contemporary American Indian artist, Virgil Ortiz, and his work impact thinking on American Indian representation and identity.

The literature stems from a broad base of disciplines including critical cultural studies; art and art history; American Indian studies, and communication studies. By combining key points from each field, I create a web of connections that enables a more nuanced grasp of these three complex relationships. This understanding allows me to create a theoretical framework from which to analyze Ortiz’s work and my research questions.
I start by examining the links between cultural identity, collective identity, and cultural sovereignty that serve to produce American Indian art. I define each term and explain how each concept plays into one another and to the production of American Indian art. Next, I outline art’s link to American Indian identity. I present a survey of American Indian art from the late 1800s to the present in order to familiarize readers with its distinct trajectory. I examine how the various philosophical movements – structuralism, poststructuralism, modernism, and postmodernism – impact constructions of identity and representation that affect the art world, focusing on American Indian art. Finally, I conclude by unpacking art and the politics of representation.

Linking American Indian Cultural Identity, Collective Identity, and Cultural Sovereignty to American Indian Art

In this first section, three concepts are outlined to demonstrate how they produce not just any type of art, but specifically, what is referred to as, American Indian art, which is a genre of art that amalgamates a wide range of art practices from many tribes. First, I start by unpacking the root word *culture*, as its definition provides a clearer understanding of the lens from which I examine cultural identity and cultural sovereignty. Next, I define cultural identity based on the work of noted scholars, pairing it with my own framing, and connect cultural identity to the production of American Indian art. Then, I tackle outlining collective identity, revealing sources from which American Indian collective identity is produced and maintained. I detail how art functions as such a source through its symbolic elements and link this concept to the production of American Indian art. Finally, I detail how the claim of cultural sovereignty through the production
of American Indian art complicates representational and identity politics but nonetheless, encourages the moniker of American Indian art for such work.

Culture and Cultural Identity

Culture is a prismatic concept that carries with it a variety of definitions based on the angle from which the concept is viewed. For the purposes of this study, I choose to understand culture based on Hall’s\textsuperscript{10} (2003) explanation of culture as a “process” (p. 2). He says, “Culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ – between the members of a society or group” (p. 2). Individuals that culturally identify with one another form this society or group. Culture, therefore, provides threads to which individuals connect, which when woven together form a cultural group with a distinguishable cultural identity.

My understanding of cultural identity stems from a combination of Fong’s (2004) and Collier’s (in press) definitions of cultural identity. Fong (2004) explains that cultural identity

\textsuperscript{10} I draw upon Hall in lieu of other scholars as his definition of culture, which serves as a thread for connection, opens the door for consideration of his (1985/1996) theory of articulation, which speaks to momentary cultural suturing that does not result in final fixation. Hall explains:

An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time....So the so-called ‘unity’ of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be re-articulated in different ways because they have no necessary ‘belongingness’. (p. 141)

This theory of articulation eventually can lead to “cultural transformation” (Hall, 1985/1996, p. 143) by permitting the re-organization of elements that have no inherently political connotations to re-assemble in innovative ways to invoke new discursive formations that re-articulate identity.

Moving through Hall’s notion of culture to land at his theory of articulation that ultimately can provoke cultural transformation marries well with my research, as I am trying to uncover how Ortiz and his art expand notions of American Indian representation, which can result in a re-articulation of American Indian identity.
identity is “the identification of communications of a shared system of symbolic verbal and nonverbal behavior that are meaningful to group members who have a sense of belonging and who share traditions, heritage, language, and similar norms of appropriate behavior” (p. 6). Meaningful shared behaviors are at the crux of Fong’s definition.

Collier broadens Fong’s notion of cultural identity. Collier postulates that cultural identity can be thought of “as shared locations of speaking, acting and producing in historical, political, social, [and] economic contexts. These identifications are fluid and have shifting boundaries, and implicate actual and imagined communities” (p. 9). Collier expands shared behaviors to include “locations of speaking, acting, and producing” and stretches the boundaries of these shared locations to reflect how the operations contained within them impact broader contextual arenas.

I extract the essences from Fong’s and Collier’s respective definitions and infuse some of my own thinking on cultural identity to arrive at the following working definition of cultural identity: the communication of a shared system of symbolic verbal and nonverbal messages in a variety of societal contexts that are meaningful to group members who have a sense of belonging, who share heritages, beliefs, language, values, imagery, symbolism, spiritual practices, rituals, and similar norms of appropriate behavior. Furthermore, these aspects of cultural identity function dynamically and mutatively, throughout time, acting within communicative communities and on other communicative communities.

As one can see from this conceptual examination of cultural identity, there is no definable critical mass for cultural identity to magically become apparent. As cultures fluctuate so do identities. However, some type of core or shared loci seems to be present
for individuals to attach themselves to, which explains the emphasis on “shared” in all of the above definitions. In order to avoid essentializing any cultural group, the emphasis must be placed on the dynamic nature of both individuals and groups. In other words, individuals and groups both produce and are products of change and consequently, so is their cultural identity.

From this explication of cultural identity, a conclusion can be made that these group members that operate from similar cultural standpoints tend to interpret meaning and/or produce meanings in similar ways. Thereby, they construct discourse (which includes representations) unique to their culture. Simply put, a group with a shared cultural identity produces similar cultural representations, including art. With culture inexorably tied to discourse and subsequently, representation, it is no wonder that art creates, circulates, and contests endless forms of knowledge about cultural identities and cultural representations.

*Collective Identity*

Another concept that can be linked to the production of American Indian art is collective identity. Assman (as cited in Straub, 2002) relays how a collective identity comes into being as follows:

Collective identity is a question of *identification* on the part of the participating individuals. It does not exist “in itself”, but only to the extent that certain individuals profess it. It is strong or weak insofar as it lives in the thought and action of the group members and can motivate their thoughts and actions. (p. 71)

Assman’s thoughts suggest that collective identity functions on both conscious and unconscious levels and collective identity’s strength waffles based on the desires of those who identify with it. Straub (2002) claims, “Collective identities are communicative
constructs; they are *discursive facts* that in the context of scholarship rest on empirical-reconstructive close readings of the relevant aspects of the self-relationship and world-relationship of the persons affected” (p. 72). By this claim, Straub sets up the possibility that the structure of collective identity can lead to the same *Us/Them* construct that cultural identities sometimes promote.

Both collective and cultural identifications rely on shared group identification. Any group identification positions some people as insiders and everyone else as outsiders. As long as these insider/outsider communities, marked by difference, remain fluid, identity and representational transformation can continue to occur. It is when these communities become fixed that representational battles commence. However, a fleeting suturing of collective and/or cultural group identifications is important in order to allow a group to re-claim their identity and representation. This suturing becomes particularly significant for marginalized groups, in the face of the dominant group. Collective identification becomes one way to momentarily close one’s own cultural borders and begin to create a politics of identity and representation (Mendoza, 2005).

There are a number of wellsprings for American Indian collective identity produced through group identification, including but not limited to the following: biological, sacred, linguistic, geographic, familial, mythic, and philosophical (Leuthold, 1998). One of the primary generators and effects of American Indian collective identity is the production of cultural artistic representations, commonly referred to as art. Leuthold explains that American Indian productions of art and the assumptions made about these representations helps to create a sense of solidarity that binds American Indians together. In this way, they assert their cultural continuity to the dominant culture.
representational production is an important cultural glue that encourages them to declare themselves a People—a people that persist in spite of the dominant culture’s attempts to position, diminish, or annihilate them. In short, American Indian art production is one important way of creating and maintaining collective tribal identity.

Another source of collective identity stems from the symbolism contained in the stylistic elements of American Indian art. Leuthold says, “…collective identity is achieved symbolically” (p. 18). He explains that symbols in art are “mediating or connecting devices” (p. 18) that “bridge collective memory and social acts such as rite, ritual, and performance” (p. 18). These bridges, along with the bridges constructed from other group identifications, fill in the gaps between varying tribal contexts and act as sites for negotiation and mediation of similar yet varying value systems. In other words, these bridges are fluctuating and dynamic rather than fixed, which accounts for the variance in styles.

These styles are reflective of “a series of experiences and decisions that relate to the larger contexts of culture and society” (Leuthold, p. 18). Often styles that are reflective of collective identity spawn from two key factors: 1) American Indians’ identification as a colonized people, and 2) American Indians’ identification with the importance of the sacred in all aspects of life. According to Leuthold, “Style, then, serves as a basis for considering artistic expressions as collective representations…. Collective representations emerge as a key link between the psychology of the individual and the group” (pp. 19-20). In other words, collective representations are individually produced representational products that can, but do not always, contain similar stylistic elements.
that are the result of a mental, emotional, social, and/or psychological connection to a group or collective identity.

American Indian art then both carries and produces meanings that emerge from prior conscious understandings and unconscious expressions of both individual and collective identity. Art becomes essential in any discussion of the reconstruction and transformation of cultural identity due to its “persuasive appeal for identification with a new frame of reference” (Leuthold, p. 23). Therefore, signification through artistic representation is positioned as a primary site for the negotiation of social control and as a key location for the operation of interpersonal, intracultural, and intercultural power relations.

**Cultural Sovereignty**

The final concept that plays into the production of American Indian art is cultural sovereignty. Contemporary American Indian artists construct counter discourses through their work by claiming cultural sovereignty, which threatens mainstream society’s notion of *Indianness* (what American Indians should be, what they should look like, and where and how they should act in society). Cultural sovereignty is defined by Joseph (1997) as “the ability of a group to define its cultural practices and meanings as representative expressions of the group” (p. 595). Cultural sovereignty references a supreme, paramount power of collective ownership over a one’s own culture just as national sovereignty implies an absolute power over a collective body politic in the form of lands, goods, resources, people, etc., (Foucault, 1976/1980). For American Indians, claiming cultural sovereignty is one of the primary issues to be considered in the maintenance of their representations and collective cultural identity.
In the end, much of the American Indian identity question becomes wrapped up in the framework of tribal sovereignty, too. In explanation of this concept, Horse (2005) states:

Sovereignty is vested in the body politic of the tribe as a whole, not in individuals. Neither is sovereignty given or bestowed from one government to another. It is an inherent aspect of nationhood. Nations are free to recognize one another and to make treaties with one another. (p. 64)

In short, the United States has managed to exploit tribal sovereignty status as a way to promote or negate American Indian identity by wielding the power of that status to splinter its members. Tuscarora art scholar, Rickard (1995) comments, “Sovereignty is the border that shifts indigenous experience from a victimized stance to a strategic one” (p. 51). As this statement suggests, gaining and maintaining sovereignty, both tribal and its offshoot cultural, is a strategic move that allows for the opportunity of self-representational and self-identificational determination.

Cultural sovereignty both empowers and benefits American Indian artists, as it enables them to position themselves as subjects who control their own representations via the production of counter discourses. However, claiming cultural sovereignty can function as a dual-edged sword, as it can prompt detrimental as well as beneficial effects. Two complications arise from claiming cultural sovereignty.

Cultural Sovereignty Risks and Opportunities

The first complication is that American Indian art sometimes pits the individual artist’s vision, techniques, style, and final work against that of the tribe’s vision, traditional techniques, stylistic elements, and end product. This dynamic of individual artist’s creations pitted against the tribe’s representational recommendations and/or
judgments spotlights the conflict of individualist art versus committed art, which will be unpacked in further detail later in this section and other chapters.

The second complication is that art can be equated with cultural property, which often promotes cultural commodification and appropriation. To claim cultural sovereignty is to insist upon cultural ownership. Acts of cultural commodification and appropriation strip ownership from American Indians and shift that ownership into the hands of the dominant culture.

Before unpacking further complications, I point to one of the positive effects of claiming cultural sovereignty. To claim cultural sovereignty of representations illustrates the idea that American Indians are a complex people who straddle both ancient and modern worlds. Many contemporary American Indian artists visually investigate this ancient/modern chrono-spatial dynamic in their work through depictions of binary oppositions, which function as counter discourses (Harlan, 1995; Rickard, 1995). These counter discourses spawn new knowledge about American Indians by making visual arguments that transcend notions of American Indian as “relic” (Hatt, 1997, p. 93).

Mithlo (2004) explains how these counter discourses operate when she suggests, “By shifting the locus of the analysis from the psychology of the oppressor to the experiences of the oppressed, a discursive space is made in which new paradigms of knowledge may become accessible” (p. 230). This new knowledge celebrates and privileges Indigenous knowledge, which threatens the hegemonic discourses produced by the dominant culture. As Harlan (1995) who is both an ethnic scholar and curator, explains:
Native image-makers who contribute to self-knowledge and survival create messages and remembrances that recognize origin, nature, and direction of their Native existence and communities. They understand that their point of origin began before the formation of the United States and is directly rooted to the land. These Native image-makers understand that these images they create may either subvert or support existing representations of Native people. They understand that they must create the intellectual space for their images to be understood, and free themselves from the contest over visual history and its representations of Native people. (p. 32)

Harlan’s words invite an explication of the threat enacted by these Native image-makers, which begs further investigation into how contemporary American Indian artists produce counter discourses through their art. My research addresses the question that Harlan’s quote provokes, as my study spotlights how a contemporary American Indian artist, Ortiz, and his work expand the production of a counter discourse.

The creation of American Indian counter discourses invites another complication. American Indian artists’ counter discourses, encased in the shell of contemporary committed art, provides a nod to the past, a footstep in the present, and a gaze to the future. Nambe ceramicist, Lonnie Vigil explains the past/present/future triptych that is represented in American Indian contemporary committed art. He says, “I’m the person who creates it, but it’s Nambe Pueblo pottery. It belongs to my ancestors, my ancestry, to my family and to our community. Unlike Western art, we don’t claim the work as our own” (as cited in Mithlo, 2004, p. 240). One of the tenets of the committed art movement is contained in Vigil’s reference to ownership, wherein cultural ownership is placed above individual ownership. Committed art demands that individual artistic identity take a back seat to other hierarchically more important identities such as ethnic, national, racial, etc., and in the case of American Indians, collective and cultural identity. To claim cultural sovereignty in the production of American Indian art proves to be both liberating
and confining to the contemporary American Indian artists that produce the work and to the scholars that unpack the counter tactics and strategies contained within the work.

Another complication arises because this sovereignty claim provokes American Indian artistic/cultural representations to function as cultural property, which have value. In order to make the leap from the idea of artistic/cultural representation to that of cultural property, I draw from Moore’s (1997) profound statement as follows: “Cultural representation is cultural property; cultural property is cultural survival; therefore cultural representation is cultural survival” (p. 549). Cultural property denotes ownership of one’s own culture and opens up the possibility of that property being equated with Bourdieu’s (1986/2002) notion of “cultural capital” that he breaks down into three states as follows:

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee. (p. 282)

In terms of relevance to the production of American Indian art, I focus more on the objectified state of cultural capital that relates to cultural goods.

Thinking about art in Bourdieu’s terms, cultural representations are a form of cultural capital, which implies that these representations have a value assigned to them. Ownership of these valuable representations is integral to the maintenance of the dynamic entity that is American Indian collective cultural identity. Pitfalls come with this ownership. Shanley (1997) states, “Indian cultural capital (which, ironically, is one of the few marketable resources American Indians consistently have) historically invites
chicanery and fraud” (p. 683). The idea that American Indian art functions as cultural capital with a value attached, unfortunately, promotes cultural commodification and appropriation. Inevitably, when something possesses value, both positive and negative forces (dependent on one’s standpoint) collide to act upon that value. Consequently, the claim of cultural sovereignty becomes a complex assertion with favorable and unfavorable effects on the production of American Indian art.

Art itself has both “divisive and synthetic potentiality in intergroup relations,” (Leuthold, p. 27) and, I suggest, intragroup relations. The importance of emphasizing the dynamism in art while also looking at it systemically helps to avoid fixed perceptions of the Other. In short, art proves to be a valid and revealing lens in which to explore the connections between cultural identity, collective identity, and cultural sovereignty. My research adds to the evidence that art, with its direct link to signification, is a particularly salient locus of group identification and ultimately, a wellspring for producing and circulating representational politics.

Art and American Indian Identity

American Indian art has and continues to endure a complicated journey through the art world lexicon. In what follows, I map out what I see as the interconnections between American Indian art and identity as drawn from the writings of American Indian and non-Native communication, art, and philosophical scholars.

I present a large conceptual canvas, consisting of two broad brushstrokes, to paint a picture of some of the seminal movements that have and continue to impact thinking about American Indian identity and art. Often these movements overlap, intersect, and
operate simultaneously or asynchronously, depending upon their locus and filtration into geographic regions.

My first brushstroke outlines a brief history of the perceptions about American Indian art and explains how it is positioned within the larger context. The term “American Indian art” is used interchangeably with the terms “Native American art”, “Native art,” and “Indian art,” in that, sources often refer to American Indian art in a myriad of manners. With my second brushstroke, I outline the effects of some of the major philosophical movements – covering the end of structuralism that leads into poststructuralism and modernism which break ground for postmodernism – as they relate primarily to American Indian art and identity.

Survey of American Indian Art

To efficiently address American Indian art in the United States and present the groundwork for its discussion, I conduct more of an overall survey rather than an in-depth feature detailing individual artists and tribal influences on American Indian art forms and phases. By this token, I do not mean to diminish the work of important individuals and phases within the U.S. American Indian arts movement. However, in order to be concise and address the crux of this study’s subject matter – the intersections of identity and representation as manifested through art – I aim to concisely outline the progression of American Indian art within the larger art framework. In regards to the survey format, Berlo and Phillips' (1998) warn:

Yet the survey, like all forms of narrative, shapes the story it tells. Aboriginal conceptions of time are often organized around principles of cyclical rather than linear order. Western traditions of historical narrative which, in contrast, tend to privilege moments of change, are appropriate to a history of Native American art in the sense that much of the story of this art over the past five centuries tells of
successive visual responses to crises such as epidemics, forced removals from homelands, repressive colonial regimes, religious conversion, and contact with foreign cultures and their arts. Yet it is also a story of the enduring strength of traditions. The many moments of transformation, rupture, and renewal in art contained in this story reveal the importance of visual arts in maintaining integrity of spiritual, social, political, and economic systems. (pp. 3)

In response to Berlo and Phillips warning, I illuminate the American Indian responses to oppressive, often misguided representations and relegations of their art by the dominant culture while at the same time spotlighting the enduring traditions and continual transformations that are manifested through American Indian art. I proceed with an abbreviated survey of American Indian art based primarily on information drawn from Grove Art Online (2006) with supplemental text included from additional scholars.

Prior to the late 1800s, American Indian art was not perceived as art. American Indian art was thought of in terms of American Indian material culture and, consequently, was treated as a collection of ethnographic objects, more utilitarian in nature than artistic. Hence, American Indian art was studied more from an anthropological perspective than an artistic one (Grove Art Online: Native North American art, §XVII, 1: Historiography: Anthropological approaches). This approach continues, in some instances, through to the

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11 As this section is merely meant to provide a background context for the foreground analysis, I choose to reference Grove Art Online (GAO) as a primary source. GAO is a comprehensive online database that contains information on all aspects of worldwide visual arts. GAO is compiled from a vast array of scholarly articles and books. GAO provides web access to the entire text of The Dictionary of Art (1996, 34 vols.) with ongoing additions of new material and updates to the text. GAO also provides access to The Oxford Companion to Western Art (2001). As GAO’s section on Native North American Art is organized in an outline format from which users can click and access the headings and subheadings with subsequent bibliographic information, I include either the author’s name that compiled the information for the section (if available) or the entire section’s outline heading the first time it is referenced. For subsequent mentions of the same heading, I only include reference to the specific subheading title.
present day. Joe Baker (Delaware Nation), the Heard Museum’s Lloyd Kiva new Curator of Fine Arts states, “Museums have largely relegated the so-called ‘cultural’ arts to only a subsidiary role: as object, adornment, a stage for topical discussion centered around cultural significance and meaning” (as cited in Traditional Fine Arts Organization, Inc. website, 2004, p. 1).

However, there are many factors that impacted the trajectory of how American Indian art was and is considered, positioned, and staged. Traders, museum curators, anthropologists, members of the U.S. government, art scholars and critics, Native and non-Native artists, and collectors are the people that have impacted and continue to impact American Indian art’s trajectory. Also, factors such as schools of thought, academic disciplines, tourism, financial markets, and regional organizations have had and continue to have influence on this trajectory.

For example, Berlo (1992) says that late 19th century and early 20th century traders, particularly in the Southwest, such as John H. Huckel, Thomas Kean, Clinton Neal Cotton, and John Bradford Moore were responsible for influencing styles in American Indian art based on the traders’ communications to American Indian artists of the dominant culture’s consumer desires and demands. For example, in response to the dominant culture’s desire for more circular motifs in their rugs, often American Indian artists strayed from their tribe’s traditional motifs that might have been more linear in nature to comply with market demands.

Sorrells (2003) details this commodification of representation in an essay that focuses on this process as it pertains to Navajo weavers and Pueblo potters. Moreover, U.S. government-sponsored arts and crafts fairs further influenced designs and forms by
their insistence on quality standardization (Graham, 2004/2006). Due to this consumer
demand that often resulted in cultural commodification, Graham explains that
anthropologists such as Frank Hamilton Cushing, Frank Boas, and Stewart Culin felt that
American Indian cultures were dying. This scare prompted museums to collect and
display American Indian material culture in an attempt to have some *authentic* pieces.

By the 1920s American Indian art began to be perceived more as artistic
representations rather than as utilitarian objects. As such, art scholars began to focus
more on detailing aesthetics rather than explaining the functions of the work (Graham).
Due to this shift whereby the artistic details and craftsmanship of the art was highlighted,
American Indian art became thought of more in terms of a master craft. In other words, if
American Indian art was being considered a product of civility, it had moved up on the
hierarchical chain from utilitarian object to master craft, but still had not reached the
supreme civility marker of fine art.

With the 30s came the European theoretical construct termed “diffusionism”
which positioned American Indian art as a “trans-Pacific” evolutionary offshoot of
ancient Asian art, subsequently, categorizing American Indian art as primitive art
(Anthropological approaches, p. 1). This trans-Pacific evolution notion that secured the
relegation of American Indian art to that of the primitive art was born out of the idea that
at one point in history the Bering Strait offered a migratory option for Asians to relocate
to North America. This migratory notion, constructed out of Eurocentric religious dogma
and scientific thinking, as expressed in the *Bering Strait theory*, was heatedly contested
by imminent Standing Rock Sioux scholar and activist, Vine Deloria, Jr. and unpacked in
On diffusionism’s heels swept the structuralist movement that countered the diffusionist notion of relegating American Indians to a primitive category by claiming that primitives as well as Westerners were “shaped by constant laws of abstract structure” (Timmermann, 2006, p.1) – thereby, positioning primitives as equally intellectually capable as Westerners. The upward propulsion of American Indian intellectual status, prompted by structuralism, influenced art scholars to uncover the underlying structures of American Indian art (Anthropological approaches). In part, as a result of the shift in thinking in the 20s and the theoretical movements of the 30s, American Indian art gained momentum as an art form and, as such, was featured in a number of important exhibits on both American coasts (Grove Art Online: Native North American art, §XVII, 2: Historiography: Art-historical approaches).

In the 1940s, a group of European Surrealists who migrated to the United States echoed structuralism’s opposition to the diffusionist notion of American Indian art. They suggested that the similarity to ancient Asian art was due to similar mythic structures between American Indian and Asian cultures rather than as a result of population migration that promoted an evolutionary development of art (Art-historical approaches). These 40s transplanted Surrealists equated the inspirations of American Indian art with their own artistic inspirations (Art-historical approaches). The Surrealists’ attention to and support of American Indian art helped to validate it. Their support encouraged museums to run American Indian art exhibitions concurrently with long-standing American Indian ethnographic exhibitions. This distinction between art and ethnographic material both broadened the overall perspective on American Indian culture and
solidified American Indian art as an authentic, recognized art category. (Art-historical approaches).

While artistic movements played an important role in the development of American Indian art, American Indian artists and organizations in the Southwest also played key parts in the development, promotion, and expansion of American Indian fine art (Graham). Graham explains that the following six factors originating in the Southwest encouraged the blossoming of the American Indian art movement between the 20s and 40s: 1) museum-sponsored Indian fairs and arts and crafts shows; 2) training received at New Mexico’s Santa Fe Indian School that eventually became the Institute of American Indian Arts; 3) the Inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial started in Gallup, New Mexico; 4) the Santa Fe Indian Market; 5) the establishment of the Indian Arts and Craft Board; and 6) the Denver Art Museum’s installation of its Indian Art Collection and its sponsorship of local and visiting Indian artists’ shows.

Another boost for American Indian fine art that expanded its reach began on the East Coast. In 1941, New York’s Museum of Modern Art sponsored a seminal exhibition entitled *Indian Art in the US* that enabled American Indian art to broaden its reach (Graham). This exhibition and others like it served to capture the attention of non-Native artists and patrons and American and European collectors not previously exposed to the more on-going regional art movements occurring in pockets of the United States (Graham).

The next three decades were filled with reactionary responses to the imaginary decline of American Indian art. The 1950s brought with them a concern among collectors and curators that American Indian art was on the decline prompting the formation of the
Southwest Indian Art Project that ran from 1960-1962 to shape the future of American Indian arts (Graham). Graham explains that American Indian art sales soared due to the tourist explosion of the 1960s and 70s. However, with the tourist explosion came increasing consumer input into the stylistic elements of the American Indian art they purchased. American Indian art suffered the effects of cultural commodification due to an exacting consumer public. As a result, the next decade brought fears of the end of authentic American Indian art (Graham). She explains that such fears helped drive the market for American Indian art and positioned that market as an industry generating millions.

From the 80s on into the present day, American Indian art continues to celebrate the traditional and evolve with varied visions into the contemporary. Both traditional and contemporary evolutions of American Indian art problematize notions of identity and representation. Moreover, identity, cultural, and representational politics paired with the Western need to categorize serve to position American Indian art into neat niches as follows: tribal fine and folk art; sacred objects; decorative commercial fine arts; and individualist arts (Wade, 2004/2006, p. 1). This need to label art ignited a representational war by spurring battles around artistic self-representation. This space between committed art and individualist art becomes the ground from which I begin my study of Ortiz and his work.

As a re-cap, prior to the late 1800s when the Southwest trade routes started to influence thinking about American Indian art, this art was thought of more in terms of ethnographic representations of material culture. By the 20s, the thinking shifted again, and American Indian art was viewed more in terms of a master craft. By the 30s,
American Indian art was labeled primitive art. In the 40s, American Indian art gained recognition as a fine art. The 1950s brought the decline of American Indian art scare, which prompted the formation of a council to address the future of American Indian art. During the 60s and 70s American Indian art sales boomed.

With fears prompted by on-going cultural commodification during these two eras, the 80s ushered the decline of authentic American Indian art scare that caused the value of American Indian art to skyrocket. From the 80s to the present, American Indian art continues to expand in new directions, utilizing a variety of mediums. Particularly during boom periods, art politics flourish and beg for debate, which inevitably positions American Indian art and artists at the center of these representational battles.

*Philosophical Movements and Affects on American Indian Identity and Art*

In this section, I outline the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism and modernism to postmodernism, with modernity serving as their gateway. I place my emphasis on each movement’s effects on American Indian art, identity, and representation. Any discussion of a movement’s tenets are merely presented to lay the groundwork for explaining how the movement impacts thinking, construction, and positioning of American Indian art.

*Turn from structuralism to poststructuralism.*

Structuralism is a movement that lives up to its name, in that it is wholly concerned with revealing embedded structures. According to Timmermann (2006) structuralism is commonly associated with a French intellectual movement occurring during the 50s and 60s. Young (1981) explains the method that presupposes the movement:
The structural method, then, assumes that meaning is made possible by the existence of underlying systems of conventions, which enable elements to function individually as signs. Structuralist analysis addresses itself to the system of rules and relations underlying each signifying practice. (p. 3)

Young points out that this type of analysis when applied to an object of study sets out to map that object’s system of rules and relations. By mapping these underlying signifying practices, a model of this system can be produced for future application. According to Young, the structure actually becomes the “simulacrum” (p. 4) or copy of the object and reveals previously hidden elements of that object. This method has consequences when applied to artistic representations. According to Timmermann, structuralism assumes that “all phenomena of human life are shaped by laws of abstract structure” (p. 1). This universality allows art to be decoded by revealing the detectable meanings locked in its structure.

This proves to be a fraudulent assumption, in that cultural contexts are not considered in the production of art. Barker and Galasinski (2001) elucidate, “In this, structuralism, is also asserting the specificity of culture, and its irreducibility to any other phenomena, taking culture to be analogous to, or structured like a language” (p. 4). As a method of analysis, structuralism proves problematic for application to American Indian art in that often American Indian art contains symbolic and sacred cultural elements that are not part of the dominant culture’s vocabulary.

Additionally, structuralism proves problematic because this movement positions objects in time/space as being ahistorical or not concerned with origins, impetus, and development. American Indian art is continually evolving based on forces from outside and influences from within making the structuralist method of analysis ineffective.
Macherey (as cited in Young, 1981) echoes this sentiment when he critiques structuralism by saying, “The work is never related to the material conditions of its production, but to its ‘principle,’ its ideal possibility, which is its simulacrum” (p. 5). However, it is obvious that the material and social conditions produced by the dominant culture greatly affected and continue to affect the overall process of creating, exhibiting, positioning, and selling American Indian art.

Derrida provides another dimension to structuralism that negatively affects thinking about American Indian art and identity. Derrida (1967/1978) explains that a structure has a center that serves as a balancing and organizing locus from which all offshoots can attach themselves. As Barker and Galasinski (2001) suggest, this center allows for the operation of “hierarchical binary oppositions such as “speech/writing, reality/appearance, nature/culture, reason/madness, etc.,” (p. 10). I posit that the designating of center allows a difference to be split; thereby, creating these binaries in the first place.

The structuralist operations of binary oppositions in representation are easily recognizable in Edward R. Curtis’ photography that depicts sepia-toned American Indians represented as the “Noble Savage” (Touchette, 2003, p. 11). Curtis’ images are in stark contrast to the dominant culture’s color pictures of themselves represented as civilized citizens. Curtis’ photographs serve to fix American Indians in time, romanticizing them in a wistful attempt to permit the viewer to escape the pull of modernity (Skoda, 1996). In short, structuralism is a movement that designs new ways of thinking about representation – but often at the risk of essentialism. Ironically, Young (1981) explains that some rather progressive thinking from scholars including Derrida,
Foucault, and Lacan follows this essentializing thinking because all three scholars begin to question how to uncover these unvoiced, below-the-level-of-consciousness discursive formations.

While structuralism’s tenets certainly pose problems when considering American Indian art, the movement also benefits both the art world, at large, and American Indian art. Structuralism illustrates the sign-like character of art and visual culture, which enables the connection to be made between the signifying practices of images and texts as represented in Barthes' (1977/1999) analysis of print advertisements. Barthes’ analyses highlight the power of representation and remind an often somnambulant public to engage in critical thinking. Moreover, structuralism also encourages an analysis of an artist’s body of work by suggesting that there is a natural, identifiable structure that connects the individual pieces so that they can be interpreted as a unit. This thinking lays the bedrock for one-man shows that showcase an artist’s inventory, which subsequently, spawns American Indian artist’s one-man shows.

Poststructuralism enters the scene and overlaps structuralism at the end of the 1960s. Poststructuralism is the successionist, self-reflexive critical movement that, as Young (1981) posits, moves towards an unabsolute, fictive dynamic that defers truth. The works of Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan are seminal cornerstones around which poststructuralism adheres. Timmerman (2006) explains that as early as the 1970s, poststructuralism begins to change the way art and art history are interpreted. In order to see how this change in the art world comes about, I outline the influences that Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan’s critiques place on the movement.
Derrida (1967/1978) suggests that the structuralist notion of a center not only permits the operation of binaries but also masks its lack of being fully present by inviting endless substitutions for itself which constitutes his idea of “play” (p. 278). He explains that play introduces the need for metaphors and metonymies to constitute this fabled center. Derrida posits that meaning is constituted out of this play of signifiers. He says that this notion of play, or dynamic tension, could occur as a result of an immobile center, which creates a paradox. This paradox suggests that the center is merely a series of substitutions for an entity, an endless deferral. This everlasting substitution is due to the fact that there never was a fixed, stable core to begin with. This instability provokes the “rupture” of the center or “decentering” which “extends the domain and play of signification infinitely” (Derrida, p. 280). He explains that one consequence of this decentering is the disallowance of Eurocentric cultural framing, which has significant effects on thinking about discourse, and I point out, which includes the discourse of art.

The abandonment of traditional methods of “deconstructing” discourse introduces innovative, intertextual ways to approach and create discourse such as Levi-Strauss’ “mythopoetical” activity he calls “bricolage” (as cited in Derrida, 1967/1978, p. 286). This mythopoetical construction pairs well with Derrida’s decentering. Levi-Strauss’ and Derrida’s thinking invites the notion that representations, which function as myths, give a subject knowledge of the world, and in doing so, signal the death of this subject.

Barthes (1972/2004) explains, “Myths have the task of giving historical intention, a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal” (p. 82). Although myths attempt to naturalize and fix conditions making them appear true, the fact remains that they are dynamic, unstable, and fictive in nature. Thereby, Derrida suggests that there is
no direct access to truth and stable meaning, which enables him to make the claim that there is no truth or meaning outside of representation. This declaration raises the stakes on the project of representation and explains how differing identity groups often slug it out in the representational arena.

I suggest that rather than thinking of poststructuralism as a movement that signals the deconstruction or death of the subject, it is beneficial to think of it in terms of Hall’s (1996) description of identity as “a process of becoming rather than being” (p. 4) Hall (1990/1997) explains, “Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning” (p. 53). Hall (1990/1997) further explains that cultural identity is historical yet constantly transforming based on the “continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (p. 52). In other words, cultural identity is formed out of both difference and Derrida’s notion of différance. Difference is relational and therefore, “is underpinned by exclusion” (Woodward, 1997, p. 9) skewing more essentialist in nature. For example, difference, as a construct would suggest, “If you are this, you cannot be that.” Différance suggests endless deferral skewing more nonessentialist in form by challenging “the fixed binaries which stabilise meaning and representation and show how meaning is never finished or completed” (Hall, 1990/1997, p. 54). Différance makes visible the constitutive outside to demonstrate the contingent character of identity articulations.

As one can see from the explanation above, the notion of the deconstruction of the subject is a dual-edged sword. On the one hand, subject deconstruction permits continual innovation and re-invention. On the other hand, this continuous morphing prohibits
moments of identity solidarity that temporarily close cultural boundaries, which permits representational recognition and subsequent political action. In essence, it would be difficult to state that there exists such a construct as American Indian art when the cultural sutures cannot be maintained long enough to label it as such. On a more positive note, deconstruction allows for the flux, instability, dynamism, and meaning deferral that poststructuralism stipulates while giving rise to hybridity. Barker and Galasinski (2001) state that hybridity “challenges not only the centrality of colonial culture and the marginalization of the colonized, but the very idea of centre and margin as being anything other than ‘representational effects’” (p. 11). Patel (2002) explains that hybridity defies uniformity, shuns a center, and “unsettle[s] the self” (p. 410).

A number of contemporary American Indian artists produce hybrid representations through both content and choice of medium(s). By this token, their works not only subvert circulating representations of American Indians but also defy conventional and traditional approaches to tribal art. Contemporary American Indian artists often employ hybridized forms of art such as collage and mixed media. This hybridity allows for the art to work on a variety of levels. Moreover, hybridity permits the static representations of American Indians to be countered via stylistically fluid elements. As Patel states, “Hybridity brings with it ambiguity, and with that possibility threatens the orderliness of schematized reality” (p. 413). This representational fluidity relayed through hybridity allows for American Indian collective identity to shift from the margins to the center. As a result of this shift, I contend, an unsettling of the cultural balance occurs – which is really the exercise of complete authority by the dominant culture of what art, other cultures, and other discourses should look like.
I include a truncated list of some of the contemporary American Indian artists whose work collectively produces counter discourses to the dominant culture’s discourses on American Indians and American Indian art. Hybridity is a trademark element in their pieces, as many are situated in both ancient and modern worlds: the performance and photographic pieces of James Luna (Luiseño) that satirically comment on the representation of American Indians as historic, one-dimensional artifacts (McMaster {Plains Cree/Siksika First Nation}, 2005); the mixed media installations of Jolene Rickard that speak to the issues of both representational and geographic sovereignty (Rickard, 1995); the boundary crossing photographs of Lee Marmon (Laguna) that poke fun at romanticized images of American Indians (Harlan, 1995); and the gaze-flipping photographic series of Zig Jackson (Mandan/Hidatsat/Arikara) that calls into question the notion of the Other (Jackson, 1995).

After Derrida’s contribution to the poststructural discussion that opens up the possibility of hybridity and its representational execution, he interjects another component that shapes the movement. Derrida (1967/1978) positions the writer and his/her conventions as the originator of the historical structures within which works of art are interpreted. This positioning encourages these conventions to be considered, as Timmermann terms, “narrative fictions” (p. 1) which are consequently, ripe for re-thinking. It is important to note that art positioning and interpretation would be vastly different if theorized from an indigenous perspective.12 In contrast, the western way of

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12 As Williams, Wierzbowski, and Preucel (2005) point out in their book, Native American Voices on Identity, Art, and Culture, an indigenous perspective on American Indian art positioning and interpretation would probably cover such topics including but not limited to the following: the “contrast of destruction and preservation” of American
framing American Indian art prompts the question, “Why and for whom are narrative fictions constructed?”

Foucault (1976/1980) answers by explaining that discourse is that which produces knowledge in an understandable way while excluding other forms as unreasonable, thus establishing “a ‘régime’ of truth” (p. 133). Foucault sees the operation of discourse as a means of constructing power/knowledge systems that produce a range of subjects. As Barker and Galasinski (2001) elaborate:

For Foucault, the subject is not a stable universal entity but an effect of discourse that constructs an ‘I’ in grammar…Living persons are required to ‘take up’ subject positions in discourse in order to make sense of the world and appear coherent to others. A subject position is that perspective or set of regulated discursive meanings from which discourse makes sense. To speak is to take up a subject position and to be subjected to the regulatory power of discourse. (p. 13)

In some cases, this subject position is both benefitted and harmed by the discourse that constructs it.

Lacan agrees with this concept of an amorphous subject that is a product of discourse. Lacan (1949/1996) arrives at this position based on his disagreement with the Freudian ego model of psychology. He offers an alternative subject construction with the beginning of this process being an infant’s engagement with his/her own reflection in a mirror, so termed the “mirror stage” (p. 330). The mirror stage posits a “split subject” (p. 329). In other words, Lacan suggests the self is recognized only through its imaginary

Indian art and artifacts (Leventhal, as cited in Williams et al., 2005, p. xiv); the idea that “acts of making” can be understood as “acts of creation” that honor the ancestors and contribute to the harmonious world order (Preucel, p. 12); the understanding that there exists an intimate link between American Indian oppression and representation (Preucel, p. 14); the revelations of “myth and false history” with regards to American Indian art (p. Preucel, 17); and recognition of “the adaptive abilities of Native individuals and communities in responding to changes around them” (Preucel, p. 17) both in life and in art.
other. Lacan explains that the mirror stage begins this process of overcoming one’s fragmentation through the recognition of one’s image. This image provides an inkling of a unique self that eventually thrusts this self from that of spectator into that of a social being or an “I,” (p. 333) which I point out, eventually comes into contact with a “you”. He clarifies that this I is set in motion with another I, (and so on…) through discourse and social interaction. This discourse and social interaction spurs the production of individual identity formations and subjectivities.

Lacan’s construct critiques the unitary subject that structuralism puts forth. His identity construct empowers the social Other to construct a subject’s identity while at the same time celebrating the uniqueness of the I. By this token, Lacan would agree that there is no subject except in representation. This idea is both self-empowering, in that it suggests a subject can attempt to construct him/herself through discourse and dangerous, in that someone else can appropriate or misrepresent that same subject’s identity. This double bind increases the representational stakes, as representational control can be partially responsible for the birth or death of a culture.

In summation, the turn from structuralism to poststructuralism is greatly indebted to the works of Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan and their contributions to notions of identity, representation, discourse, power/knowledge, and the subject. Their theories, in particular, shape and drive the move from structuralism’s anti-humanist, essentialist, constructionist thinking to produce poststructuralism’s nonessentialist, deconstructionist, discursively-driven thinking about identity and representation. Each philosophical movement produced unique standpoints on issues of identity, representation, and art in
general that helped to shape the way American Indian identity, representation, and art are constructed and understood.

*Turn from modernism to postmodernism.*

I unpack modernity first, as it is the gateway for modernism and postmodernism. Modernity occurs at different times in different places, depending on a myriad of factors converging at once. In other words, modernity is a multi-faceted condition. Fergusson (2004) breaks modernity into three phases: the early phase from 1550 to 1700 (associated with the age of absolutism, the rise of mercantilism and central states, and the formation of empires); the central phase from 1700 to 1870 (associated with large-scale industrialization and urbanization), and the current phase from 1850 to the present (associated with the ordering and institutionalization of the mechanisms of society – the state, the market, the corporation, etc.).

Levy (as cited in Trilling, 1996) defines modernity as the societal condition that encourages “the replacement of animate by inanimate sources of energy” (p. 354) whose homogenizing qualities require a global social, cultural, and economic convergence in order to keep modernity’s engines fueled. Debord (1967/1999) expands this notion, “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of ‘spectacles.’” Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation” (p. 95). Benjamin (1936/1999) connects this condition of representation and art to modernity’s effects. He explains that the mechanical reproduction of art shifts art attitudes to postures that are reactionary, progressive, and critical – thereby signaling the revolutionary potential of the field that demands a politics. Smith (2006) points out that advertising, entertainment, fashion, and propaganda are the
“primary vehicles for an imagery of modernity that celebrated the mass production process and then its products” (p. 1).

I focus primarily on modernity’s late phase, wherein modernism and postmodernism engage in an ideological battle over identity formation and representational production. Regardless of each movement’s identity and representational standpoints, both of them firmly agree on their obsession with modernity.

First, I address the effects of modernism and postmodernism on art. Late modernism began in Europe in the mid 1800s but really did not take hold in the United States until the early 1900s (Grove Art Online: Modernism, p. 1). European modernism ushered in numerous styles that commented on modernity and were distinctly recognizable, as Bell (2006a) suggests, by their tendency to distance themselves from familiar representations in order to explore “essences of visual experience” (p. 1). Strategies of modernism in art included the following: inciting the shock of the new; revealing the present to be valuable while at the same time consigning the past to a space of incongruous misplacement; imagining the future to be reachable; and reclaiming the past as an essential vault of values that transcends the focus on historical style (Grove Art Online: Modernism, p. 2). Modernism’s strategies are included but are not limited to the following styles: Art Nouveau, Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Supremism, Constructivism, Dadaism, and Surrealism (Grove Art Online: Modernism, p. 1). These styles promote the fashioning of historical narratives and are circulated via exhibitions worldwide (Grove Art Online: Modernism, p. 1).

Modernism fell back on its imperialist roots and reached its limits when it started to Other in the name of experimentation. Modernism claimed primitive art as its own and
subsumed American Indian art under its umbrella (Grove Art Online: Modernism, p. 1). Modernism’s fracturing gaze of exclusion and inclusion and its adherence to past essences and future musings eventually splintered its public and signaled its demise.

Postmodernism followed with its early transitive phase comprising the work of Robert Rauschenberg and the Art Deco movement. Postmodernism’s final transitive phase housed the Pop Art movement of the sixties (Bell, 2006b). Bell (2006b) explains that postmodernism was a reaction to modernism’s formalism. Postmodernism welcomed eclecticism, “embracing all manner of given representations and styles, while querying all notions of essence” (p. 1). As a result, postmodernism could be deemed nonessentialist, anti-formalist, and multi-representational.

Bickers (2002) explains that resistance is the chief representational strategy that operates in postmodernism. Moreover, Bell (2006b) says that while modernism addresses progress, postmodernism invokes consumer commodification. The 70s and 80s ushered in German and American Neo-Expressionism, which were followed by more performance-oriented pieces, influenced by feminism and poststructuralism that called meaning itself into question (Bell, 2006b). Bickers suggests that the emphasis on identity politics in art disguised an increasing disengagement with the social and political in deference to an emphasis on the personal and self-serving. During this time, art, although revolutionary, began to show signs of cultural commodification and began to respond to consumer-driven markets.

How does American Indian art fit into the debate between modernism and postmodernism? I outline a particularly salient example that demonstrates how American Indian art is positioned at the center of the debate. The controversy arose out of an
argument over the ownership and inception of the avant-garde. Lewis (2001) points to a scathing book by Guilbaut entitled *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*. Guilbaut posited the theory that New York stole the avant-garde construct from Paris. Lewis explains that this idea of Paris spawning the avant-garde was a misconception and an immediate fallback position that Eurocentric artistic imperialism dictates. He directs attention to the separate works of two art scholars, Ann Eden Gibson and W. Jackson Rushing. Both of their independent studies illustrate how the New York avant-garde’s font of inspiration was actually from that of American Indian and other non-Western art.

With Gibson’s and Rushing’s work in mind, Lewis goes on to reclaim individual American Indian artist’s works, focusing on an abstract painter, Leon Polk Smith (Cherokee). He explains how the social climate, between the 30s and 60s hindered many artists from claiming their American Indian heritage. During this time, American Indian cultural identification proved problematic for three reasons: the relegation of their work to the category of primitive art; the persistent categorization of their work as American Indian art; and the rejection of their work by more individualist movements, such as Abstract Expressionism. In other instances, cultural identification proved profitable, particularly during the 80s when authentic American Indian art was in demand.

This love-hate relationship with cultural identification also spurs additional representational struggles. These struggles stem from the conflict over where to position cultural identity in the production of art. Proponents of the committed art movement want cultural identity positioned in the foreground of their art. Whereas, proponents of the individualistic art movement want cultural identity positioned in the background or not visually referenced at all in their art (Touchette, 2003). This conflict prompts the
question, what is to distinguish individualist American Indian art from mainstream art? As Jacka and Jacka (1991) comment, “As individual artists rise on merit alone, today’s art is becoming a blend of contemporary styles that bear no label. Often, however, a price has been paid for this individuality” (p. 39). Entrenched American Indian traditionalists cry, “Sell-out,” or signal disapproval indicating that, by no means, is the American Indian art world steady representational ground. Jacka and Jacka point to one such example of this unsteady representational ground in the case of potter Nancy Youngblood Cutler. When Cutler, who comes from a long line of Santa Clara potters, began using non-traditional, innovative designs in her pots, many of her tribal family members disapproved. Jacka and Jacka suggest that additional problems generated by the individualist versus committed art controversy arise from galleries refusing to accept contemporary work that is “not Indian enough,” (p. 41) as evidenced by the shunning of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith’s (Flathead/Shoshone/French-Cree) paintings. Cultural hurdles continue to provoke everlasting controversy. During all artistic periods, identity politics exerted a vice-like grip on American Indian art.

Next, I address modernism and postmodernism’s stances on constructions of identity. With Freud on modernism’s billboard, it was no wonder that Eurocentric and phalli-centric constructs of identity based on unconscious drives that promote a sense of an individual self (Sarup, 1989) dominated and problematized the egalitarian, collective sensibilities of American Indians and their art (Deloria, 2004; Francis {Laguna Pueblo}, 2003; Waters, 2004). Freud’s construct of, as Elias (as cited in Barker & Galasinski, 2001) terms, “the Western “I””, (p. 29) born of scientific objectivity and the Age of Reason did not pair well with the indigenous concept of the “We” (Waters, 2004).
Both modernism and postmodernism are about self-realization, (Trilling, 1996) but each produced different identity formations for obtaining this unattainable, self-realized state. In simple terms, modernism constructed a more individual notion of identity, whereas, postmodernism constituted a more collective notion of identity (Ferguson, 2004; Trilling, 1996). As such, postmodernism aligned better with American Indian philosophies but was, by no means, devoid of its pitfalls. Rolling (2004) contributes to this concept of differing identity formations when he suggests that modernist thinking constructed an identity that was more of an “oppositional other that is required by narrative to remain bound to its station of difference” (p. 878). Whereas, he suggests that postmodernist thinking prescribed more of a “fluidly bounded relational other that lends to the creation of nonessentialist and reinterpretable identity” (p. 877). These differing formations had direct implications on styles of art, in general and American Indian art, in particular.

Trilling (1996) breaks modernism into two camps: “puritanical” and “libertarian” (p. 355). He notes each camp’s impact on the notion of identity, the individual, and art. Trilling says:

Puritanical modernism embraces modernization in the hope of rationalizing society from top to bottom. Libertarian modernism counters the depersonalizing power of modernization by making individuality sacrosanct. Together, they recognize and enshrine what will be left when modernization has done its work: the individual and the human community. (pp. 355)

He sites artistic examples of puritanical modernism that included the industrial design movement and the urbanization of the social landscape with clean-lined, simple architecture. In this social landscape, he suggests that people appear more like props rather than constituents of the environment. By contrast, he offers works in the Cubist
and Surrealist tradition as being representative of the freedom of expression that libertarian modernism permitted wherein artists could construct their own “private languages” (Trilling, p. 355) for the public to accept on their own terms whether they understood them or not. Smith (2006) points out that modern art has two faces, as well. One face displays its experimentality, as evidenced in artistic movements like Cubism and Surrealism. The other face presents its critical nature, as expressed in modern art’s return to realism which, often, critiques modernity.

Postmodernism manifests its own unique faces of modernity pursuant to its tenets. Rolling (2004) explains, “The postmodern twist on the reconfiguration of identity is that parables of the self imbricate like the scales of a single piece of snakeskin – overlapping, intersecting, and disappearing beneath the self-same surfaces of one another” (p. 875). Such thinking about identity invites hybridity and the walking in both worlds\textsuperscript{13} thematic that is present in American Indian literature and art (Bonnet (Rosebud Sioux), 2003; Kim et al., 1998). Smith (2006) suggests:

Theorists of post-modernity argue that the master narratives that have sustained consent in modernizing societies – ideals of progress, democracy, humanism, modernity itself – have become illegitimate and that dream of universal rationality that inspired the Enlightenment has ended. Post-modernists call for a new era of anything-goes, open-ended possibility. (p. 2)

This thinking permits contemporary American Indian art to be judged more on merit than on cultural relevance and for these works to accepted as valid entries into the art world.

\textsuperscript{13} Kim et al. (1998) wrote an article addressing the complexity of American Indian cultural identity entitled I Can Walk Both Ways that refers to American Indians repeated crossings of identity boundaries, particularly between the dominant culture’s and the American Indian world, which is unpacked in more detail in Chapter 5.
However, this open postmodern thinking also creates some complications for American Indian artists and their art. The committed art versus individualist art conflict comes into play again. Often, American Indian traditionalists shun contemporary American Indian artists’ work by claiming that their work embodies too many of postmodernism’s textual indicators. If these contemporary artists’ work strays too far from incorporating traditional, culturally identifiable techniques, styles, motifs, etc., their work can be stripped of its American Indian art moniker and relegated to the category of individualist art.

Rice (2004) cross-references several scholars to come up with a list of postmodern textual indicators that often problematize American Indian art production. He outlines six of postmodern art’s textual indicators as follows: 1) refusal of universals through the featuring of oppositional elements; 2) attention to context which references cross-cultural dimensions rather than historical time; 3) co-construction of elements between textual participants that promotes intermingling; 4) constructivist and interrogative stances rather than mimetic stance; 5) postmodern art’s hyperreal and verisimilitudinous presentation that connects audience to artist via its insistence on interaction and intersection of gazes; and 6) challenge to existing ideological elements which illuminate existing power structures (pp. 69-71). As demonstrated, postmodernism is an open-forum, which can be liberating for an artist, but some of its intersecting, co-mingling tendencies invite complications for the American Indian artist.

Finally, to summarize how all these movements – the turn from structuralism to poststructuralism and the shift from modernism to postmodernism – interrelate to impact identity and representation, I offer this explanation from Jameson (1979):
The contemporary poststructuralist aesthetic signals the dissolution of the modernist paradigm – with its valorization of myth and symbol, temporality, organic form and the concrete universal, the identity of the subject and the continuity of linguistic expression – and foretells the emergence of some new, properly postmodernist or schizophrenic conception of the artifact – now strategically reformulated as ‘text’ or écriture,’ and stressing discontinuity, allegory, the mechanical, the gap between signifier and signified, the lapse in meaning, the syncope in the experience of the subject. (p. 20)

In short, the progression of these schools of thought illustrates the shift from the concrete to the fluid, from the universal to the unabsolute, and from the constructionist to the deconstructionist, with each shift deeply affecting identity and representation.

As outlined, American Indian art has and continues to endure a complicated journey through the art world lexicon. This complex navigation is primarily a result of three factors as follows: controversy stemming from the debate over the correct way to represent American Indians and their art; the philosophical movements’ affects on identity formations and these formation’s subsequent impact on American Indian art; and the way in which various social, cultural, economic, and political systems serve as knowledge gatekeepers by producing power/knowledge régimes that both limit and enable what we know of American Indian identity, representation, and art.

By unpacking the identity and cultural politics within this all-powerful art labyrinth, perhaps more representational latitude may be attained by all marginalized groups and, in particular, American Indians. As a result of expanding the spectrum of identity constructions and representations by which various groups are ascribed to or avow with, perhaps a more egalitarian existence with increased freedom of representation and expression can be achieved. I suggest that one of the means to garnering more representational autonomy within this labyrinth is the illumination of the basis for and
inner workings of this system’s cultural, identity, and representational politics. By examining Ortiz and his work, I intend to showcase concrete examples of the operations of these politics.

Art and Politics of Representation

The politics of representation is, ultimately, about the struggle over meaning and signification. In the case of American Indians, the politics of representation is often both producer and product of the battle over American Indian self-signification and self-identification. In other words American Indian identity, which encompasses variables such as individual, collective, and cultural identity is at the crux of this meaning making battle.

In an attempt to spotlight the components that play key roles in this signification struggle and explain why art is a legitimate forum for crafting a politics of representation, I build from the ground up. I start by pointing to the complex identity negotiations that lead to identity politics, which I define. Because identity politics spur representational politics, I define representation and demonstrate its connection to art. Then, I detail the communicative levels and realms that art engages and explain how art functions constitutively and discursively to produce meaning. Next, I outline how dominant and counter discourses are constructed and explain how power and economics are enmeshed in them. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that each type of discourse encompasses a unique politics of representation that concerns itself with signification struggles. This explanation enables the connection to be made to my study, which examines how an artist and his art create a politics of representation that impacts notions of American Indian identity.
As outlined in a previous section of my literature review, American Indian collective identity is continually in negotiation with individual identity and American Indian cultural identity. Lawrence (2003) says, “For Native people, individual identity is always being negotiated in relation to collective identity, and in the face of an external colonizing society” (p. 4). When trying to navigate this self-signification battlefield, it is important to acknowledge some of the critical factors that complicate this matter. First, American Indians must negotiate an identity triad (individual, collective, and cultural identity) in the face of the dominant culture who has its own construction of American Indian identity. Second, throughout these complex identity negotiations potent factors such as representation, discourse, and power come into the forefront to further entangle matters. Barker and Galasinski (2001) suggest, “Individual identity projects and the cultural politics of collectivities require us to forge new languages, new ways of describing ourselves, which recast our place in the world” (p. 55). In other words, individual, collective, and cultural identity projects propel representational politics, which circulate knowledge via discourse.

Due, in part, to these complex identity negotiations, the rise of American Indian identity politics is inevitable. Unfortunately, American Indians are only one producer of American Indian representations. A variety of people not identifying, and sometimes falsely identifying, as American Indian pollute the representational arena, which points to the need for an identity politics. Moreover, American Indians’ status as a marginalized group and the dominant culture’s attempts to control American Indian signification intensify these representational battles that provoke identity politics.
Evans (1998) comments on the increasing attention paid to identity politics as follows:

Since the end of the Cold War, identity has become a new way to do politics, and something new to do politics for. Nations are said to be in search of one; individuals nurture theirs; collectivities of all kinds are encouraged to seek rights for their identity and defend it from the imprecations of others. (p. 94)

In light of the emphasis put on identity politics, what exactly are they? Identity politics have been and are notoriously divisive. Alcoff and Mohanty (2006) explain that even former supporters of identity-based movements are “concerned about an overemphasis on difference and identity at the expense of unity” (p. 3). They outline various positions on identity politics as follows:

Political critics of identity politics claim that it fractures coalitions and breeds distrust of those outside one’s group. Theoretical critics of identity politics claim that identities are social constructions rather than natural kinds, that they are indelibly marked by the oppressive conditions that created them in the first place, and therefore should not be given so much weight or importance….These and other sorts of arguments are used to suggest that identities are ideological fictions, imposed from above, and used to divide and control populations. Both the political and theoretical critics claim that we should be working to eliminate the salience of identity in everyday life, not institutionalize it. (p. 3)

While Alcoff and Mohanty recognize these criticisms, they operate from a postpositivist or realist standpoint towards identity and subsequently, identity politics. They state:

Realists about identity further argue that identities are not our mysterious inner essences but rather social embodied facts about ourselves in our world; moreover, they are not mere descriptions of who we are but, rather, causal explanations of our social locations in a world that is shaped by such locations, by the way they are distributed and hierarchically organized. The real debate is not ever whether identities have political relevance, but how much and what kind. The theoretical issue concerning identities is not whether they are constructed (they always are, since they are social kinds) but what difference different kinds of construction make. (p. 6)
Yep (2004) extends Alcoff and Mohanty’s standpoint and positions identity politics as a site of negotiation and/or resistance in his statement, “Identity politics refers to the process of claiming one’s identity as a member of a marginalized group as a political point of departure and political mobilization” (p. 77). Yep’s reference to a marginalized group takes into consideration American Indians, as they are such a group. Also, his reference to a political point of departure enables the consideration of the claiming of identity via a representational politics enacted through art, as art serves as this point of political departure.

However, Hall’s (1996) definition provides specific references and useful connections to the components I am spotlighting in my study. Drawing from Hall (1996), identity politics are the “political-cobbling-together” (Hall, as cited in Clifford, 1997, p. 106) of notions of an individual or collective self drawn from spectrums including cultural, economic, racial, etc. that are articulated through the employment of representation within a discourse to produce a result. From Hall’s definition I choose to focus on two areas because they offer transformative possibilities.

First, I spotlight the notion that identity politics imply enacting strategic discursive maneuvers in order to invoke a desired goal. Identity politics operate at the risk of essentializing those involved, in that these politics require a momentary suturing of identifications. However, if identity is thought of more in Hall’s (1990/1997) terms of “not an essence but a positioning” (p. 53) then a politics of identity can transcend to a “politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’” (p. 53). In other words, a politics of position enables maneuverability and avoids fixation.
Next, I highlight Hall’s (1990/1997) spectrums from which an individual or collective self emanates, as it is from these contexts that intersectionalities occur that discourage essentialisms. For example, if a group of contemporary American Indian artists communicate an identity politics that calls into question notions of ethnicity, inevitably, a subset of those artists will additionally communicate an identity politics that also calls into question factors such as gender, sexuality, class, etc. In other words, a nonessentialistic politics of representation operating through language can be enacted by incorporating the following two components: 1) an identity politics performed as representational positionings via discourse with 2) an emphasis placed on the contextual intersectionalities from which these identifications are drawn.

Thus, the claim can be made that identity politics produced in and through language can invoke a transformative politics of representation. As Rolling (2004) points out:

Language predicates a democracy of (re)positionions, allowing momentary releases from our everyday descriptors. Allowing movement into new territories of identity. Visual forms, signs, symbols, types, and icons all lend themselves to discursive, language-bound (re)positionings. Identity is in the mix; artist-researchers dive headlong into the mix to suss out those identities, critique them, reconstitute them. (p. 882)

Rolling’s comment positions language, thought of in the broadest terms, as fecund ground for spawning a politics of representation that offers a way for American Indian artists to re-exert control of self-signification. In the end, the contestation between the dominant culture and American Indians over self-signification is being fought on the representational battleground.
As such, representation needs defining. Representations both produce and are products of discourse. According to Hall (2003):

Representation is the process by which members of a culture use language (broadly defined as any system which deploys signs, any signifying system) to produce meaning. Already, this definition carries the important premise that things—objects, people, events, in the world—do not have themselves any fixed, final or true meaning. It is us—in society, within human cultures—who make things mean, who signify. (p. 61)

This understanding of representation suggests that meaning is not inherent in representation itself but is constituted in tandem with members of cultures.

To bring the definition closer to the focus my research, I include Murray’s (2001) explanation of the dual role of representation. He says:

At one level it means the recording or copying of something, as in an aesthetic or documentary account. The process is therefore one of ‘standing for’ something else. At another level, though, it means ‘standing-for,’ or speaking for, a person or whole community as in the sense of political representation. In both cases the constant danger is of the representative replacing or obscuring what is meant to be visible ‘through’ it—and in so doing threatening a whole complex of ideas that rely on being able to keep a clear distinction between what is real or one’s own and what is represented, clustered around the idea of the proper (property, propriety, appropriation, and ultimately, sovereignty). (p. 80)

Drawing from both Hall’s and Murray’s definitions of representation, art can then be construed as a form of representation. Art meets the qualification of operating as a signifying system that incorporates one or more of these languages at any given time. Also, art can aesthetically account for something, or politically stand or speak for something, or art can simply produce meaning.

Sorrells (1999) includes a variety of manifestations of art in her list of “visual forms of communication such as architecture, painting, photography, sculpture, film and popular cultural artifacts” (p. 2). She also points to various communication scholars such
as Foss (1994), Reid (1990), and Saint-Martin (1987) who are devoting time to studying “how meaning is made and communicated through visual imagery” (p. 4). Hall, Murray, Sorrells, and the various scholars she references each adds legitimacy to the idea that art is a type of representation that communicates.

By this token, art is a kind of representation that communicates on many levels. Art primarily employs visual language but often incorporates textual, verbal, and/or nonverbal languages, as witnessed in many modern art installations and art performances. In other words, art functions as a specific type of representation that allows personal, social, and cultural discourses to be explored and experienced through a number of languages. Leppert says:

Images are less visual translations of what might otherwise be said (in words) than they are visual transformations of a certain awareness of the world. Conscious (and unconscious) awareness of a given situation, to be sure, has ties in language, but language is only the most obvious, and not the only, means by which people attempt to make sense of their reality. (p. 6)

Leppert’s statement bolsters the argument that art is a type of representation that is a legitimate form of communication. His statement also lends credence to the notion that art operates on several communicative levels both on and below the level of consciousness.

Another important communicative level that art engages is the provocation of an all-encompassing communicative experience that accesses several communicative levels at once. Art often provokes a kind of gestalt or “holistic” (Sorrells, 1999, p. 7) experience. Gestalt references experiencing a work of art as a whole, which communicates an overall feeling, mood, tone, or shading between an artist, audience, experience, or movement. This gestalt occurs due to the covert shift that art facilitates
that directs the viewer’s focus on the intellectual and sensory interconnections within it rather than relegating the focus to one isolated element.

As such, not only does art operate on several communicative levels at once, but also art operates in a variety of realms including the “symbolic” (Leuthold, 1998, p. 18), “social” (Lippard, 1983, p. 5), personal (Leppert, 1996, p. 6), and “cultural” (Leppert, 1996, p. 4). In other words, art welcomes an audience into this interconnective intellectual and sensory web of communication levels and realms, which enables art to serve as the bedrock on which to construct representational politics.

Art functions in two important ways to produce representational politics. First, art is not something that captures a moment in time; rather it is something that functions constitutively to continue to produce meanings. Art triggers the intellectual and sensory webs of each individual who encounters it to invoke experiences and provoke meanings. Coming in contact with art is a participatory exercise that has real effects on its audiences. Trotsky (as cited in Bickers, 2002) goes one step further when he says, “Art, it is said, is not mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes” (p. 335). Trotsky claims that art actually shapes the world around it by shaping the participants that experience it. Van Manen (as cited in Rolling (2004) gives weight to art’s participatory nature in his comment, “Because artists [and artist-researchers] are involved in giving shape to their lived experience, the products of art are, in a sense, lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations” (p. 882).

Second, art functions discursively. Hall (2003) defines discourse as follows:

Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which
provides ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. (p. 6)

Simply put, “discourse is about the production of knowledge through language,” (Hall, 2003, p. 44). Consequently, discourses produce and circulate various ideologies.

“Ideologies are structures of signification that constitute social relations in and through power” (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p. 25). Ideological battles over American Indian identity through representation provoke the construction of dominant and counter discourses. As such, dominant and counter discourses produce different and often opposing ideologies. Barker and Galasinski point out that ideology is not counterpoised to truth but that the power employed through these systems of representation generates and enables all forms of social action. I suggest that ideology, while not pointing to or away from truth, points directly to lived experience. Consequently, ideology’s role is to try and determine those lived experiences by attempting to fix difference through encircling the unstable meanings of signifiers in the discursive field (Hall, 2003). Hall (2003) suggests that representation is the key site, so prized in hegemonic practices, in the struggle for the “power of definition” (p. 348).

In this battle for definition, this balancing act between hegemony and negotiation enables the construction of dominant and counter discourses. Each of these discourses both conveys and constitutes a standpoint through their particular discursive inclusions, exclusions, and formations. To further explain, dominant discourses are produced from and constructed by the standpoint held by the dominant culture or in other words, those that are in power. Counter discourses are produced from and constructed by the
standpoint held by those that contend with the dominant culture and elect to offer up self-constructed alternatives that contest the dominant discourses.

Dominant and counter discourses circulate competing knowledges that function as products of each producer’s purpose, intent, pleasure, desire, agenda, etc. Producers of these discourses attempt to circulate representations that serve their politics. Barker and Galasinski (2001) state, “Knowledge is not a matter of getting an accurate picture of reality, but of learning how to contend with the world in the pursuit of our various purposes” (p. 3). Their claim suggests that absolute truth is not embedded in the circulation of knowledge. Rather, knowledge circulation is about exercising power not broadcasting truth. In essence, producers of these discourses attempt to broadcast their own truth, which is really an exercise in the circulatory flow of power.

To further address how power becomes imbricated in Foucault’s (1976/1980) “régimes of truth” (p. 131) mentioned in the previous section of my literature review, I include his explanation of truth. He says:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (p. 131)

In other words, régimes of truth attempt to breed truth in representation, as contained in dominant and counter discourses.

For example, in dominant discourses American Indian identity is often fixed through the regulatory action of power that produces stereotypical, essentialist, reductionistic, and exoticized representations. Skoda (1996) points to Edward R. Curtis’
often staged, romanticized, sepia-toned photographs of American Indians with feathers in their headdresses staring stoically at the camera. She suggests that these images imply that American Indians are “frozen in time” (p. 50) cementing them with descriptors such as “stoic, noble, primitive, nature loving…” (p. 50).

In response to Curtis’ debilitating images and representations like them that fix American Indians in time, numerous contemporary American Indian artists present various counter discourses. Luiseño artist, Fritz Scholder in his 1979 exhibit used “stereotypical Indian images and symbols from media and advertising” (Skoda, 1996, p. 51) to engage in social commentary on representation and signification issues that pertained to American Indians. In Scholder’s work and other contemporary artist like him, American Indian identity is explored, questioned, and re-claimed by American Indians. Not only is power enmeshed in the production of dominant and counter discourses, but also economics is in play.

Although counter discourses sometimes function to reclaim American Indian identity and representation, these discourses are often constrained by the weight of tribal sovereignty spurred by economic hardship. American Indians’ need for financial resources paired with the dominant culture’s demand for American Indian authenticity often results in a border closing on American Indian representational and identity construction, limiting those representations to a narrow politicized space (Touchette, 2003). As a result, artists can become subsumed by manifesting their American Indian cultural identity in their art and, in turn, can lose much of their individual artistic identity due to economic pressures produced by a powerful consumer culture that values authenticity.
For example, Sorrells (2003) explains how several of the American Indian potters that she interviewed who participated in the 1998 Santa Fe Indian Market were frustrated by their low sales. These artists explained that consumers wanted pieces with “traditional” designs and stated that they felt their pieces were not selling because they “did not look ‘Indian’ or ‘native’ enough” (Sorrells, p. 29). Consumer requirements of traditional styles do not allow for cultural and individual innovations that shape new works. These requirements also serve to reinforce stereotypes.

The combination of power and economics in the production of discourses make American Indian identity and representational constitution highly politicized endeavors. These discourses that center on identity and representational issues produce and are a product of competing representational politics that are “intrinsically bound up with questions of power” (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p. 57). In other words, an examination of American Indian artists who highlight struggles of representational legitimacy and identity authentication can reveal various emerging politics of representation through their art that point to instances of power.

In essence, dominant and counter discourses both produce and are products of the politics of representation that concerns itself with the struggle over meaning and signification. This fact gives the politics of representation profound weight, prompting me to investigate representational instances that focus attention on American Indians.

Overall, I demonstrated how complicated identity negotiations provoke identity politics, which I subsequently defined. I explained how identity politics play into the need for the construction and enactment of an American Indian politics of representation. Representation was defined and its connection to art was demonstrated. I detailed the
communicative levels and realms on and in which art engages and explained how art functions constitutively and discursively to produce meaning. I outlined how dominant and counter discourses are constructed and detailed how power and economics are enmeshed in them. Finally, I concluded by stating that each type of discourse contains a unique politics of representation that deals with signification. Ultimately, I demonstrated that art is a key component for study in the battle over meaning.

My review of literature has laid the groundwork for understanding how American Indian cultural identity, collective identity, and cultural sovereignty work in tandem to produce, what society refers to as, American Indian art. Also, this review has established how art relates to American Indian identity, as crafted by the art world and philosophical movements. My review concluded by substantiating how art produces a politics of representation. Examining art’s interaction with and impact on representation and identity provides the foundation for my study, which tracks how American Indian artist, Virgil Ortiz, his art, and the discourse surrounding both art and artist communicates expanded notions of American Indian identity.
CHAPTER 4: HISTORICAL CONTEXTUAL GROUNDING: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF AMERICAN INDIAN IDENTITY, REPRESENTATION, AND SOVEREIGNTY

While we use our famous tunnel vision, and argue among ourselves about who is American Indian and who is not, Big Brother is quietly burying another piece of our sovereignty as he pats us on the head[s], and himself on the back (Harrell, as cited in Hapiuk, 2001, p. 1033).

Blood tales are American Indian told (Barker, 2003, p. 46).

Wrap it up. I’ll take it! (Eurythmics on Sweet Dreams {Are Made of This} via Hayes & Porter 1968/1983)

The colonization process has already succeeded in wrenching lands away from American Indians. However, the struggle continues between colonizers and American Indians over the control of American Indian identity, representation, and tribal/cultural sovereignty. The dominant culture has executed a variety of strategies since first contact with American Indians in order to subjugate them. I focus on two distinct and simultaneously executed strategies that have been particularly effective in the subordination of American Indians – the production of blood discourse and simulation discourse [my term].

The dominant culture produces divide-and-conquer blood discourse, under the paternalistic hospices of caring for its poor charges, that facilitates the closing of American Indian boundaries. This blood discourse is so named due to its insistence, primarily, on blood criteria as a basis for claiming American Indian identity. Blood discourse alleges to promote American Indian solidarity and protect tribal/cultural
sovereignty. In reality, this discourse, that masks itself as a protector of collective tribal identity, fractures American Indian solidarity by pitting individuals against individuals, individuals against tribes, and tribes and against other tribes.

Moreover, the dominant culture relies on representational formations of American Indians in binary opposition to themselves to construct counterfeit-and-co-optated simulation discourse that siphons American Indian cultural/artistic representations and relegates those representations to areas filled with imposed labels, kitsch, misconceptions, and misrepresentations. The dominant culture produces this simulation discourse, so named because it speaks and acts from an imaginary place of authority, in two ways. Simulation discourse constructs its own socially preferred versions of American Indian representations for distribution, which leads to misrepresentations and misconceptions. Furthermore, this discourse siphons existing American Indian-produced representations and alters them to produce economically preferred versions for distribution, also leading to misrepresentations and misconceptions. This tactic is referred to as appropriation, known specifically as co-optation. This type of appropriation denies American Indian cultural sovereignty and leads to the disfigurement of American Indian collective cultural identity by imposing labels and a sense of kitsch to their culture. Additional consequences of this tactic are explained by Westerfelhaus (2004) in his statement: “Co-optation…is a form of appropriation used by a dominant or mainstream culture as a means of containing and taming expressions of resistance and opposition” (p. 107).

Ironically enough, Ward Churchill {Creek/Cherokee Métis}(1994), a scholar whose own American Indian identity is in question, cites the United Nations 1948
Convention on Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide, wherein it was pronounced that the instigating or causing of a culture to cease to exist is an act of genocide. This thought is now encompassed under the term “cultural genocide,” and its effects are devastating. Oneida scholar, Pam Colorado, (as cited in Churchill, 1994) points to the devastating effects of cultural genocide provoked by cultural imperialism specifically enacted through the process of spiritual appropriation:

The process is ultimately intended to supplant Indians, even in the areas of their own culture and spirituality. In the end, non-Indians will have complete power to define what is and what is not Indian, even for Indians. We are talking here about an complete ideological/conceptual subordination of Indian people in addition to the total physical subordination they already experience. When this happens, the last vestiges of real Indian society and Indian rights will disappear. Non-Indians will then claim to ‘own’ our heritage and ideas as thoroughly as they now claim our land and resources. (p. 216)

Investigations into attacks on American Indian identity through representation by the dominant culture and illuminating examples of the battles for ownership of American Indian cultural property are key factors in maintaining and continuing to develop a sense of American Indian collective identity and cultural sovereignty.

In order to illustrate the stakes in the debates over American Indian sovereignty, collective identity, and cultural artistic representations, I explore the identity politics produced by both the dominant culture in the form of dominant discourses and by American Indians in the form of the counter discourses. I demonstrate how the divide-and-conquer blood discourse, produced primarily in the legal realm, pairs with the counterfeit-and-co-optate simulation discourse, produced primarily in the popular realm (art, literary, and commercial), to blur American Indian cultural boundaries beyond
recognition, wreaking havoc on American Indian identity, representation, and tribal/cultural sovereignty.

Specifically, I explicate the blood discourse produced by the dominant culture contained in two illustrative legal documents that problematize American Indian identity. Then, I address the tactics employed in the simulation discourse produced by the dominant culture and representationally portrayed in the popular realm that affect American Indians.

I also outline some of the tactics employed in the counter discourses produced by American Indian artists, writers, and orators that function to comment on, disturb, and resist the dominant culture’s blood and simulation discourses. By no means does this chapter address all of the representational shifts or all of the discourses throughout history produced by the dominant culture and American Indians. This critical review merely targets specific examples throughout time that serve to illuminate the precarious problematic of identity politics, as produced by representation through discourse.

In short, colonization is demonstrated to be an on-going process via my presentation of several puissant examples of the multi-faceted mechanisms of oppression contained in blood and simulation discourses. American Indian counter discourses are presented to demonstrate that sites of resistance are actively engaging in renegotiating power dynamics. A brief summary precedes the final note of the chapter that outlines a few of the innovative and on-going philosophical American Indian counters to the dominant discourses to insure that hope resonates.
Identity Politics in Discourse

*Dominant Discourses*

Discourses constructed and circulated primarily, by the dominant culture and ironically, secondarily by American Indians are examined. These blood and simulation discourses showcase the dominant culture’s misunderstanding of American Indians. What are the poetics and politics involved in the representation of American Indians that provoke such misunderstandings? First, I outline a particularly effective blood discourse contained in the 1887 Dawes Act. This act is the precursor to a series of unfolding legislation that continues to have devastating affects on American Indian identity and representation. Then, I address the more recent 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act, which also has powerful effects on the notion of American Indian identity, representation, and tribal/cultural sovereignty.

These acts share in common the U.S. government’s distinction of American Indians as citizens of sovereign nations. The concept of sovereignty that would seem to indicate authority over oneself, ironically, proves to be the problematic injected through these acts into the issue of American Indian identity. Both acts and many on-going legislative motions function as racialized regulatory régimes that serve to fracture American Indian families, tribes, and nations.

*Blood discourse -1887 Dawes Act.*

The 1887 Dawes Act was a product of the dominant culture’s adherence to the Eurocentric notion that blood is a transmitter of culture. The Dawes Act was essentially a tribal roll assembled from 1899 through 1906 that relied on “blood cards” for proof of authenticity (Garrouette, 2001; Grande, 2000). Authenticity insured individual land
allotments of between 40 and 740 acres for enrolled American Indians (Barker, 2003) making enrollment extremely lucrative. In order to be considered authentic, an individual had to demonstrate that he/she possessed, at least, one-quarter American Indian blood (Garoutte, 2001). As Garoutte (2001) explains, “Degree of blood is calculated on the basis of the immediacy of one’s genetic relationship to ancestors whose bloodlines were (supposedly) unmixed” (p. 225). As one can imagine, this requirement produced a number of problems.

This complicated process was mired in fraud, deception, racism, and gender discrimination. The fact that fulfillment of blood criterion resulted in receiving land encouraged fraud. Barker (2003) suggests, “Racial purity, it would seem, is a difficult thing to legislate when confronted with the social forces of greed” (p. 33). Whether the results of this strategy were preconceived or not, the act ended up amounting to a ingenious way to fracture the American Indian nation by spurring tribal in-fighting over questions of authenticity. Moreover, the Dawes Act introduced a hierarchical structure of real American Indianness based on percent of American Indian blood, with full-blood being the most desirable and authentic, half-blood being less desirable and less authentic, and “thindians,” (Paredes, 1995, p. 343) being the least desirable and least authentic, as they are merely “psychogenetically” (p. 343) connected to their ancestors who have barely any American Indian blood (Garoutte, 2001, 2003).

In the process of creating hierarchies of authenticity, this enrollment process also served to dispossess people entirely. Often people died before they could enroll in the Dawes Rolls (Garoutte, 2001). Inter-ethnic marriages spurred some tribes to re-frame their matrilineal formations to that of patrilineal alignments in order to protect their
valuable resources from outside threats, thereby, ousting former members (Barker, 2003). Many tribal individuals of the Cherokee Nation, oppositional groups such as the Nighthawk and Snake Societies, and whole tribes opposed to the enrollment and allotment processes did not participate in them, which helps to explain the fact that currently over 300 indigenous groups are without recognition status (Barker, 2003).

Consequently, the dominant culture’s mandate to comply and the American Indians’ reaction to resist proved to have monumental consequences for future generations by negating citizenship eligibility (Garroutte, 2001). This act and the “blood quantum discourse” (Lawrence, 2003, p. 20) contained within it served as a construct for the federal regulation of American Indian identity and unfortunately, as a model for tribes in regulating identity from within. This act begins a long history wherein “reified blood as a means of dispossession” (Barker, 2003, p. 27) is exercised, as Barker suggests that “blood emerges from discourses of genetics, culture and assimilation to code authenticity and rights” (p. 31). Blood discourse then sets a confusing course for the racialization and domination of American Indians. Confusing, as Barker explains, because the Bureau of American Indian Affairs as of 1977 had over 300 different documented definitions of American Indians. By adding this number to the various state and tribal definitions, this already complicated structure multiplies.

The delineation between federal, state, and tribal regulatory standards further exacerbates the situation. Each tribe has the right to enforce its own set of criteria for citizenship. Many tribes spurn the Euro-American insistence on blood quantum as an indicator of authenticity. Garroutte (2001) claims, “A significant number of tribes – almost one-third of those populating the lower forty-eight states – have rejected the
specific blood quantum requirements for determining tribal citizenship” (p. 225). Tribal citizenship relies on a number of different considerations dependent upon the tribe including the following: blood quantum (Barker, 2003; Garrouette, 2001); proof of reservation residency (Garrouette, 2003); matrilineal or patrilineal descent lines (Barker, 2003; Garrouette, 2003); birthplace (Barker, 2003); and “clan relationships, kinship patterns, one’s individual tribal name, and community-based norms” (Horse, 2005, p. 64).

The situation is further problematized by the notion that a person can have state recognition of their American Indian citizenship without having federal recognition. A person can also have federal recognition without having state recognition. In short, the stakes are high in proving American Indian authenticity to comply with federal, state, and/or tribal criteria.

The federal benefits awarded to tribal citizens include, but are not limited to, the following: economic resources; geographic entitlements; water rights; exemptions from state licensures; exemptions from state income and property taxation; and protection under certain American Indian-related federal acts including but not limited to those on behalf of families, freedom of religion, and ownership and reclamation of sacred objects (Garrouette, 2001). The state benefits range from as little as a commemorative plaque in a park to as much as garnering special state rights from newly formed state American Indian commissions (Paredes, 1995). Tribal citizenship often offers reservation land and living rights; exposure to cultural and ceremonial teachings, acts, and performances; and a general sense of immediate connection to community.
Although there are some obvious advantages to claiming American Indian identity, the regulatory processes created to obtain and maintain this identity are derived from Eurocentric knowledge systems that operate from a referential foundation that does not align with Indigicentric thinking. What was the strategy behind the Dawes Act? As Garoutte (2003) explains:

The effort, in a nutshell, was to destroy indigenous cultures by destroying their foundation – their collective ownership of land – and to integrate the Indians thus ‘liberated’ in the dominant mainstream culture. Through a process of land allotment, Indians were remade into individual, private owners of small farms who would quickly become independent of government attention and expenditures. (p. 22)

Moreover, the Dawes Act strategy was to promote intra and inter-tribal disagreements over the following issues: the compliance or lack thereof with federal, state, and tribal authenticity criteria; the criteria for citizenship; the hierarchical authentication status produced by blood quantum levels; and the economic and political ramifications of individual versus collective rights. The tactics employed by the dominant culture included stalling the enrollment process; committing fraudulent acts during enrollment; creating confusion over the criteria; positioning tribal membership alongside resource control; and instituting and promoting an overall policing of identity.

The 1887 Dawes Act functioned as an act of disenfranchisement and dispossession and delivered a crushing blow to American Indian identity. This act succeeded in connecting tribal membership to resource control, which unleashed human greed to further disintegrate an already precarious identity formation. This act also succeeded in influencing how American Indian identity is envisioned from past to
present. Finally, this act served to maintain the dominant culture’s interest of remaining in power by encouraging on-going identity surveillance.

**Blood discourse – 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act.**

A recent act that is spawned from the legacy of blood criterion that relates specifically to American Indian cultural/artistic representation is the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA). Barker (2003) explains that the IACA is based on a 1935 act by the same name developed by then Commissioner of American Indian Affairs, John Collier. Both the 1935 and 1990 versions were established to counter the assimilation efforts promoted by the Dawes Act. Moreover, they were crafted to promote tribal self-determination and cultural autonomy.

Unfortunately, the IACA continued in the tradition of prompting identity policing from within, through ever-shifting tribal specifications. Through the instigation of these authentication constructs to begin with, the IACA also prompts identity policing from outside stakeholders such as collectors and museums. As Barker (2003) points out, “The IACA’s stated purpose is to protect American Indian and Alaskan Native artists and their patrons from the fraud and misrepresentation of imports and domestic appropriations” (p. 25). According to Hapiuk (2001), “A 1985 congressionally mandated study by the U. S. Department of Commerce estimated annual sales of Native American jewelry and handicrafts at $400 to $800 million” (p. 1017). When factoring in American Indian fine arts to these revenue totals, American Indian arts and crafts amount to big business. Under these auspices, it is not surprising that the following American Indian bodies are in support of the IACA: Indigenous art associations such as the Native American Art Alliance; members of the American Indian Arts and Crafts Board (an agency not legally
affiliated with the American Indian Arts and Crafts Association) that has a large tribal membership; and influential American Indian government officials such as Cheyenne House Representative Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Creek political lobbyist Susan Shown Harjo. These organizations and individuals in conjunction with Representative Jon Kyl and Senator John McCain were instrumental in the development and passage of the IACA (Barker, 2003; Hapiuk, 2001).

Hapiuk explains that while the act was developed with good intentions, its enforcement resulted in another devastating blow to American Indians due to its failure to address the following two important issues: 1) to acknowledge the historical development of both American Indian tribes and American Indian arts and crafts and 2) to appreciate the ways that contemporary American Indian identity is constructed. The implications of this act and its failings are far from simple as I demonstrate in the following representational examples.

Barker points to the work of Diné/Seminole/Muscogee artist, Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie’s work, Nobody’s Pet Indian, wherein she prominently features her tribal enrollment card in her self-portraits. Through her work, Tsinhnahjinnie comments on two issues as follows: 1) the commodification of American Indians in the very process of American Indian art-making, and 2) American Indian and American Indian art’s inherited ties to blood discourse. Sac and Fox Quapaw artist, Dennis Jennings, compares tribal enrollment cards carried by American Indians to the tattoos etched on Jewish people’s wrists under the Nazi régime (Hapiuk, 2001). Moreover, according to Hapiuk (2001) the well-intentioned, “truth-in-advertising” (p. 1027) IACA provoked a cultural “witch-hunt”
(p. 1011) with its “bounty-hunter clause” (p. 1027) that allows individuals to report authenticity violations that can result in civil and criminal charges.

A famous example of this witchhunt mentality centers on well-known Cherokee artist, Jimmie Durham. Although the Cherokee council affirms his tribal membership, after the passage of the IACA several galleries and museums cancelled his exhibitions because he is not officially registered with the Cherokee Nation or the Bureau of American Indian Affairs. A debate ensued concerning authenticity and identity that continues still. Encapsulating some of the frustration with the blood discourse contained in the Dawes Act, and subsequently, in the IACA, Durham (as cited in Churchill, 1994) caustically replied to the controversy surrounding him:

I hereby swear to the truth of the following statements: I am a full-blood contemporary artist, of the sub-group (or clan) called sculptors. I am not an American Indian, nor have I ever seen or sworn loyalty to India. I am not Native ‘American,’ nor do I feel that ‘America’ has any right to either name or un-name me. I have previously stated that I should be considered a mixed-blood: that is, I claim to be male but in fact only one of my parents is male. (p. 107)

Artist and curator Jaune Quick-to-See Smith equates the witchhunting and resulting blacklisting prompted by the IACA to activities carried out during the McCarthy era (Hapiuk, 2001). As Durham can attest and Barker (2003) comments, this adherence to blood quantum becomes the “deciding factor of one’s intellectualism and position with regards to sovereignty” (p. 52) and invites surveillance that can only be a product of memory loss of not so distant past witchhunts. Owens (as cited in Barker, 2003) further explains:

It is this confused and undefined ‘posturing’ of authenticity that must forget the historical and cultural consequences of U.S. policies in constituting indigenous people’s disenfranchisement in order to authorize itself as a real against which others can be discredited. (p. 52)
Even though tribes are allowed to define enrollment criteria and police their membership, which would seem to suggest self-sovereignty, American Indian self-signification is still not in full effect. In fact, by insisting that American Indian identification needs categorizing in the first place and by basing those criteria on Eurocentric constructs in the second place, the battle for American Indian self-determination is, in reality, ceded to the hands of the U.S. government. Under the U. S. government, and subsequently, American Indian tribal systems that rely on a variety of discombobulating criteria, it is possible to be ethnically American Indian without being considered legally American Indian and so receiving the political and economic resources that come with that legal sanction (Hapiuk, 2001). In fact, Champagne points out, “The 1990 U. S. Census counted 1.75 million Indians based on its racial categorizations, but an estimated seven million Americans claim descent from an American Indian ancestor” (as cited in Hapiuk, 2001, p. 1013).

Barker states that proponents of the IACA explain that the act incorporates a number of contingencies that allow for tribal accommodations. One such contingency is the designation of “special artisan status” (p. 54) that permits artists who are not enrolled in the tribe to produce art for the purposes of selling and displaying their work. Another contingency is the designation “of Indian descent, Native American descent, or Tribe A descent” (p. 54) that allows for art from the tribal descendants of foreign countries and

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I employ self-sovereignty as an all-encompassing term that can reference tribal, cultural, or individual sovereignty depending on the context in which it is used. Generally, self-sovereignty refers to the power to self-govern, manage one’s own affairs, and exercise authority and jurisdiction over one’s self and the signification processes and significations associated with that self (Larson {Gros Ventre}, 2005).
the U.S. to be sold as long as that fact is clearly disclosed in conjunction with the sale. This designation is problematic in that not only are U.S. American Indians being categorized and recognized but also foreign indigenous peoples are being subject to these processes. Moreover, this designation is troublesome because “Indian made” becomes the primary factor in artistic production, relegating unique tribal affiliation to a less consequential position.

For example, Barker (2003) cites a case wherein non-American Indian owned factories, staffed by Diné artisans, are producing Hopi kachinas. Obviously, this situation creates a number of complications and a variety of emotions such as anger and contempt and activities such as protest and reclamation in response to the circumstances. This situation incites the Hopi; encourages the Diné to insist upon their right to economic viability in a consumer-driven market; and points to the failings of these tribal boundary lines to protect against inter-tribal appropriation. On the one hand, if tribes can produce each other’s representations, does this recycle the dominant culture’s notion of pan-Indianness? (Barker, 2003). On the other hand, if inter-tribal appropriation is disallowed, what boundaries does this allowance place on creativity, representational sharing, and artistic growth?

Not only does the IACA place contingencies on American Indian identity but also the IACA commodifies it. Barker (2003) references the part of the IACA that states, “Indian product means any art or craft product made by an Indian” (p. 55) This statement equates American Indians with products, which positions both as commodities with exchange values that operate in markets. This positioning serves to commodify American Indians (Barker, 2003). Due in part to legislative legalese like the above, American
Indians, just like the majority of their arts and crafts, historically are deemed ethnographic objects rather than dynamic, creative subjects.

In summary, blood is slippery in nature just like the discourse it produces, which allows those in power (the dominant culture, government, agencies, tribal councils, etc.) to waffle at whim on identity issues based on how advantageous the outcomes are to their group’s agendas.

*Simulation discourse.*

Another type of discourse that produces duplicitous identity conditions is simulation discourse, wherein American Indian representations are either counterfeited or co-opted. D. L. Moore’s (2003) “nature versus culture” (p. 73) opposition is in full operation to construct American Indians in terms of binaries. American Indian representations are seated in such binaries as white/red, savage/civil, Us/Them-Other. These overarching binary oppositions can be quartered to produce even more confusion, reductionism, naturalism, essentialism, and fixation. They include such examples as “Bad Injun/Good Indian,” “Ignoble savage/Noble savage,“ (Büken, 2002, p. 46) and wisdomkeepers/drunkards with “noble savage” being one of the most resonant and often produced representations.

How do whites enact symbolic power via representational practices that include stereotyping of American Indians? Büken (2002) explains that popular culture serves to marginalize and trivialize American Indians by reflecting the concerns, addressing the needs, and impacting the consciousness of whites and their public memory. She also points out that the construction and circulation of these stereotypical representations of American Indians serve many purposes including the following: shapes non-Natives
perceptions of the *Other*; erases American Indian cultural identities; and creates semiotic representations that function as “cultural symbols and icons” (p. 47) that are created by one group (the dominant culture) about another group (American Indians). Through the positioning of American Indians as cultural icons American Indian agency is constrained inhibiting American Indians’ abilities to create their own individual and collective cultural representations and identities.

Additionally, these representations serve to essentialize American Indians. Fuss defines essentialism as, “a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given identity” (as cited in Gonzalvez, 1997, p. 171). The dominant discourse’s representations of American Indians construct and circulate images and notions that are fixed and not up for discussion, negation, or contestation. Identity politics as executed in the dominant discourses produced by the dominant culture about American Indians permits little room for American Indians to self-signify. The representations contained in many of the dominant discourses engage in reductionism, attempting to narrowly define American Indians. Büken (2002) explains that over 500 tribal nations are reduced to “generic ‘Indian’” (p. 53) promoting a kind of pan-Indianness.

In short, the knowledge produced by the dominant discourses essentializes, historicizes, and exoticizes American Indians through the employment of stereotyping and attempts to steal their cultural sovereignty and fix them in time. The motivation for the production of this type of knowledge might lay in the comments made by Comanche writer, curator, and cultural critic, Paul Chaat Smith (1995) who explains:
The country can’t make up its mind. One decade we’re invisible, another
dangerous. Obsolete and quaint, a rather boring people suitable for schoolkids and
family vacations, then suddenly we’re cool and mysterious. Once considered so
primitive that our status as fully human was a subject of scientific debate, some
now regard us as keepers of planetary secrets and the only salvation for a world
bent on destroying itself. Heck, we’re just plain folks, but no one wants to hear
that. But how could it be any different? The confusion and ambivalence, the
amnesia and wistful romanticism makes perfect sense. We are shape-shifters in
the national consciousness, accidental survivors, unwanted reminders of
disagreeable events. Indians have to be explained and accounted for, and
somehow fit into the creation myth of the most powerful, benevolent nation ever,
the last best hope of man on earth. (p. 9)

Smith’s comments allude to American Indians being construed as a phantom people and
accentuate the ghostly residue of a people that attempts to materialize only to be
misshapen via the production of their representation by the dominant discourses.

When did these dominant discourses gain momentum? The discourses were
initially formulated upon the dominant culture’s first contact with American Indians. As
Bataille (2001) suggests, “Travel narratives as early as the 1500s depicted the Native
American as a fierce, cannibalistic creature, and the woodcuts accompanying the stories
portrayed the Indian as less than human – naked, violent, warlike, and frequently, more
animalistic than human” (p. 2). Specifically, American Indian representational
railroading [my term and emphasis] came into fruition around 1840 when popular culture
became ‘the defining medium for the image of the Indian,’ (Berkhofer, as cited in Büken,
p. 47). Buken (2002) points out that the fabrication of these biased images of American
Indians, which were both positive and negative, proved “detrimental to the cultural
heritage, cultural pride, cultural identity, and self-esteem of the native peoples” (p. 47).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, American Indian representations
were constructed and circulated via a variety of mediums as follows: toys (Büken, 2002);
cultural performances by American Indians attending charter schools instituted; traveling plays and on lecture circuits, like the Chautauqua tour that functioned more like a pageant to patriotism, nationalism, and/or the Other (Maddox, 2002); wild west shows like Buffalo Bill Cody’s in 1883 (Maddox, 2002); photojournalistic accounts of life on the reservation like those concocted by Rodman Wanamaker and Joseph Kossuth Dixon (Maddox, 2002); world’s fairs and expositions (Hall, 2002; Maddox, 2002); and stereotypical images produced by non-natives such as George Catlin and Edward S. Curtis that reflected what they believed to be “a race of primitive people vanishing in the face of progress,” (Skoda, 1996, p. 51). Catlin’s paintings and Curtis’ photographs are considered seminal American Indian representations that continue to be displayed in countless museums and institutions.

Maddox (2002) points out that the politics of representation took center stage during the St. Louis Fair in 1904. She explains that the American Indian portion of the exhibit included a representation of the structure of an American Indian charter school, which served to civilize the savage that was part of a larger exhibit titled the “Congress of Races” (p. 15-16). Maddox explains that the larger exhibit was situated on a hill with the civilizing American Indian charter school positioned at the top and center of the hill. Whereas, the exhibits of other Indigenous peoples were organized below and around the American Indian charter school; thereby suggesting some kind of hierarchical order among Indigenous peoples. This order seemed to imply that the more civilized one is purported to be, the higher one’s status is in the eyes of the dominant culture.

These misrepresentations of American Indians did not stop in the early 1900s. Instead, they surged forward to flood the current culture. Rader (2003) suggests the
momentum of the dominant discourses accelerates during the age of technological advancement. He says, “The site of cultural colonialism and erasure has shifted from the empty expanse of the West to the empty expanses of television and movie screens” (p. 183). Once again, the mediums of popular culture – including television, film, children’s literature, romance novels, and the New Age movement, etc. – are employed to misshape American Indian representations.

During the 1960s a “‘renaissance’ of Native writing” (Bataille, 2003, p. 4) occurred with Kiowa and Cherokee author, N. Scott Momaday, winning the 1968 Pulitzer Prize for his novel *House Made of Dawn*. What does Momaday’s writing have to do with the production of dominant discourses? Criticism surrounding the novel suggested that American Indians were being forced to step into the mask of the “American Indian Other” constructed by the dominant culture in order “to be recognized, and thus to have a voice that is heard by those in control of power” (Owens, 2003, p. 17). As referenced earlier, these “mimic men” (Naipaul, as cited in Owens, 2003, p. 23) were part of a dynamic that Deloria (1998) discusses in his book titled, *Playing Indian*. In short, American Indians were encouraged to package their cultural products in *white wrappings* in order to be accepted by the dominant culture. This desired packaging is replayed in films like Costner’s (1990) *Dances with Wolves* and Mann’s (1992) *The Last of the Mohicans* wherein the dominant culture demands that American Indians fit the romanticized image of the noble warrior. This tactic is merely another kind of identity politics at work that insists how marginalized people should operate within régimes of power. This tactic’s consequence epitomizes the complexity and boundary blurring that representation and identity endure when cultural sovereignty is appropriated.
Additional examples that further problematize American Indian identity, representation, and cultural sovereignty arise from cultural co-optation and commodification by the dominant culture. Past studies of co-optation of American Indian cultural representations are primarily derived from three contexts: artistic, materialistic, and spiritualistic. Past studies of appropriation enable insights to be gleaned on critical concepts that facilitate an understanding of the covert operations of identity production and the stakes of such productions.

The appropriation of American Indian cultural representations in the form of art is addressed in Sorrells’ (2003) critical and interpretive study focusing on the commodification of these art forms by using participant observations and interviews to explain its impact on female Navajo weavers and Pueblo potters briefly mentioned earlier. Sorrells explains that the dominant culture fixes the subordinate, exotic culture’s identity and representations in time; thereby, essentializing that culture which is an act of cultural stereotyping and cultural colonization. Sorrells makes the connection to the equation of culture with a product, which helps to explain the commodification of American Indians’ representations and its subsequent impact on artists’ cultural identities. She points out that some artists modify their notions of American Indian imagery to meet consumer specifications and demands. She explains that when studied within a historical context, this commodification is the result of colonization by two separate groups, the Spanish and the Anglos, who both sought to marginalize American Indians. The Spanish succeeded in marginalization by creating a system of hierarchy that equated racial ancestry with social class, which relegated American Indians to the bottom. The Anglos, with their notions of racial superiority, designated American Indians
to the realm of the *Other* assigning them qualities that were to be construed as inherent and exotic. This relegation to *Otherness* results in stereotyping which strips American Indian culture of its complexity.

This cultural excavation results in essentialism of American Indians and fetishism being directed towards them (Sorrells, 2003). Essentializing and fetishizing a culture opens the door for commodification of that culture which is, in essence, cultural colonization. As a result, Sorrells elaborates that American Indian cultural representations are shaped by several entities: the consumer; the tribe; and the individual artists within complex historical, regional, economic, and familial contexts. Sorrells concludes that some American Indian women artists that she interviewed are exercising their own agency to change their lives and the lives of those around them by revisiting their cultural pasts and redefining their cultural futures through their art. Sorrells explains that the commodification of American Indian cultural representations that exoticize the *Other* is to blame for this co-optation.

Other explorations of cultural appropriation of American Indians are contained in Meyer and Royer’s (2001) book. In their introduction, they reveal several stereotypes that plague American Indians. Two that are particularly relevant are as follows: American Indians as keepers of the Earth and American Indians as spiritual tuning forks. According to Meyer and Royer, “Many Americans, instead of placing themselves in opposition to Indians, want to be associated with what they perceive to be a positive aspect of American Indianness” (p. xiii). Meyer and Royer also point to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau that show those people identifying themselves as American Indians doubled between 1980 and 1990. They conclude that essentialism of American Indian
culture and the subsequent commodification that follows it leads to co-optation of American Indian cultural representations.

Studies on the appropriation of American Indian cultural identity through cultural misrepresentation and misuse of symbols have been prompted by vociferous American Indian protests of the use of these sacred symbols and tribal names in sports and advertising. Merskin’s (2001) study focuses on the consumer products that use American Indian representations to help sell them such as Jeep Cherokee, Land O’ Lakes Butter, and Crazy Horse Malt Liquor. Merskin incorporates McCracken’s definition of a brand and pairs it with Barthes’ semiotic analysis to come up with a framework “to study the articulation of racist ideology in brand images” (p. 164). For example, in the case of Land O’ Lakes dairy products, Merskin explains that the use of the American Indian maiden to symbolize product purity and the incorporation of natural symbols such as trees and lakes presents an overall stereotypical image of the “noble savage” (p. 165). However, this stereotypical image has been circulated for such a long time (since 1924) that it has been engrained in U.S. consumers’ psyches as one of the quintessential American Indian representations. In short, this powerful image has been incorporated into greater society for so many decades that the image, and images like it, escape questioning of its inherent racism. Merskin concludes that a nearly internalized assumption by the dominant culture of whom American Indians are and what they represent creates invisibility with regards to the racist labeling of these products.

Another perspective that helps explain Merskin’s conclusion is that contained in Peroff’s (1997) research, involving the “new sciences” (p. 487). According to Peroff, the
new sciences are created out of a combination of computer science, biology and physics. Peroff explains:

In the new science paradigm, the concept of emergent behaviors/properties is critical to understanding a real world of very complex nonlinear systems. An emergent property of a nonlinear living system may be expressed by the behavior of the elements of a system in interaction with one another and the environment, but it is not a property of any individual element and it cannot be explained as a summation of the properties of those elements. Examples include behavior in such diverse nonlinear systems as ant colonies, traffic jams, and the human immune system. (p. 487)

Peroff employs the concepts of nonlinear systems theory and metaphor to present two distinct yet interrelated forms of American Indian identity. Note Peroff’s use of the upper-case “I” and the lower-case “i” to highlight the difference between the sources of these identities. Peroff posits, “Indianness is anchored in tribally-based metaphor and is an emergent property of a vital or ‘living’ tribal community and indianness is a generic identity formed in the dominant American society” (p. 485). In short, American Indianness is a product of American Indian tribal cultures that defines and guides the behavior of American Indians. Peroff expands, “It determines the tribe’s manifest nature according to its specifications” (p. 488). Whereas, American indianness is a symbolic product of American society’s making that “influences the larger society’s actions and behaviors regarding Indians” (Peroff, p. 489). The fact that the dominant culture has the power to create a generic identity that proceeds unnoticed helps to explain Merskin’s notions of the invisibility of racist labeling.

Additional acts of appropriation of American Indian cultural representations occur in the spiritual arena. In Aldred’s (2000) critical rhetorical essay she reveals through numerous textual examples that New Age practitioners, under the guise of social and
spiritual expansiveness, sometimes knowingly and other times unwittingly, commercialize American Indian rituals. According to Aldred, New Age is the consumerist, countercultural movement that emerges in the 1980s whose members focus on spiritual growth attained through hybridized spiritual and healing practices pulled from a variety of cultures. Aldred points to the important and controversial subject of freedom of speech and the silencing of American Indian voices when she cites Smith who proclaims:

Many white feminists have claimed that Indians are not respecting “freedom of speech” by demanding that whites stop promoting and selling books that exploit American Indian spirituality. However, promotion of this material is destroying freedom of speech for Native Americans by ensuring that our voices will never be heard…Feminists must make a choice, will they respect American Indian political and spiritual autonomy or will they promote materials that are fundamentally racist under the guise of “freedom of speech”? (p. 336)

Aldred concludes that driven by the strong urgings of capitalism, the New Age practitioners trivialize and exoticize American Indian traditional spiritual practices, further serving to quash an already oppressed population and sufficiently altering their voices.

Furthermore, in my own research (2004) that analyzes on-line advertisements and press materials for spas, I find that these materials position and manufacture American Indianness as a hot commodity. New Agers and savvy business people strip this cultural capital from the hearts, minds, souls, and pockets of American Indians, re-package it, and sell it to those who will pay the price. Examples of this co-optation are contained in the press materials and advertisements for spas such as Mii amo, part of a larger property called Enchantment Resort in Sedona, Arizona (Donnelly, n.d.) and New Age Health Spa in Neversink, New Jersey (Izzo-Feldman, 2004). These materials utilize often covert and
crafty marketing lures to further marginalize and trivialize American Indians through exoticism and essentialism that feeds into the Us/Them binary. Additionally, these messages serve to belittle longstanding American Indian cultural traditions by pairing them with the relatively new hybridized practices of New Agers.

As demonstrated in the above studies, the dominant culture re-structures American Indian cultural artistic representations to meet their own idea of the traditional American Indian. They confiscate American Indian tribal imagery, names, and symbols to feed a ferocious consumer-driven market. Lastly, the dominant culture incorporates the sacred traditions and ancient spiritual practices of American Indians into itself to create a watered down *kitsch soup of Indianness* that misrepresents American Indian authentic and original methods, symbols, beliefs, and intentions.

This aggressive consumer appetite complicates matters further when often economically-challenged American Indians are lured into marketing and selling their own cultural and ceremonial representations, products, and services to feed this consumer market, fueled by the capitalist engine. Dunn (2004) relays in her article about American Indian sweat lodges and healing how a non-Native was allowed to “observe and learn the tradition over a period of eight months” from a “Yakima tribal elder” (p. 61). In this and other similar cases, American Indian cultural capital is exchanged for economic capital in the form of money in order to insure American Indian survival in the United States’ commodified, consumer culture. Whether perpetuated by the dominant culture (in stealing cultural property) or by American Indians (in trading cultural property for cash and submitting to the strain of the dominant culture’s régime of power), American Indians become the ones who lose.
In conclusion, the dominant blood and simulation discourses exercise the following philosophy toward American Indians: “If we can’t erase them, we can, at least, fix them in time and halt their progression. Or we can borrow what we want from them to make a profit. Or we can force them to enter our power/knowledge systems in order to survive but at their own peril.”

**Counter Discourses**

Büken (2002) asks, “How can American Indians, who have not had much impact on the creation of mass cultural images, counter the centuries old stereotypical imagery produced and promoted by mass culture?” (p. 48). American Indians have a longstanding relationship with resistance. Rader (2003) terms this contestation of the dominant discourses “engaged resistance” (p. 179) and explains:

> We see this engaged resistance explicitly in the simple fact that the Indians from different tribes come together for a unified act of resistance. But the more implicit acts of engaged resistance…are the acts of American Indian expression and communication that are fundamentally linked to Native histories, cultures, and beliefs. (p. 179)

Essentially, Rader is referring to the movement toward committed art rather than individualistic art or *art for art’s sake*. Mendoza (2002) references this kind of movement, enacted on a much broader scale by and within the Philippine academy that is prompted by Filipino scholar, Virgilio Gaspar Enriquez. Enriquez explains that this specific Filipino movement was more about dedication to peoplehood and indigenous ways than just about art (as cited in Mendoza, 2002). These types of movements counter the dominant discourses and attempt to re-write the ways in which dominant and marginalized groups are represented. In Rader’s essay, counter discourses rewrite how “Whiteness and Indianness get represented” (p. 181) by encouraging American Indians to
take control of the semiotics of their own representations through the insistence of a collective identity that is enacted politically and artistically to produce American Indian cultural sovereignty.

What commonalities do these counter discourses have? How do these discourses operate? Smith (1995) elaborates about the artists who participate in the counter discourse:

They are fearless in other ways, and not just in technical proficiency. They dare to experiment, to theorize, to argue and harangue, to tease and joke. They are not following anyone’s instructions. To use the parlance of the late nineteenth century, these Indians have ‘strayed off the reservation’. (p. 7)

I contend, however, they have not strayed entirely off the reservation, as Smith suggests, but nevertheless, are making great strides towards cultural sovereignty. American Indians from a variety of tribes produce these artistic representations so there is a multi-vocality within the collective tribal identity that is portrayed in the works. The representations often counter historicized versions of American Indians by depicting images that speak to “entanglement, border crossing, and coexistence” (Clifford, 1997, p. 95) suggesting an overall ambiguity. Moreover, many of these works employ humor either sublimely or overtly. American Indian artist, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie says, “A lot of humor runs through the Native community. I know there’s the myth of the stoic Native, but when we get together we always laugh” (as cited in Skoda, 1996, p. 55).

These contemporary American Indian artists claim cultural sovereignty via their art which threatens the dominant culture’s ideas of what American Indians should be and where they should fit in; hence, the cultural imbalance. This claim of cultural sovereignty empowers and benefits American Indians, as they gain more control over their present
and future representations. This claim articulates the idea that American Indians are a complex people who straddle both ancient and modern worlds. In my literature review, I included a list of American Indian artists that use hybridity, humor, and gaze flipping in their counter discourses to claim cultural sovereignty.

An additional artistic example that functions alongside the previously mentioned work to construct counter discourses are the photographic images captured during the 1970s American Indian movement that documented the struggle for self-determination via political advocacy (Skoda, 1996). The fact that this example stems from a medium that is directly involved with the gaze is significant and symbolic. Re-gaining control of the gaze, re-focusing the gaze on a re-signified self, and gaze flipping/reversal are tactics that are frequently employed in American Indian artistic counter discourses.

Further examples of counter discourses in art are displayed in the thought-provoking George Gustave Heye Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian at the Custom House in New York (White, 1997). White points to the artistic contributions of American Indians such as Plains Cree Siksika Nation artist, Gerald McMaster, and Ojibwe artist, Earl Nyholm, that bring American Indian voices to the representational concert, provoking questions about representations whose meanings are contestable and unstable. This exhibit puts the terms “diversity” and “multivocal,” that authoritatively associate themselves with American Indian art, on trial explaining that these terms provoke confusion (White, p. 29). However, even with all the representational enlightenment that this exhibit provokes, White’s criticism manages to problematize another well-intentioned attempt to re-gain the representational reins,
pointing to the fact that American Indian identity and cultural politics are no easy endeavors.

Not only does American Indian art serve to produce counter discourses but a literary movement contributes, as well. As D. L. Moore (2003) suggests, “Native literary formulations around the Ghost Dance and the return of the buffalo begin to suggest patterns by which Americans might conceive of *e pluribus anum* as community built on difference rather than on making differences vanish” (p. 53). Insistence on tribal and cultural sovereignty is the principles at the heart of the invocation of the symbolic Ghost Dance and buffalo representations in American Indian literature. D. L. Moore (2003) comments that American Indian writers such as Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Leslie Silko (Laguna), James Welch (Blackfeet, Gros Ventre), and Gerald Vizenor (Chippewa) are just a few of the authors who invoke the semiotics of the Ghost Dance and the buffalo to accentuate the cyclical thinking of American Indians, rather than linear thinking of the dominant culture. These semiotic references suggest that American Indians are circularly exercising their cultural sovereignty to take back their representations. D. L. Moore (2003) further punctuates the poetics of the identity politics behind this literature when he comments that those examples serve to counter “America’s regulative discourse of the ‘vanishing Indian’” that “offers no idiom for either the suffering or the survival of Indian communities and identities” (p. 61).

Another word-based medium that produces counter discourses by seizing representational power from the oppressor and re-signifying American Indian identity in a positive self-image is that of American Indian protest rhetoric. Lake and Palczewski (in press) point to some of the tactics employed by Oglala Lakota activist, Russell Means.
Means’ extemporaneous style relies on *encircling* [my term] and reversals. Lake and Palczewski comment that Means appeals to his audience by incorporating commonly occurring experiential data and authoritatively delivering it as fact in order to encircle his listeners to produce philosophical solidarity. Furthermore, Lake and Palczewski suggest that Means employs reversal as a tactic to counter the stereotypical notions of American Indians as “primitive” and “inferior” by “characterizing white society as derivative” (p. 6) and positioning American Indians as the precursors to any sort of societal formation. Between the work of innovative American Indian artists, the texts of insightful American Indian authors, and the speeches of thought-provoking American Indian orators, there is a great deal of self-determined representational ground being covered.

The identity and cultural politics produced by and contained in dominant and counter discourses have been explored in order to illustrate the stakes in the debates over American Indian collective self-identity and cultural/artistic representations. I outlined the tactics and strategies involved in the dominant culture’s pairing of divide-and-conquer blood discourses with counterfeit-and-co-optate simulation discourses. I demonstrated that the results of this pairing amount to the blurring of American Indian identity, representation, and cultural boundaries beyond recognition and to the inception of inter-tribal surveillance and policing. Both tactics spawned by the dominant culture serve to lessen the individual and collective powers of American Indians.

I also presented examples of counter discourses that function to resist the dominant discourses, politicize American Indian identity, and in some instances, offer transformative alternatives to notions of American Indian identity and representation. In short, the poetics and politics of American Indian identity and representation, produced
within the legal and popular realms that constitute both dominant and counter discourses have been detailed to showcase how power, culture, identity, and representation are all interrelated and how the notion of sovereignty plays an integral role throughout.

Colonization was demonstrated to be an on-going process, even with the blips of good intentions that show up on the social radar. Ultimately, when American Indian identity and representation are placed within Eurocentric formations that are allowed to run rampant, American Indian identities, collective cultural identities, representations, and sovereignty are stolen. American Indians are essentially robbed of their histories, voices, power, and existences. The dominant culture can then place them in the cabinet of curiosities as the noble savage forever. Nevertheless, the battle over the cherished concepts of American Indian identity and representation among and between American Indians and the dominant culture wages on in the struggles for tribal/cultural sovereignty.

Continuing Philosophical Counters

At the heart of these representation and identity controversies, there lies tension between the ways that different groups conceptualize, operationalize, and signify cultural identity. As such, cultural identity and its derivative cultural artistic representations, prove to be slippery subjects, which account for the endless debates surrounding them and the tireless efforts to gain signification self-sovereignty over them.

West (as cited in Barker & Galasinski, 2001) suggests a process that could serve as the foundation for an American Indian response to re-gain signification self-sovereignty, as encapsulated in his three Ds [my shorthand] construct. Some American Indian and marginalized group’s scholars and activists are already engaged in this process whether they are aware of its named existence or not. West (as cited in Barker &
Galasinski, p. 58) defines them as follows: 1) “deconstruction” (critically reading the texts and highlighting the rhetorical operations that position people, issues, etc.); 2) “demythologization” (tracking the social construction of metaphors that regulate descriptions to understand their implications for politics, agendas, purposes, prejudices); and 3) “demystification” (analyzing the power structures in order to identify sites of opportunity for transformative praxis that are applicable in the social, cultural, political, legal, etc. realms).

Although West’s three Ds construct represents a sturdy base from which to identify the problem, in order to counter the powers enacted by cultural and identity politics, the next step requires gaining sovereign control over signification.

Barker (2003) points to two intertwined models to address American Indian self-definition, self-representation, and sovereign self-determination that move the process into action: “the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” and “indigenous (oral) histories” (p. 68). She suggests that self-determination lies at the core of each aspect (tradition, custom, property, language, oral histories, philosophies, writing systems, educational systems, medicines, health practices, resources, and lands) included in the Declaration. This Declaration defines the rights of Indigenous peoples and states that these rights are understood to be interconnected and indivisible.

Barker then problematizes her first model by suggesting that indigenous governments need to craft membership criteria that both recognize the rights of individuals to self-define while these governments exercise their collective rights to define those criteria. She explains that indigenous oral histories are the platform on which to base this individual/collective negotiation that needs to occur.
Barker points to the Indigenous activist’s work of J. Kehaulani Kauanui (1999) occurring in Hawaii that places enormous value on indigenous oral histories. These stories detail genealogies, connecting people to people and people to place, as viable alternatives to harness self-determination and ethically proceed forward with attention to individuals and their collective responsibility to both tribal nation and tribal lands. Obviously, this approach requires a complete overhaul of the current system – not something easily accomplished. However, I suggest that a renovation is long overdue, in that each new attempt to right a wrong seems to result in further confusion, complication, and corruption.

Representational control is the key to empowerment, as is demonstrated in the work of many artists, writers, and scholars. Cunningham (as cited in Barker & Galasinski, 2001) suggests that a representational shift needs to occur and proposes that a move away from the “rhetorics of resistance, oppositionalism, anti-commercialism” towards those of “access, equity, and empowerment,” (p. 60) which offers an alternative archetype in which to construct a social democratic perspective on citizenship or, at least, offers a more balanced social picture.

Grande (2000), along with a bevy of other American Indian scholars’ works included in the edited books by Waters (2004); the work of Cherokee/Irish/Dutch author, M. Moore (2003); and the writings of Grounds (Yuchi/Seminole), Tinker (Osage/Cherokee), & Wilkins (Lumbee) (2003) have begun to engage in the theoretical discourse that produces “a critical Indigenous theory of liberation” (p. 355). Grande (2000) suggests creating a “Red Pedagogy” (p. 355), which rests on four Indigicentric cornerstones as follows:
1) the quest for sovereignty and dismantling of global capitalism as its political force; 2) Indigenous knowledge as its epistemological foundation; 3) the Earth as its spiritual center; and 4) tribal and traditional ways of life as its sociocultural frame of reference (p. 355)

In other words, as many American Indian scholars and artists attest through their work, if American Indians are to regain control of their identity and representation that is under attack from the competing and simultaneously enacted processes of racism and multiculturalism, a complete paradigm shift is required. However, historian White (1997) warns, “The current tendency to put the ‘sacred,’ the ‘traditional,’ the ‘natural,’ and the ‘artistic’ at the heart of all Indian life obscures the commercial, the bureaucratic, the secular, [and] the inventive” (p. 33). White’s last four components are consequential elements in U. S. capitalistic society and therefore, bear recognition.

Skoda (1996) offers an inventive approach in her comments directed towards a group of seminal American Indian photographers:

With the tactics, both aesthetic and thematic, that they use to represent themselves, these five artists share in the tradition of the Trickster, a mythological figure common to many Native American cultures. The Trickster can take many forms and alter his appearance and persona to meet new challenges. A transformative nature and biting wit enable the Trickster to break conventions and create space for change. (p. 57)

The Trickster, the creative American Indian muse, inspires much of the work contained in and produced by counter discourses. The Trickster cracks open the door to re-gaining American Indian identity, representational, and cultural sovereignty and snips, “Ready or not, here I come.”

Enter Virgil Ortiz, a contemporary American Indian artist who is continuing to blur symbolic borders between American Indians and the dominant culture in order to re-claim American Indian cultural, tribal, and artistic sovereignty from the control of the
dominant culture. As was demonstrated in my historical contextual grounding of the problematic, the dominant culture’s divide-and-conquer blood discourse pairs with their counterfeit-and-co-optate simulation discourse to set the stage for the continual misrepresentation and obscuring of American Indians. The dominant culture’s appropriation of American Indian representational sovereignty manages to wreak havoc on American Indian self-signification authority and subsequent identity articulations.

Ortiz participates along with other American Indian artists, writers, and orators to comment on, disturb, and challenge these dominant discourses that circulate prevailing notions of American Indians and constrain American Indian identity. Through engagement in the production of counter discourses, American Indians are opening spaces for on-going American Indian and Indigenous peoples’ philosophical and social movements; representational re-framings; and identity re-imaginings. Ortiz’s work and others like his, ensure that hope for American Indian signification sovereignty endures.
CHAPTER 5: ROLE PLAY TO POWER PLAY: RHETORIC OF SADOMASOCHISTIC DOMINANCE AND SUBMISSION (SMDS)

But this is not your father’s Indian pottery: although the figures, for example, have roots in the past, they radiate their own cool attitude. (Susser, 2005, p. 76)

American Indian artist, Virgil Ortiz, uses the theme of sadomasochistic dominance and submission (SMDS) to shape an artistic message that surreptitiously persuades his audience to consider transformative constitutions of American Indian art, representations, and identities. Sadomasochism and its offshoots dominance and submission; discipline; bondage; and leather sex are themes that are becoming increasingly prevalent in popular culture (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006). Sadomasochism (SM) is a subject that has been explored by artists in many genres such as: filmmaker Adrian Lyne’s (1986) erotic drama 9½ Weeks; television series creator, Ann Donahue and Anthony E. Zuiker’s (2000) CSI Las Vegas episodes featuring Lady Heather; novelist Anne Rice’s (1983), under the pseudonym of A. N. Roquelaure, The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty; playwright Kenneth Tynan’s (1969) Oh! Calcutta!; singer Marilyn Manson’s music (see official website www.marilynmanson.com); and graphic artist Wilhelm Steiner’s modern Neosurrealist digital images (see artist’s website www.deaddreamer.com). Ortiz adds his signature to the list of artistic explorers of sadomasochistic dominance and submission, a theme that dates back to the French aristocrat, novelist, and practitioner of the activity from whence the term sadism
emerged, the Comte Donatien-Alphonse-Francois, marquis de Sade (1740-1814) (Weinberg, 2006).

In order to better understand the theme and the standpoint from which I investigate its application in Ortiz’s work, I explain the terms involved in the SMDS theme. Then, I provide some background on the evolution of thinking about SMDS, and detail my understanding of the current usage of the term. To highlight the interplay of SMDS in Ortiz’s work, in some cases, a leitmotif for the relationship between American Indians and the dominant culture, I identify examples of his work that carry SMDS referents and explore how this anchor theme is communicatively operating throughout them. First, I address his Trail of Painted Ponies sculpture. Next, I undertake his pottery, including representative monos and specific vessels. I conclude by exploring his fashions. With each medium, I analyze and interpret how SMDS is symbolically operating to negotiate past power dynamics and/or re-configure current power dynamics between American Indians and the dominant culture.

Sadomasochistic Dominance and Submission (SMDS)

Sadomasochistic dominance and submission (SMDS); sadomasochism (SM), dominance and submission (DS); bondage and discipline (BD); bondage, discipline, and sadomasochism (BDSM); and leather are a sampling of the terms that stem from a similar knowledge base with each carrying slightly different meanings (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006). According to Ernulf and Innala (1995) dominance and submission is a broad term that often encompasses BD, SM, and a variety of other sexual variations that include an exchange of power. Weinberg (2006) explains that sadomasochism is “the eroticization of dominance and submission” (p. 20) with “power, and not the giving and receiving of
pain, at the core of SM” (Cross & Matheson, 2006, p. 134). In light of this explanation, I choose to use the term SMDS in reference to Ortiz’s work because SMDS speaks to the visual references of physical pleasure and pain via SM and the psychological manifestations of dominance and submission via DS. In my unpacking of SMDS, I sometimes use SM interchangeably with SMDS, as much of the research also avails the monikers in this way.

Although SM and its derivatives are often depicted in and referred to by the mainstream, there has been little research conducted on this subject (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006; Williams, 2006). The research that has been carried out on this topic pits psychological views of SMDS against sociological understandings of SMDS (Weille, 2002). Weille explains that “psychoanalytic perspectives have tended to view SMDS as a traumatically induced, preoedipally fixated form of acting out that, despite its orgiastic pleasures, leads to restricted capacity for meaningful relationships” (p. 132). With Freud and Krafft-Ebing at its helm, the traditional psychiatric profession’s view of SMDS characterizes participants as being clinically diagnosable with psychiatric disorders that label them as being unhealthy, socially maladjusted, and not able to properly mature (Cross & Matheson, 2006; Williams, 2006).

This depiction is in stark contrast to the sociological community’s view of SMDS. In contrast, Weille explains:

…sociological studies documenting the workings of SMDS subcultures have reached considerably different conclusions. Members of these subcultures increasingly claim that SMDS sexual fantasy-play provides satisfying interpersonal contact, and sometimes even psychological liberation and healing. (p. 132)
My perspective on SMDS falls more in line with the sociological opinion, as this view aligns well with a critical communication’s perspective that probes power dynamics. Cross and Matheson (2006) state that they “could not find support for the psychopathology/medical-model contention that sadists are antisocial or psychopathic and that masochists suffer from some sort of mental disorder” (p. 145). In fact, the current research shows participants as being high income earning, well educated, and socially well adjusted (Sandnabba, Santtila & Nordling, as cited in Weinberg, 2006; Williams, 2006).

Sociology’s stable characterization of SMDS participants challenges adherents of the radical feminists’ view that declares that SMDS activities are misogynistic and anti-feminist. Supporters of feminist conviction claim that SMDS scripts often borrow from the patriarchal frameworks of Western culture that subject women to violence at the hands of brutal men (Butler, as cited in Cross & Matheson, 2006). However, findings by Cross and Matheson, in their quantitative examinations of 93 self-identifying sadomasochist and 61 non-sadomasochists, refute the above negative representations of SMDS. While this sample size might not seem large compared to other quantitative studies, they “ended up with a relatively large sample size for studies in this area” (Cross & Matheson, p. 137). A variety of different measures and scales were applied to evaluate the participants’ answers on the extensive questionnaire. They note, “…No evidence was found suggesting that sadomasochists espoused anti-feminist beliefs or traditional gender roles to a greater extent than the non-sadomasochists sampled” (p. 146). In other words, SMDS, while playing with power, does not necessarily abuse or re-inscribe it.
Then, what exactly is SMDS? I chose to refer to the entire term, SMDS not just sadomasochism (SM) or dominance and submission (DS) because each letter pairing provides different doorways of understanding. The SM part of SMDS serves as a gateway to reference the tools (chains, cuffs, harnesses, etc.); activities (cockbinding, cutting, whipping, etc.); and costumes (leather, metal, horse hair, etc.) of the engagement (Santtila, Sandnabba, Alison, & Nordling, 2002). Whereas, the DS part of SMDS functions as a portal to explore the psychological dimensions of dominance and submission within the engagement. Both parts of the term come together to represent a “‘deviant’ [which] means different than a norm – not necessarily dysfunctional” (Williams, 2006, p. 344) form of “play” that Chancer (as cited in Langdridge & Butt, 2004) explains “is understood within the context of a consensual relationship in which dynamic power relationships may be explored within limits that are always open to challenge and change” (p. 48). In effect, SMDS can be viewed as an intervention or disruption of traditional power relations.

Chancer (as cited in Langdridge & Butt, 2004) delineates between “liberating S/M play and institutionalized oppressive S/M structures” (p. 48). She explains that the roles within S/M structures “are fixed and based on conditions of power which cannot be challenged without the risk of dire consequences” (p. 48). Langdridge and Butt (2004) paraphrase:

Paradoxically, she [Chancer] argues that sadomasochistic sex play may serve to undermine institutional ‘sadomasochism’ by playing with issues of power, dominance and submission. Sadomasochistic sex play may therefore highlight and challenge structural inequalities based on dominance and submission. The story of S/M produces resistance as it makes visible previously invisible institutionalized power inequalities (p. 48)
By referring to SMDS as *play*, the activity could be misread as being whimsical and haphazard. SMDS is far from fanciful and careless. SMDS is a highly structured activity based on open communication between its participants with specifically agreed upon roles. The SMDS mantra is “safe, sane, and consensual” (Langdridge & Butt, p. 46).

To further illustrate the structured nature of SMDS, I include the five components that Weinberg, William, and Moser (as cited in Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006) claim are usually present together to constitute SM, which interestingly, are so often absent from traditional power relations:

1) The appearance of dominance and submission; the appearance of rule by one partner over the other; 2) Role playing; 3) Consensuality, that is, voluntary agreement to enter into the interaction; 4) Mutual definition, i.e., a shared understanding that the activities constitute SM or some similar term; and 5) A sexual context, though the concept that SM is always sexual is not shared by all participants. (p. 4)

In other words, participation in SMDS can be said to be activating the following four conditions usually in tandem: 1) negotiated positioning to determine control and consent during the interaction and/or exchange of power; 2) play\(^{15}\) and fantasy; 3) mutual agreements and definitions; and 4) sexual and/or psychological eroticism.

Throughout engagement in acts of SMDS, the participants are in continual negotiation through the constant recognition and understanding of each other’s needs that encourages ongoing adjustments to insure a pleasurable and often transformative experience for each person. Chancer (1992) explains:

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\(^{15}\) I align my understanding of *play* with German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s framing of the term. Gadamer describes play as a serious endeavor, rather than trivial, that participants are called into, immersed in, and potentially transformed by. In essence, play takes the players out of themselves. In other words, play itself is more central and critical than the players (Davey, 2007).
The idea of sadomasochism – and the open acknowledgement of one’s own sadistic and masochistic inclinations – immediately suggests agents, existential subjects, who act out a dynamic that is not determined or static. Sadomasochism’s own fluidity thus makes of the masochist’s victimization not an inevitable, but an alterable, social act. The experience of victimization is thus confronted straight on, noneuphemistically, so that change becomes an authentic possibility. (p. 10)

Due to the interplay of SMDS’s critical components and via its performance, transformative scenarios are suggested, internalized, and potentially staged.

The transformative possibilities offered by SMDS suggest that Ortiz’s inclusion of these currents throughout his work is no accident. Ortiz’s utilization of SMDS referents is far from a dalliance in subversive style but demonstrates an active questioning of, commenting on, and negotiation in social control. MacKendrick says, “S&M pleasures have the potential to destabilize and threaten not only 'the existing political and cultural orders but all manner of orders’” (as cited in Carrette, 2005, p. 21). Ortiz’s work engages SMDS thematics to disrupt hegemonic order by performing resistance and negotiation to offer the possibility of transformative power relations.

Following this clarification and explication of SMDS, I analyze examples of Ortiz’s work and the discourse surrounding it that showcases the SMDS aesthetic and subverts traditional historical power relations. Then, I outline how this aesthetic informs the communication of American Indian representation and identity via references to the intercultural power dynamics between American Indians and the dominant culture. I open with one of the more straightforward examples of Ortiz’s work that encompasses SMDS, his Trail of Painted Ponies horse sculpture.

Sculpture: Trail of Painted Ponies - *Willing*

According to Richardson (2002), the Trail of Painted Ponies project was the brainchild of best-selling author turned art entrepreneur, Rod Baker. In the summer of
2000, Baker commissioned a sculptor to create a durable, resin, life-size cast of a horse. He then invited well-known and budding Southwest artists to submit designs for the ponies. Ortiz was one of the artists chosen to create his unique vision on the cast horse. Richardson reports that in the fall of 2001 all of the participating artists’ ponies were rounded up and sold via auction and direct sales. The Trail of Painted Ponies project raised over $500,000 for New Mexico philanthropic organizations and still serves as a model for auctions and as an exemplar for other states’ charitable fundraisers. Richardson explains that following the successful pony sales, a national licensing agreement to produce various-sized pony replicas and related pony merchandise continues to generate millions of dollars in sales with a percentage of the proceeds directed to charities.

Figure 2. Willing, 2001
Although this successful venture is known as The Trail of Painted Ponies, the name is somewhat of a misnomer in the case of Ortiz’s entry (see Figure 2) and many of the other artists involved, as they chose to adorn their ponies with a variety of materials other than paint. Although Ortiz did incorporate paint, much of my analysis encompasses far more than the painted elements of Ortiz’s pony. I investigate four components that showcase the SMDS theme in Ortiz’s pony as follows: the tribal tattoo design motif, the unorthodox tack, the sardonic title, and the provocative incorporation of horns on his horse. I conclude my exploration of Ortiz’s pony by incorporating my interpretation of the discourse surrounding the piece.

Ortiz chooses to first paint his pony in black and silver incorporating traditional Cochiti pottery designs. He fuses those swirling, graphic Cochiti forms with Maori-inspired warrior patterns known as tribal tattoos (Andrews, 2004). “Virgil loves tattoos,” says Andrews (p. 2). Because Ortiz continues to participate in traditional Cochiti ceremonies, in which tattoos are forbidden, he satisfies his tattoo proclivity by incorporating them on alternate surfaces rather than under the skin (Andrews).

In general, tattoos serve as personal expressions, social commentary, rites of passage, the marking of an event, and/or as bodily resistance to authority by members of various subcultures (Beeler, 2006). To the Maori, tattoos or Ta Moko operate as proof of identification (Australian Museum Online, 2000). The museum explains that Maori tribal tattoos often reference such elements as ancestry, rank, and status of the bearer. Maori tattoos can also allude to virility and ferocity. Whether general or specific, tattoos convey a politics and are therefore, both inclusive and exclusive at the same time. Whether indigenously inspired, as in Maori tribal tattoos or more Eurocentrically spawned, as in
personal inked expressions, tattoos function to subvert the dominant culture’s notion of the body, and can be linked to having a “scarred body” (Beeler, p. 2). Tattoos challenge the notion of the proper location for art to be displayed. They also question the dominant culture’s aesthetic of the body beautiful. Fenske (2007) specifically addresses the incorporation of tribal tattoos and terms this non-indigenous bodily representational homage to tribal cultures “modern primitivism” (p. 110). She explains, “Simultaneously this body is a visual intersection, interpretation, and adaption of a conglomeration of ‘tribal’ symbols that merge to form the imagination of ‘primitive culture’” (p. 126). She continues:

Museum exhibitions may present a cultural object taken from one location and displace it into another, thus placing the object as a representation of the cultural ‘other.’ The modern primitive body, on the other hand, produces itself as a cultural other. It produces itself as the ‘in-between’ space, thus eluding the politics of polarity and emerging as the other of itself. The modern primitive body, therefore, functions to demonstrate both how the juxtapositional and metonymic representational process of modern primitive exoticism takes place and how the power of hybridity transforms the ‘body’ of territorializing discourse. (p. 127)

Essentially, the incorporation of tribal tattooing on the non-indigenous body permits and advertises a foreign substance’s – an Other’s – entrance into the body. In other words, tribal tattooing facilitates the symbolic merging of an I and a You, an Us and an Other, the dominant culture and American Indians.

Beeler says, “Yet because the tattoo is a form of body art, the tattoo’s narrative is a story of blood and ink” (2006, p. 2). This connection to blood and ink provides another layer of interpretation that has ties to the relationship between the dominant culture and American Indians. Historically, American Indians were an oral rather than writing-based culture (Allen {Laguna Pueblo and Sioux}, 1992). Treaties were complex historical
documents drafted in ink and in English that functioned as agreements, pacts, and/or contracts between the U.S. government and American Indians. By in large, the dominant culture’s treaties, regulations, and laws were unreadable by American Indians (Miller, 2006). Oftentimes, the contents of these written documents were inadequately translated to American Indians due to poor or deficient translator skills and/or bribery of the tribal negotiators resulting in the division and decimation of thousands of tribal peoples (Miller, 2006). In other words, the dominant culture’s unleashing of ink via written documents resulted in the spilling of American Indian blood via wars and the division of American Indian peoples via blood discourses such as the 1887 Dawes Act (Garoutte, 2001; Grande, 2000).

Ortiz’s use of tattoos in his work, in general – a scribed form of art that functions as a counter-hegemonic type of representation that is a statement of individuality and ownership of one’s own body - is one ironic yet fitting re-inscription tactic that points back to the power of American Indian sovereignty with its ties to ownership and control. Ortiz’s decision to feature tribal tattoos – a permanent reference to indigenous, tribal, collective cultures – is yet another re-inscription tactic that re-focuses power from the individual back to that of American Indian collective identity. These dualistic re-inscription tactics that carve out attention to American Indian sovereignty and American Indian collective identity symbolically re-position American Indians as writers of their own futures and shapers of their own representations. Evidence of these re-inscriptions is contained in the counter discourses presented by numerous contemporary American Indian artists, writers, and filmmakers.
Through Ortiz’s inclusion of a specific type of tattoo style that is inspired by Maori warrior tribal tattoos, Ortiz sets a tone of engagement similar to that of the Maori warrior whose tattoos often reference degrees of ferociousness and authority. The warrior persona is unleashed as Ortiz’s pony questions, plays, and/or battles authority. The piece provokes viewers to ask, “Who is really in control? Who is assuming the dominant role?” Ortiz’s tribally-tattooed warrior pony prances onto the representational battlefield to covertly question traditional dominant and submissive roles held by the dominant culture and American Indians in order to slyly engage in power negotiations.

Several dynamics are highlighted as a result of Ortiz’s artistic ode to ink. First, Ortiz manages to sate his personal tattoo fetish without defying the tattoo’s taboo status among the Cochiti, thereby honoring his tribal beliefs. Next, his pony creates a politics by artistically spurring an in-group/out-group situation. Ortiz’s piece resists dominant notions of the sacred body in favor of the “scarred body” (Beeler, 2006, p. 2). The work subverts conventional ideas of how the body can be used and where art can be displayed. His pony reminds viewers of the bond forever linking the dominant culture and American Indians that was sanctioned in ink and staged in blood. Finally, through re-inscription tactics, the piece signals a re-acquaintance with American Indian sovereignty and collective identity that offers the possibility of self-determination.

Another way that Ortiz’s work provokes a re-thinking of American Indian representation and identity is through his unique choices in tack materials and tack design that incorporate the SMDS theme (Santtila et al., 2002). The unorthodox tack is as follows: a leather and metal spiked harness, rather than a traditional saddle; a silver chain bridle, rather than the customary leather one; numerous, irregularly-shaped leather saddle
horns, rather than the usual singular, smooth, metal saddle horn; lace-up metal socks from just below the pony’s knees to his fetlocks with silver spikes protruding from the back of them, rather than the typical spikeless, tape-wrapped lower legs with cotton socks slid over them; silver gilded, spiked hooves, rather than the familiar weaponless, natural hooves; and finally, the whip-like, horse hair tassel dangling from the bit, rather than the classic absence of any type of bit pendant. With all of these edgy elements in play, Susser (2005) explains that Ortiz’s pony “looks more S & M than C & W” (p. 76). In other words, Ortiz chooses to spotlight the power dynamics embodied in sadomasochistic (S & M) ensembles rather than the costumes sported in country and western (C & W) arenas.

Traditional tack permits a rider to impose some measure of control over a horse by providing a stable space. Ortiz’s tack choices contort traditional control dynamics provoking SMDS tension that destabilizes the space. Some components of Ortiz’s bondage implements (the hardcore leather and metal harness attached to the steel bridle chains) beckon a phantom rider (the dominant culture) to climb aboard the willing pony (American Indians) and control the horse by physically restraining it. While other parts of the bondage implements (the imposing, dagger-like steel spikes running atop the harness from nose to tail) shift the invitation to that of a threat that positions the pony in the role of dominance with the steel spikes practically insuring that no phantom rider will attempt to mount, yet alone, control this horse. The caveat remains that even if a rider is able to gain access he/she will not do so without incurring extreme literal and figurative damage.

Ortiz’s placement of four leather globules atop the silver spikes running along the pony’s neck where a solitary, metal saddle horn (used for stabilizing a rider) would typically be located also creates SMDS tension. The multiplicity and arrangement of
these spiked globs serve to confuse and unbalance any phantom rider that might actually try and ride the pony, suggesting that this horse is, ultimately, in control of its own direction. Ortiz’s satirical rearrangement of a common saddle component declaratively repositions this traditionally submissive beast of burden in the role of dominant deemer of its own destiny. Moser and Kleinplatz (2006) speak to this type of reorientation spurred by SMDS activities in their explanation that “the option of exiting slavery is built into the relationship” (p. 8). In agreement with this explanation, Ortiz’s artistic references to directional control visually depict this exit option. His artistic depiction of a destabilizing technique paired with SMDS referents presents this tactic as a maneuver that could be employed in real world power negotiations.

Ortiz’s featuring of lace-up metal, silver-spiked socks; silver-wrapped, spiked hooves; and whip-like, horse hair bit tassel also bear resemblance to the restraint tools and literally and/or figuratively painful activities featured in SMDS rituals. The lace-up socks mirror constraining corsets. The gilded hooves connote the wrapping or “mummifying” that some SMDS participants entertain (Santtila et al., 2002, p. 187). The horse-hair whip is a distinctive feature of acts of “flagellation” enjoyed by SMDS enthusiasts (Santtila et al., p. 187). On the one hand, the socks and the hooves fall into the restraint realm, positioning the pony in the submissive role. However, this pony’s socks and hooves have ominous steel spikes incorporated into their design. The spikes on the hooves face toward the pony’s head, and the spikes on the socks point toward the pony’s tail protecting the horse from both directions. On the other hand, spikes or “knives” and whips (as featured dangling from the bit) are tools of “humiliation” that re-position the horse in the dominant role (Santtila et al., p. 187).
Although the pony’s tack bears resemblance to SMDS tools and activities suggestive of the infliction of physical and psychological pain, there is much more going on in this piece. According to Cross and Matheson (2006), SMDS is not necessarily about the infliction of pain, but more so the pain involved in SMDS is “one of the many techniques that help delineate power and status, and it is the experience of a power differential that is sought” (p. 137). They explain, “While genuine rape, torture, and humiliation are crimes against humanity, the consensual simulation of such acts may represent an opportunity to play with icons of power and authority for purposes of exploring and developing erotic fantasies” (p. 148). Devoid of the erotic end goal, Ortiz’s work also affords this opportunity to play with power. By creating SMDS tension in his pony, Ortiz’s piece communicatively operates in the following four ways: 1) to spotlight power dynamics; 2) to question the fixation of dominant and submissive roles; 3) to encourage role playing for the purposes of revealing power indifferences; and 4) to provoke power negotiations between American Indians and the dominant culture.

The fact that Ortiz’s re-interpretation of Sewell’s (1877) *Black Beauty*, is ironically named, *Willing*, provides another layer of SMDS tension that serves as the third component for analysis. Both the tack and the title tease, “Ride me if you take pleasure in the pain. Ride me if you can submit. Try to control me if you dare.” The strategic dualism and tension inherently contained in SMDS promotes re-consideration and re-interpretation of the power relations between the dominant culture and the American Indians. By spotlighting this SMDS tension via strategic equipment and moniker choices, Ortiz lures the dominant culture, with a sexual and verbal tease, into mounting *Willing*. Riding *Willing* reinforces the dominant culture’s role as the dominant.
Enter the irony caused by this SMDS tension and tease. The dominant culture discovers that *Willing* cannot be ridden, thereby shifting *Willing* into the dominant role and re-positioning the dominant culture into the submissive role. Ortiz’s incorporation of SMDS tension via the sexual and verbal tease, which produces such an ironic outcome, symbolically offers the promise of an American Indian sovereign future by shifting the dominant culture into the submissive position.

A fourth component that incorporates the SMDS theme are the horns. Ortiz modifies his cast horse with the addition of silver-capped buffalo horns, complete with two metal cock ring-like apparatuses situated on each horn’s shaft. His decisions to put horns, in general; buffalo horns, specifically; and encircle those buffalo horns with cock-rings, more specifically, invites speculation into the strategies behind each choice.

First, Ortiz’s inclusion of horns on his horse carries a great deal of conflicting symbolism. According to Jung (as cited in Cirlot, 1990) horns denote dualistic representations of both masculinity and femininity depending on from which direction they are viewed. As Jung suggests, when looked at from outside in, horns capture the masculine with their active, penetrating shape. When viewed from inside out, horns encapsulate the feminine with their passive, receptacle-like form. Similarly, horns operate as devices of defense in battles, skewing more masculine, and they function as objects of beauty in courtship rituals, skewing more feminine.

By putting horns on *Willing*, Ortiz taps into the confusion surrounding whether SMDS participants are actually engaging in active (traditionally masculine) or passive (traditionally feminine) behaviors or behaviors that stem from entirely different gendered or non-gendered perspectives. To unpack this confusion, Ernulf and Innala (1995) use the
example of one individual performing fellatio on another, which would position the person performing the fellatio in the active role. However, they point out that this situation could position the individual performing the fellatio in the passive role, if the person is engaging in the act “as a submission to the desire of the active individual who receives the fellatio” (p. 634). To clarify this confusion, Ernulf and Innala employ the terms “dominant-initiator” and “submissive-recipient” to more accurately describe “the agency of the partners” (p. 634). They point out that many dominant-initiators start off as submissive-recipients. They claim that extensive training as submissive-recipients creates better and more “empathetic dominant-initiators” (p. 635). Weinberg (as cited in Ernulf & Innala) explains that “flexibility,” “versatility,” and “bisexuality” (p. 635) are desirable qualities to possess within the SM community.

Ortiz’s choice to place horns on his horse transmits these covetable SMDS qualities. Willing’s horns broadcast masculinity and femininity; dominance and submission; power and beauty. The horns also communicate the American Indians’ profound grasp of empathetic understanding after being relegated to the submissive-recipient role for years. While additionally, the horns signal an American Indian readiness to operate in the dominant-initiator role, presiding over their own representation and identity.

Not only is Ortiz’s choice to adorn his pony with horns a calculated one, but also his decision to specifically select buffalo horns speaks to American Indian history and traditions. Historically, the American Indians living on the Plains primarily subsisted on buffalo. By the mid-1800s, buffalo were nearly extinct in the United States due to their slaughter by the dominant culture (White, 2006). Ortiz’s use of buffalo horns acts as a
symbolic reminder of an enduring American Indian population. By extension, the re-introduction of the buffalo symbolically captured on *Willing* conveys that not only are American Indians reinstating their presence as members of modern society but reconfiguring their conventionally imagined representations with an evocative as well as provocative symbol. By utilizing a symbol (buffalo horns) often associated with American Indians of the past and placing the buffalo horns in a discordant setting (on a horse), Ortiz manages to blur nostalgia for this type of romanticized American Indian representation and invoke a re-thinking of American Indian representation and identity. Furthermore, Ortiz, ever the provocateur, encases his horns in metal, making them appear even more threatening than the average rack. His intimidating steel horns intensify the blurring effect symbolically demanding the dominant culture to re-consider their hegemonic characterizations of American Indians.

Ortiz’s work falls in line with that of Cuban-born performance artist, Alina Troyano, known as Carmelita Tropicana. Tropicana (as referenced in Fusco, 2000, p. 40) embodies a character, Pingalito Betancourt, who brings to mind the quintessential retired, cigar-smoking, Cuban male worker of the 50s. Tropicana subsequently explodes this nostalgic embodiment via her rant on Puritanism that ends in extolling the benefits of masturbation and public fondling. Like Tropicana, Ortiz lulls the audience into a nostalgic cultural reverie and then erupts the comforting trance to provoke a re-thinking of American Indian representation, complete with SMDS figuratively mounted on top. Like Tropicana’s, Ortiz’s tactic demonstrates how invoking nostalgia and turning it on its axis can function as a form of resistance that intervenes in seemingly fixed stereotypes to
stimulate transformative representational reconsiderations and identity re-articulations in the present.

The final SMDS connection that ties in with Ortiz’s horns is the positioning of two rings on each horn’s shaft serving to sexualize them. According to Santtila et al. (2002), cockbinding, in its many forms, falls into a SMDS cluster of behavior known as “hypermasculinity” (p. 186). They explain that this cluster is primarily associated with homosexual males. The activities pursued within this cluster serve as “displays of masculinity and toughness” (p. 186). Those not familiar with these types of activities might associate the submissive-recipient with weakness and femininity. However, in cockbinding activities that include rings being positioned to constrict a phallus by a dominant-initiator (a.k.a. the dominant culture), a high degree of fortitude and masculinity is required in the case of the submissive-recipient (a.k.a. the buffalo/American Indians). The ringed horns act as a reminder of the stamina and strength exhibited by American Indians in the face of the dominant culture’s continual infliction of acts of physical, emotional, and psychological pain. For example, past acts include the stealing of tribal lands, the relegation of tribes to reservations, and the division of tribal peoples by such schismatic legislation as the 1887 Dawes Act. Recent initiatives, under the veil of good intentions, such as the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Acts (Barker, 2003; Hapiuk, 2001) reflect the ongoing tradition of figurative cockbinding. Yet American Indians continue to endure attempts of physical and cultural genocide. In spite of these horrific trials, some tribes are currently flourishing.

Ortiz’s sexualization of the buffalo horns also functions to spotlight the dominant culture’s fetishism of American Indians via the mainstream’s sexualized representations
of the Other. Both academic exposés (Morgenstern, 1995; Price, 1995) and pop culture examples such as films like Costner’s (1990) *Dances with Wolves* and Mann’s (1992) *The Last of the Mohicans*) speak to the sexualization, exoticization, and fetishism of American Indians.

For example, Merskin (2001) talks about how Land O’ Lakes (a non-Native company) uses the image of a young, nubile American Indian maiden on their butter packages to trigger the association of purity and nature with their product. I extend Merskin’s interpretation to include the suggestion of sexualized imagery. An alluring, doe-eyed, American Indian maiden kneels in submission beckoning consumers to enter her gentle, welcoming world to enjoy her sweet, delicate butter. In addition to the commodification that Merskin calls attention to, I point out that the American Indian maiden functions as an exotic, sexual object (a fetish object) that consumers are prompted to essentialize and desire, rather than a complex subject encompassing multiple intersecting identities.

Ono and Buescher (2001) reference this sexualization of American Indians in their exploration of Disney’s commodification of Pocahontas in conjunction with the film release by the same. They outline numerous products that were produced as a result of Gabriel and Goldberg’s (1995) *Pocahontas* movie and unpack the complex processes involved in the commodification of a real, historic American Indian woman by the same name. Ono and Buescher state, “In comparing Barbie with Pocahontas (or Native American Barbie), form, body, race, ethnicity, sex and gender are all fetishized for consumer culture, further commodifying the Native American woman” (p. 34). Not only
is Pocahontas fetishized and commodified in this case, but also she is exoticized and sexualized.

Ortiz’s cock-ringed buffalo horns situate the dominant culture’s sexualization, fetishism, and exoticization of American Indians in the foreground and force the dominant culture to examine their actions. In a sense, Ortiz reverses the gaze much as Mapplethorpe (1986) reverses the gaze in his photographic book, *The Black Book*. In the book, Mapplethorpe so ontologically reduces black males to that of an erotic object that according to Mercer (as cited in Hall, 2003), “In this sense, the text reveals more about the desires of the hidden and invisible white male subject behind the camera and what ‘he’ wants-to-see, than it does about the anonymous black men whose beautiful bodies are depicted” (p. 286). Ortiz’s ringing of the buffalo horns functions to illuminate the dominant culture’s transgressive fantasies – those unorthodox, unconventional, and socially unacceptable imaginative notions – forcing the dominant culture to examine its compulsions and actions. Ortiz’s spotlighting of the dominant culture’s sexualization, fetishism, and exoticization of American Indians operates as an act of resistance to the fixity of American Indian stereotypes and urges the dominant culture to engage in self-scrutiny. Ortiz’s use of gaze reversal also functions to disrupt traditional power relations.

Moreover, Ortiz’s metal-sheathed buffalo horns call to mind Hall’s (2003) notion of the “bifurcation in racial expressions” (p. 287). Hall describes the premise:

…as the expression of both a nostalgia for an innocence lost forever to the civilized, and the threat of civilization being over-run or undermined by the recurrence of savagery, which is always lurking just below the surface; or by untutored sexuality threatening to ‘break out’. (p. 287)
The buffalo horns conjure the romanticized, noble American Indian fixed in the past while the ringed, stainless steel sheaths invoke the wildly erotic, red savage waiting to spring up from society’s underbelly. By presenting his horns in this bifurcated way, Ortiz revisits this insidious tactic and warns of its ability to cement marginalized groups in binary perpetuity.

Overall, Ortiz’s pony cautions and coaxes; extinguishes and arouses; and submits and dominates. In other words, *Willing* is positioned like a curved bridge between contradictory conditions that seduces its audience into acknowledging both states while at the same time providing a pathway to power negotiations. Langdridge and Butt (2004) explain that Foucault argues that language is used to “subjugate dissident sexualities” with “the aim being to consolidate and promote sexual hegemony (patriarchal vanilla heterosexual monogamy)” (p. 41). Ortiz’s work, ripe with SMDS references, thwarts this “patriarchal vanilla heterosexual monogamy” by spotlighting consensual; unorthodox; pansexual monogamy, bigamy, or polygamy that frees rather than subjugates its participants. *Willing* is packed with allusions to seemingly contradictory yet symbiotic sexual practices that often highlight and promote the unpacking of binaries so prized by the dominant culture. In other words, Ortiz uses the *and* of S & M and D & S to explore binaries usually framed by the *or* such as red savage or white man. By utilizing a connective conjunction such as *and* to explore the power dynamics between American Indians and the dominant culture a bridging effect occurs between groups and conditions that permits movement, role-playing, interaction, and potential negotiation. When operating in the *or*, positioned via binaries, there is no bridge space, no gray area, and little navigable negotiation space between groups or conditions. When operating in the
or, there is merely a choice to be made between seemingly cemented groups and fixed conditions.

Unfortunately, there is limited public discourse surrounding *Willing*. However, the discourse that is accessible, including Susser’s (2005) S & M/C & W reference mentioned earlier, offers further evidence of this bridging tactic, which when woven with the interpretations garnered from the piece’s visual fabric, creates a telling tapestry of the intercultural power dynamics between American Indians and the dominant culture.

*Willing*’s description on The Trail of Painted Ponies website (2005) reads, “Part pueblo, part demi-monde, this cutting-edge interpretation of ‘Black Beauty’ has evoked gasps, admiration and raves from public and critics alike.” This statement echoes much of my visual interpretation. The website’s description suggests that traditional culture meets unconventional society in this contemporary re-interpretation of a classic figure through the pairing of traditional Cochiti designs with modern SMDS accoutrements. *Willing* allows an audience to move back and forth across the sidelines – a space that is privy to a vast vantage point from end to end – providing a valuable perspective of the entire intercultural power playing field between American Indians and the dominant culture. Moreover, this sideline space, which offers sightlines to intercultural power maneuvers, enables calculated negotiations to transpire; wherein traditional roles are called question, new roles are played with, and power exchanges are positioned to commence. This quote also conveys the audience’s range of emotion when encountering *Willing*. The piece is both shocking and striking while at the same time subtle and seductive. *Willing* works on a myriad of levels at once, which enable the pony to solicit such praise and passion.
A revised description from a more recent version of The Trail of Painted Ponies website (2006) describes Willing as follows: “Tattooed with traditional pottery designs before it was strapped down in black leather and silver spikes, this dramatic re-interpretation of Black Beauty has a mystique, a sensuality, and a power that is vintage Ortiz.” Although this depiction also positions the audience on this curved bridge between conflicting conditions, the quote additionally relays the audience’s sexualized responses to the piece. For example, the references to mystique (alluring mystery) and sensuality (exotic eroticism and physicality) pair with the mention of power to provide a textual example that mirrors the visual one. This quote speaks to the sexualization and fetishism of power, which serves to highlight some of the destructive tactics that are used to stereotype and fix the Other.

The last textual example again comes from Susser (2005) who says, “Tattooed with traditional Pueblo designs, the horse has been, in the language of the piercing parlors that Ortiz evokes here, ‘modified’ with a pair of shiny silver buffalo horns. It is impossible not to admire the powerful, culturally restless result, even if the elegant Goth/biker aesthetic is not one’s cup of tea.” This quote itself is ripe with contradictions such as tattoo – Pueblo (anti-tattoo), silver (metal) – horns (mineral) and elegant – Goth/biker (unrefined). However, it is the key word, modified, that drives the interpretation. Woolf’s (1981) Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defines “modified” as calling for a reshaping, revamping, refashioning to make less extreme. Focusing on modification, the discourse mirrors the piece. Both examples present the extremes in order to convince the audience to play with and experience the radically opposite roles. The audience can then return to the bridge to contemplate the intercultural power
dynamics in order to begin instituting a modification or revision of the current dynamics. Ortiz’s incorporation of SMDS motifs in *Willing* encourages the use of consensuality and negotiation to move towards this modification of the intercultural power quotients between American Indians and the dominant culture.

Giddens (as cited in Langridge & Butt, 2004) delineates relationships that focus on pleasure, negotiation, equality and confluent love, from those that are based on patriarchal power and inequality, associated with traditional romantic love and centering on reproduction. He terms the one based on confluent love and equality a “pure relationship” and explains that relationships like this one are “complex negotiated affairs with open and explicit recognition of each person’s desires” (p. 33). He also states that an SM relationship may function as a “prototype of the pure relationship.” Ultimately, both *Willing* and the discourse surrounding the pony visually convey and textually represent this pure relationship that requires complex negotiations and understanding of each participant’s processional and end goal aspirations.

Both *Willing* and the discourse reflect many of the operations of SMDS. They question role fixation, encourage role playing, and re-frame what it means to be dominant and submissive. SMDS calls attention to and subverts traditional notions of roles. SMDS subtly spotlights dominant and submissive power dynamics and slyly begins to engage in power negotiations between them – or in other terms, between the dominant culture and American Indians.

**Pottery: Monos and Vessels**

*Willing* is not the only example in which the SMDS theme reveals itself. Ortiz’s pottery, particularly his monos and vessels, also contain references to this thematic. I
begin by relaying a brief history of monos. Next, I analyze some of Ortiz’s more illustrative monos. I conclude with an explication of some of Ortiz’s trademark vessels.

In 1989, art collector and mentor to Ortiz, Robert Gallegos, showed Ortiz some of the fragments of figurative pottery that farmers from northern New Mexico were digging up. The farmers called them monos, meaning “pretty, dainty or cute” (Shaw, 2006, p. 3). Shaw explains that Gallegos and the farmers believe traders coming from northern Mexico brought these monos, originating with the Aztecs, to the Cochiti Pueblo. Due to the positive public response to the monos along the route, the traders then commissioned the Cochiti Pueblo artisans to recreate these sacred idols for sale, as the Cochiti were already fashioning some figurines, along with the utilitarian pots they sold at the Santa Fe trading post (Andrews, 2004; Shaw, 2006).

The Cochiti artisans knew the monos they were asked to recreate were more fetish objects than sacred idols and chose to incorporate their own designs and commentaries on the social world around them into their figures. Three subversive elements emerged that had significant implications. First, what the dominant culture assumed was a sacred idol was, in fact, a fetish object (Ringlero {Pima}, 2006; Shaw 2006). Second, Pueblo potters were, by in large, female (Ringlero, 2006). Third, the monos were actually pointed parodies of the bizarre assortment of travelers passing through the Pueblo (Andrews, 2004; Ringlero, 2006; Susser 2005).

First, the nature of monos, as that of fetish objects rather than sacred idols, reverses the gaze. Members of the dominant culture purchased these charming, sacred effigies to possess a spiritual object of the Other’s worship that they would then secularize by turning them into an owned curio. In the spirit of de Certeau’s (1984)
notion of “the tactic” (p. xix), the Cochiti potters subverted the dominant culture’s actions through the production and sale of monos that amounted to a masterful joke being played on the buyers. Weidemann (2000) describes de Certeau’s tactic as “an action which he defines as insinuating itself within the space of the other, worming its way into the territory of that which it seeks to subvert, like a tiny virus infecting a vast computer program” (p. 1). By making monos so desirable, the Cochiti potters positioned themselves in a subversive space that served to reverse the gaze and the existing power dynamic between American Indians and the dominant culture. What, in fact, were merely fetish objects not sacred idols shifted the gaze to their owners. Cochiti artists created monos to capture the dominant culture’s aberrant presentations and ways. As such, through this provocation of gaze reversal, Cochiti artists slyly reversed positions into that of the dominant. The fetishized (American Indians) turned the fetishizers (the dominant culture) into seducers of themselves, revealing the unmitigated ego of the dominant culture.

To add insult to injury, Cochiti potters were primarily women. Labeled by traditional society as the submissive sex, the women potters that crafted these monos poked fun at men in two ways. First, the majority of travelers depicted by the monos were male. Second, the majority of purchasers of monos were male. As demonstrated, SMDS role playing was already emerging in the covert submissive-to-dominant reversals engaged in by the Cochiti female potters. Ringlero (2006) explains, “The disparity over what constituted propriety takes on other meanings in a power dynamic over aesthetics between observer and observed and the sexes” (p. 32). Even in their early incarnations,
monos explored gendered power dynamics and challenged hegemonically constructed
gender roles.

Monos also contested the general power dynamics between the dominant culture
say, “Cultural syncretism refers to the ways that various cultural expressions are affirmed
while they simultaneously protest against the dominant ideology” (p. 6). In the case of
monos, they function as examples of an on-going tradition of Cochiti figurative pottery
that affirms their mastery of artistic cultural representations while at the same time
challenges the dominant culture by making them the target of their caustic cultural
commentary. The monos were cutting caricatures of “the flood of people – missionaries,
circus entertainers, tourists, traders and speculators – who arrived with the opening of the
Santa Fe Trail in 1821 and the subsequent completion of the railroad” (Susser, 2005, p.
76). Fittingly, Ortiz explains, “The Spanish Colonists called the clay figures muños,
meaning monkey or mimicking doll” (as cited in Cline, 2006, p. 51). These coil-built,
hollow, standing clay figures; usually with upraised arms or hands on their hips, open
mouths, and tooth-like fingers depicted the assortment of life journeying West (Andrews,
2004). Figurines portrayed conjoined twins, cowboys, priests, speculators, missionaries,
businessmen, traders, and even other foreign tribespeople like the Navajo (Fauntleroy,
1999; Shaw 2006; Susser, 2005). Andrews describes the monos as follows:

Two-headed and four-armed homunculi may represent Siamese twins who
traveled to Santa Fe in Mexican circus sideshows. Potbellies and mustaches
accompany Spanish style clothing on male figures that seem buffo-demonic.
Navajo men with beard tweezers, and barefoot or booted cross-wearing gavachos
all stood in amazed parody until 1910. The gig was up. (p. 1)
The subjects of these sacred idols, which turned out to be caustic curios, realized they were being made fun of and banned monos from the Santa Fe market in 1910. Subsequently, the authorities destroyed almost all of the monos (Andrews, 2004; Ortiz, as cited in Shaw, 2006). Although the art form of the monos died, the act of monos-making fulfilled the important requirements of cultural syncretism by acting in a manner that is both counter-hegemonic and culturally affirming.

The unassuming storyteller figures took the place of monos. That is, until Virgil Ortiz came on the scene. Ortiz was born on the Cochiti Pueblo in 1969 to Seferina Ortiz, a famous potter renowned for storyteller figures who had been taught the art from her mother, Laurencita (Servin, 2003). Ortiz learned to make pottery from his mother at age six. He was subversive at a young age. Ortiz explains, “When I was six, I created a sculpture of a woman….She had very prominent breasts. When I next painted her wearing a bow tie and hat, my parents said, ‘Uh-oh, this kid’s in trouble’” (as cited in Servin, 2003, p. 1). So begins Ortiz’s illustrative career as a renegade artist.

It takes approximately one month to create a tall standing figure or monos (Ortiz, as cited in Targos, 2005). Red clay is dug up from specific sites on the Cochiti Pueblo, soaked, and mixed with sand to prevent cracking. Spinach, growing wild on the Pueblo, is gathered, boiled, strained, boiled again, dried on cornhusks, and mixed with water to produce the black paint for the monos (Targos). A clay slip is applied to the monos to create the tannish, white complement to the wild spinach paint. Finally, the hollow figures are fired outdoors in a traditional pit fire (Fauntleroy, 1999, 2006).

In order to explore some of these complicated figures, I have created a way to refer to each work of art, as Ortiz does not name his pieces. Ortiz explains, “Art speaks
for itself. That’s why I never name my pieces. I don’t like to tunnel vision the owner’s idea of what it is. I want the owner of a piece of my art to grow with the piece” (as cited in Traditional Fine Arts Organization, Inc. website, 2004, p. 2). The first allusion to SMDS occurs with Ortiz’s notion of naming. Ortiz’s desire for the owner [and I add, any viewer] of a piece to grow with the work is in keeping with structure of SMDS activities that encourage growth through shared experience. Eventually, perhaps this mutual growth leads to an intimacy that permits a name.

I analyze two of his well-known monos by incorporating any discourse found surrounding them with my own interpretations. I also reference elements from several of his monos included in his 2005 Saints & Sinners exhibition at the King Galleries of Scottsdale and any accessible discourse in conjunction with this exhibition. The two monos that I refer to specifically are as follows: the monos featured on the official 2006 Santa Fe Indian Market poster and the monos appearing in the 2006 La Renaissance Indigéne exhibition at the George Gustav Heye Center in New York. From here forward I refer to the Santa Fe Indian Market monos as SFIM and the La Renaissance Indigéne monos as Master and Two Tics (MATT). Master and Two Tics somehow garnered a name, as attested to by the press materials associated with this exhibition. Perhaps MATT acquired a name because the piece was on loan from the private collection of Robert and Cyndy Gallegos (Ortiz’s mentor mentioned earlier) who must have complied with Ortiz’s wish to grow with the piece enough to name it. I do not refer to the Saints & Sinners exhibition’s monos by names. I merely comment on components of the group’s pieces.

Ortiz continues on in the tradition of his ancestors to infuse social commentary into each piece. Gallegos (as cited in Shaw, 2006) says:
I told (Ortiz) when he first started that there is no difference between you and your ancestors of the 19th century. Everything is the same….The only difference is that you, as a young Indian man, are influenced by other things going on around you than what your ancestors were influenced by, things such as the traveling circus in which some of the antique monos were based. (p. 3)

Ortiz draws inspiration from the world at large. At 19, he left the Pueblo to travel the planet with some nightclub-hopping friends including stops in New York, L.A., Paris, and Prague (Andrews, 2004; Targos, 2005). Targos explains that while globe-trotting, Ortiz encounters Manhattan cross-dressers, L.A. tattoo artists, Parisian haute couture models, and Prague club-dwellers all of which factor in as influences in his monos.

Modern day media also provides fodder for Ortiz’s work. Described as “pierced, painted and dressed in tight leather,” Ortiz’s monos explore the “misfits from contemporary society” (Fauntleroy, 1999, p. 28).

The first eccentric character I explore is SFIM (see Figure 3), the poster child for the 2006 Santa Fe Indian Market. Shaw (2006) describes SFIM:

Ortiz’s 2½-foot man smiles at the sky and has designs of corn – which the Pueblo use in prayer every morning – sun and moon designs and zig-zags for water. Some designs represent different Pueblo families, but the curling mustache above the figure’s large smile has come to represent the Ortiz family. (p. 1)

In fact, the signature Ortiz family mustache; radiating eyelashes; multiple piercings; black boots; and Maori-inspired, tattoo-like Cochiti designs are recurring motifs on many of Ortiz’s monos.
SFIM has a black horn or maybe it is a Mohawk on his head. He has toothy grin, large red discs dangling from his ears, a tentacle tattoo-inscribed pot belly, and a canteen on a cord hanging from his upraised hand. Is SFIM some kind of parody of the hordes of devil tourists, water bottles in tow, that descend upon Santa Fe for the Santa Fe Indian Market each year to consume American Indian artistic cultural treasures for their own satisfaction? This imagining is plausible given the sardonic commentaries that monos provide and given that Ortiz, the enfant terrible (Heard, 2005, p. 88), produced the poster child. SFIM’s black boots, gloved hands, corona-accented crotch, and piercings aplenty play into SMDS stereotypes of hardcore deviants that engage in unorthodox sexual activities. However, as Andrews (2004) says, “The S/M topic, while prevalent in Ortiz’s
work, is often ambiguous in presenting judgment. It appears that the one being judged, or at least questioned, is not necessarily the bearer of the persona depicted in the figure, rather the viewer of the work” (p. 2). In other words, while the viewer might think he/she is in a position to judge SFIM, in reality, the viewer is actually being subjected to scrutiny through the mere act of viewing of the piece. SFIM lasciviously grins as if to say, “Not only made you look but made you think about why you were looking.” Once again, the roles of dominant and submissive are confronted and challenged in the dominant culture to American Indian arena and in the consumer to artist realm. A pertinent question arises from these dynamics. Does American Indian art production fuel the dominant culture’s consumerism or does the dominant culture’s consumerism fuel the American Indian artist? Ortiz’s work does not supply a definitive answer, but exploration is the first step towards negotiation.
Another important monos that anchors to the SMDS thematic is MATT (see Figure 4). Susser (2005) describes:

…a two-headed work in black and white, with a pierced horn atop each face and a leash in each upraised hand, looks like a psychedelic dog walker, part Botero and part ‘Yellow Submarine’ [although the animals at the end of the leashes don’t resemble any canine breed, common or uncommon – they’re like inflated sea turtles with the faces of fish]. (p. 76)

If MATT is understood as having the two-headed master represent the dominant culture and having the two tics represent American Indians, then Ortiz is artistically investigating multiple power pairings within an SMDS framework.
MATT is infused with SMDS motifs and attitudes. One face has the Ortiz family’s signature curling mustache situated over his unusually plump lips, and the other sports a straight mustache atop a toothy grin. Radiating black eyelashes, black goatees, red disc pierced ears, silver-cuffed arms, undulating tattoo-lined legs, and black-booted feet display all the trappings of an SMDS renegade.

Moving from the silver-cuffed wrists of the master to the silver-cuffed collars of the tics, a full-blown homage to the master/pet-slave scenario is presented (Williams, 2006). However, as restraining as this relationship initially appears, this master/pet-slave dynamic and the dynamic between the two tics showcases some equalizing and liberating conditions as far as gender roles and dominant/submissive roles are concerned.

Although gender is usually depicted as androgynous in Ortiz’s work, the tics appear to possess feminine and masculine characteristics. The tic in MATT’s right hand has red disc earrings dangling from her horns; full pouty lips; almond-shaped alluring eyes; and wide-set, child bearing hips. Whereas, the tic in MATT’s left hand has the trademark Ortiz family curling mustache; lips that seem to be miming ooooh to the lady tic; beady, penetrating eyes; and a lean, compact frame. By representing the gendered tics in bondage on leashes with silver and leather collars, Ortiz comments not only on the power dynamic between dominant master and submissive tics but also directs attention to the interaction between the tics. He demonstrates that either gender can function in the submissive/slave position. In other words, the female is not always in the submissive role, as many outside the SMDS world tend to believe. Chancer (1992) explains:

Sadomasochism is not an essentialistic concept. There is nothing about sadism or masochism that is intrinsically, inherently, or biologically bound to one group or
another. Instead, sadomasochism refers to a ritualized pattern that in and of itself does not discriminate by race, class, sex, ethnicity, or sexual preference. Part of its complexity, as we shall see, is that a man can be a masochist as well as a sadist, a woman sadistic as well as masochistic (even though, of course, sadomasochism becomes gendered within a particular historical context); similarly sadomasochism is not exclusive property of straight or gay persons, or of a particular national minority or caste. (p. 10)

In other words, SMDS activities are one of the few arenas that are non-discriminatory and open for all to play in. SMDS rituals provide a pathway for gender roles to be explored, questioned, and challenged. Also, with the gendered tics leashed to the male master, Ortiz comments on the current condition that exists in which all groups, no matter which gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. they embody, appear to be chained to the patriarch.

At this point in MATT’s reading, the interpretation becomes more complicated and provocative. The master and two tics relationship, which would seem to suggest just that, master and slaves, actually provokes questions about which entity is dominant and which one is submissive. Both master and tics have silver cuffs, clear references to being bound, placing both potentially in the submissive role. So one might counter, but the master has the leashes, which means the master is dominant. But who actually is walking whom? The tics are out in front of the master, suggesting that they might be leading. Furthermore, the tics certainly do not appear to be expectantly waiting for the master’s command before pursuing their own agendas. The tics are initiating their own forms of flirting, seemingly oblivious to their mirthful master. MATT visually represents an existential, paradoxical possibility in which external acknowledgment, so necessary for human psychic stability, comes in the form of mutual recognition. This mutual acknowledgment is played out in SMDS activities. Chancer (1992) explains:
Rather, recognition stems from mutual recognition by self and other that each is different from and yet independent of each other; at the same time, each is utterly dependent on the other. In this view, human beings are simultaneously both dependent on and, in other respects, independent of, an other; the other is at once independent of, and dependent upon, that person in turn. (p. 72)

In MATT’s case, this reference to mutual recognition is played out between dominant and submissive; the dominant culture and American Indians; and male and female. Ortiz’s incorporation of the SMDS aesthetic throughout this piece allows for multiple power dynamics to be explored enhancing his portfolio of artistic interventions in intercultural power negotiations.
The final group that I address references pieces included in Ortiz’s *Saints & Sinners* (S&S) exhibition (see Figures 5-7). As previously mentioned, Ortiz pieces are a reflection of the social world around him. In addition to the downtown denizens, cosmopolitan celebrities, and underground rebels that Ortiz siphons for inspiration, media *hot* topics provide fodder for Ortiz’s monos.

*Figure 6. Saints & Sinners 2, 2005*

For example, Andrews (2004) explains the inspiration for and result of one of Ortiz’s monos, “Religion is also an honored topic of critique. A figure of a priest shows a
smiling, benevolent face and a bondage-harnessed backside – commenting on apparent child molestation by the clergy” (p. 2). In this case, the SMDS bondage equipment illuminates the dark side of SMDS where pain is inflicted both for sexual gratification and pain’s sake on an unwilling and inappropriate partner. The dark side of SMDS proclivities is in stark contrast to activities where pain is inflicted to delineate power and status and to enhance the performance of mutually agreed upon roles that embody these power differentials (Cross & Matheson, 2006).

Other SMDS allusions that surface on the saintly and/or angelic monos in the S&S collection are jutting, colored nipples; pierced, protruding horns; and black-masked faces. Also, some of the S&S monos have metal spikes pushed through their limbs and whip-like black tendrils arcing around their heavenly bodies. I describe these pieces as saintly and angelic due to the inclusions of silver wings on their backs, silver halos over their heads, and/or silver coronas radiating from their craniums.

*Figure 7. Saints & Sinners 3, 2005*

This collection moves from questioning dominant and submissive roles to probing that of good and evil. Ortiz uses SMDS elements to blur the lines between saint and
sinner. Through the incorporation of these SMDS referents with saintly figures, Ortiz equalizes what is construed as good and what is deemed evil. As Ortiz did with Willing, he uses the play on binaries to focus on the gray areas, the bridges, and the sites of negotiation. Seemingly ironic at first consideration, Ortiz uses Catholic icons, such as Madonna and the Angel Gabriel, from a religion of the dominant culture to fuse good and evil; right and wrong; normal and abnormal, rather than Pueblo representatives. However, as Cochiti Pueblo writer, Joseph H. Suina (1998) explains, “The inquisitive non-Puebloan soon discovers the impenetrable shield that protects a good portion of traditional Pueblo culture” (p. 74). Perhaps Ortiz, who adheres to the spiritual practices of the Cochiti and who is a Pueblo traditionalist, in many senses of the word, chooses to maintain that highly guarded secrecy by keeping Cochiti deities sacred.

Pairing confidentiality and humor, Ortiz’s monos including SFIM, MATT, and the representative pieces from the Saints & Sinners collection use SMDS to communicatively operate in three key ways: 1) to confront and challenge the roles of dominant and submissive between the dominant culture and American Indians and between consumers and artists; 2) to showcase equalizing and liberating conditions as far as gender roles and dominant/submissive roles are concerned; and 3) to engage the binaries to re-focus on the sites of negotiation.
The final form of Ortiz’s pottery that correlates to the SMDS theme are his vessels. Ortiz draws from a diverse well for his vessel designs. He is a master of creating evocative negative spaces on his pots that speak just as loudly as the positive spaces.

Johnson (2004) states:

Mr. Ortiz’s graphic sophistication shows in the black-on-tan patterns that he paints on generously proportioned red clay pots. With its sinuous botanical motifs, torqued geometric forms and bold, interwoven bands, his painting extends
Pueblo style while reflecting other traditions, from ancient Greek vase painting to Art Nouveau decorative design to contemporary tattooing. (p. 1)

Some of his pots tend to skew more traditional in nature (see Figure 8), inspired by Pueblo life, carrying few, if any, SMDS tones. They incorporate both sinewy and linear tattoo-like organic graphics that reference corn, water, wild spinach, the moon, the sun, clouds, and snakes. Other pots tend to read more contemporary, inspired by life off the reservation and outside the mainstream. These vessels pair modern elements such as the “nouveau Native Warrior and Native Femme Fatale” (Fauntleroy, 2006, p. 194); high-heeled, tall boots; guns; and Mohawk haircuts with the more traditional components mentioned above. I reference three unnamed representative pieces to create my analysis. For the sake of clarity, I term the first piece Lick; the next, Femme Fatale; and the final one, Warrior. These edgy works and those similar to them are the sites in which the SMDS overtones shift how the pieces are operating.

Figure 9. Lick, 2007
For example, in Lick (see Figure 9) a lusciously, long-eyed, Mohawked male is depicted sticking his tongue out in order to potentially lick the highly-stylized heel of a lady’s tall, black boot. His eyes are closed, as if savoring the anticipation of the lascivious lick. Flames encircle the bottom of the pot licking the soles of the slinky boots. The vessel is also adorned with red circles, sun rays, and other organics designs. Similarly, Femme Fatale (see Figure 10) pairs provocative imagery with organic motifs such as suns
and black orbs. Femme Fatale depicts a raven-haired American Indian woman with blood red, bee-stung lips holding an unfolding red rose stem by her teeth. She has black feathers arcing from the back of her head, a black mask covering her eyes, and a black fur collar around her neck. In my final example, Warrior (see Figure 11), black rays radiate from a red sun that is partially blocked by the shaved head of a young, steely-eyed American Indian male warrior. Organic black orbs, script-like black Xs, and swirling tentacles surround the male’s raised hand whose fingers wrap around the stock of a black revolver.

Figure 11. Warrior, 2006
Unlike in Willing and Ortiz’s monos where the majority of SMDS referents are applicable to the power dynamics between the dominant culture and American Indians, a shift begins to occur in how SMDS is operating in Ortiz’s contemporarily-inspired vessels, which further extends into his fashions. In the above examples, SMDS actions (such as the submissiveness of the male in Lick and the dominance of the gun-toting male in Warrior) and SMDS attire (such as the black mask and materials like the fur and feathers that allude to wild life in Femme Fatale) utilize these SMDS elements for the sake of creating a product that allows the viewer to experience the other/Other side of life. In short, SMDS moves from operating in Ortiz’s art as a questioning, challenging, role playing, negotiating communicative tactic to operating more as an intersectional and liberatory strategy.

For instance, the SMDS imagery on Ortiz’s vessels depicts both traditional and contemporary American Indian subject matter that offers more subtle connections to the dominant culture that could be interpreted in a myriad of contradictory ways. For example, Warrior could function as a social commentary on the influence of hip hop culture, with its gun-toting gangstas, migrating to the reservation. The piece could signify the beginning of a shift towards dominance by American Indians promoting a war against the dominant culture to re-gain sovereignty over their representation and identity. Femme Fatale could represent an American Indian attempt to distance themselves from fetish object status to re-gain sexual sovereignty. The portrayal of an alluring American Indian woman by an American Indian artist rather than an artist linked to the dominant culture could attest to this attempt. Similar to how MATT operates, Lick could be attempting to
disrupt traditional gender roles by featuring the foot of the dominatrix being licked by the male, addressing both members of the dominant culture and American Indians.

As I much as I support some of the plausible interpretations involving SMDS elements that I have presented, I think the most likely reason for incorporating SMDS in his vessels is to invite the viewer/buyer to consider walking in another world – be it the American Indian world, the dark side, outside the mainstream, etc. This viewer/buyer invitation via this dual world thematic, which SMDS motifs help craft, is a complex often liberating enticement that evolves out of often constraining realities.

To explain, the Kim et al. (1998) article addressing the complexity of American Indian cultural identity, entitled I Can Walk Both Ways, investigates this theme. They say, “Too often, a person is viewed as belonging to one and only one ethnic identity, glossing over the multifaceted and evolving nature of identity experienced by many people whose lives crisscross multiple sets of boundaries” (p. 253). Additionally, American Indians in the Kim et al. study and American Indian scholars (Bonnet, 2003; Crozier-Hogle & Wilson, 1997; Garroutte, 2001; Grande, 2000) point to the binary construct of the white/non-Indian world in opposition to the red/Indian world. This binary is supported by such blood quantum acts as the Dawes Rolls (Garroutte 2001) and by such references as Hall’s (1992) “West and the Rest” (p. 277).

One of the interviewees in the Kim et al. study captures the reality that many American Indians face, wherein they are trying to negotiate sometimes multiple and often conflicting identities, in his comment, “They [Indians] are blessed because they can live in two worlds…they can pick up non-Indian characteristics and use them in both worlds…I really feel comfortable in both worlds” (p. 259). As the American Indian
interviewee above suggests, this intersectional thematic can be liberating. Ortiz’s vessels provide early glimpses of the shifting operations of SMDS in Ortiz work.

Fashion: Clothing and Accessory Designs

SMDS shifts from being artistically rendered on Ortiz’s vessels to being creatively animated in his fashions and accessories. As demonstrated by Ortiz’s ever-increasing fashion/accessory collection launches, people from all groups – dominant or marginalized – seem to desire the freedom and fantasy that a little SMDS in their art can provide, as demonstrated by their willingness to pay a pretty penny for these privileges.

Ortiz’s fashions showcase the SMDS aesthetic in new ways. As before, his audiences are spurred to waffle between dominant and submissive roles. However, in the case of Ortiz’s fashions, audiences are also wooed into wanting the liberatory effects of the walking in both worlds experience. While, at the same time, audiences are somewhat constrained by Ortiz’s fashions’ engagement of their free will, as captured by the seductive textiles of the American Indian Other. Viewers of his collections experience the powerful mesmerizing effects of an American Indian fetish. Ortiz’s designs lure them to not merely gaze at the Other but actually to want to embody the Other.
Ironically, Ortiz first dabbles in fashion as a result of his own desire to embody the *Other*. While club-hopping, he finds that many of the garments that he wants are not affordable, so Ortiz decides to create his own fashions that mirror the high-priced pieces but with his own twists (Targos, 2005). Targos explains that many of his early examples are imprinted with designs that are a result of a secret language that Ortiz and his five friends concocted when they were in middle school (see Figure 12). To date, this clandestine language is only readable by Ortiz and his cohorts. Essentially, the language is a prayer code that functions to “bring about happy feelings” (Targos, p. 2). Ortiz’s use of a secret script positions the desire for the *Other* back into dominant culture’s lap by making them want to crack the code. Ortiz’s pilot pieces begin to fly out of his Santa Fe store, aptly named, Heat: A Freak Boutique (Servin, 2003).
His career transforms when fashion icon, Donna Karan, encounters his work while in Santa Fe at Indian Market in 2002 (Gibson, 2005). She asks him to collaborate with her on the 2003 DKNY Spring collection (see Figure 13). Six months later, Ortiz’s pottery is displayed in the windows of Karan’s flagship store on Madison Avenue, and his design motifs of wild spinach, clouds, water, suns, etc. appear in columns and rows all over their collaborative clothing collection (Gibson, 2005; Servin, 2003). As referenced in Chapter 1, Ortiz’s collaboration with Karan turns out to be an extremely lucrative pairing for both designers.
Even though Ortiz helps to catapult Karan’s collection to amass substantial profits, Ortiz’s own designs are still categorized as less than civilized in some of the discourse. For example, Susser (2005) compares both designer’s works, “The clothes are classic Donna Karan, with a powerful jolt, as in a clean, fitted black cotton skirt patterned with small gold medal studs. Ortiz’s own designs – a man’s black leather motorcycle jacket with the image of a stylized white snake rounding it, for example – are less refined but no less self-assured” (p. 76). Ortiz is positioned as the savage in the city, but manages to use this stereotype to his advantage, by reclaiming its Otherness. Rogers (2007), drawing from the respective works of Gilman (1985) and Torgovnick (1996), explains:

The Other symbolizes what is desired yet forbidden, attractive yet repulsive, lost but yearned for. The trope of the primitive is deeply sexualized, projecting and displacing Western sexual ideologies, desires, and conflicts while justifying colonialism. The trope of the primitive shapes dominant images of the Native Americans not as fixed set of ideas but as dynamic forces articulated to power, consciousness, and social structure. (p. 236)

Ortiz inculcates the trope of the primitive, via the blending of SMDS and tribal elements, into his subsequent fashion endeavors to accrue prodigious profits and prestige.

Figure 14. VO™

Utilizing his initials, the house of VO™ (see Figure 14), produces both men’s and women’s fashion and accessory lines. VO™ fabricates collections with spirited names
like *Indigene* (scarves, jackets, handbags, briefcases); *Renegade* (a silk-screened T-shirt line and hats produced with Santa Fe milliner Kevin O’Farrell); and VO™ (couture clothing; boots; and jewelry including necklaces and cuff bracelets designed by Ortiz and crafted by Kenneth Johnson) (Fauntleroy, 2006; Heard, 2006; Orr, 2008; Ringlero, 2006; Servin, 2003; Targos, 2005), (see Figures 15 and 16).

In Ortiz’s recent showing of his Spring and Fall 2008 collections, *Le Sauvage Primitif*, at Scottsdale Fashion Week, he propels SMDS to the forefront through his choices of materials and processional decisions. Ortiz combines SMDS referents and traditional tribal designs to create a cultural bricolage. This fashion forward blending of subculture and tribal culture challenges hegemonic notions of what is fashionable while bolstering a sense of American Indian vernacular discourse that is both uniquely Cochiti and uniquely Ortiz. Through Ortiz’s *pastiche* American Indian vernacular discourse operates to counter hegemonic constructions of fashion and culturally affirm American
Indian/Cochiti/Ortiz notions of fashion at the same time (Calafell & Delgado, 2004; Ono & Sloop; 1995). For instance, his latex, leather, vinyl, and pony hair textile palette calls to mind dungeons and dominatrixes. Complete with long stemmed crimson roses in their teeth, Ortiz’s black-masked, feathered femme fatales strut down the runway in metal and leather corsets; leather jackets and dresses; tartan plaid outfits; and t-shirts and jeans (see Figures 17-21). Many pieces are emblazoned with words like Renegade, Rezurrect, and Indigene and phrases like I do and You lie. Intermittently, near nude male models with bare chests and loincloths adorned with Ortiz’s signature tribal tattoo design motifs “reminiscent of war paint,” (Orr, 2008, p. 3) slither down the catwalk. Orr dramatically recounts:

Then as the lights slowly raised an elegant, graceful violinist, shirtless and painted with bold black swirls appeared. Feathers decorated his head and he wore forearm bands fashioned out of vinyl and horsehair. Swaying as he glided down the catwalk, we were mesmerized by the poignant tune oozing from his blue, electric violin. The audience cooed when he appeared. (p. 2)

This discourse and Ortiz’s choices for both his collection’s materials and presentation animate this walking in both worlds invitation, provoked by both the SMDS and tribal elements’ seductive qualities, to such an extent that the dominant culture is compelled to subsume the Other.
Figure 17. Le Sauvage Primitif, 2008

Figure 18. Le Sauvage Primitif, 2008
Figure 19. Le Sauvage Primitif, 2008
Figure 20. Le Sauvage Primitif, 2008
Figure 21. Le Sauvage Primitif, 2008

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Through this example and in his other collections, Ortiz, on the one hand positions American Indians in the dominant role, manifesting Bourdieu’s (2002) notion of using cultural capital in the objectified state to garner actual capital in the dollars and cents state. Essentially, Ortiz acts like many opportunists of the dominant culture by culturally commodifying American Indian representations. Drawing from Marx (1859/1867), Rogers (2007) explains:

Commodification abstracts the value of an object or action so it can enter the system of exchange…. It becomes, in practice, equivalent to all other commodities. To create the appearance of difference (and hence value) amidst this equivalence, meanings are attached to the commodity. These meanings are the (illusory) ends to which the commodity itself becomes the means of attainment, transforming it into a fetish. (p. 243)

Ortiz pairs his commodified American Indian representations with commodified SMDS elements that play into stereotypes to create a fetish fashion spectacle of the Other that appears irresistible to many seeking freedom from the constraints of the mainstream. This insatiable appetite for the Other amounts to sizable profits, which personally benefit Ortiz and philanthropically serve Cochiti Pueblo youth. His monetary gains enable Ortiz to build a 4,000-square-foot studio to teach kids traditional Pueblo and contemporary artistic skills and the tribe’s native Keres language (Fauntleroy, 2006).

On the other hand, Ortiz positions American Indians in the submissive role by repositioning them as fetish objects that the dominant culture can imitate and pontificate about. For example, Ringlero (2006) says:

Ortiz’s garments project rez chic and announce the wearer as indigenous-savvy and fashionista forward. Incorporating tailored garments with on- and off- rez outrageousness, Ortiz presents clothing for rock stars, museum mavens, and haute sauvage hot bods to flaunt with attitude and flash. (p. 34)
Ringlero’s statement suggests that purveyors of Ortiz’s fashion not only gain garments but also acquire access to indigenous knowledge. This claim seems preposterous, in that, merely wearing clothing does not initiate one into some tribal inner sanctum. To suggest that entry is as easy as clothing oneself in Ortiz’s fashions, both minimizes and essentializes a rich and varied cultural group known as American Indians. At the same time, however, Ortiz’s perpetuation of American Indian fetishism funnels revenue back into tribal domains.

Overall, Ortiz’s forays into fashion incorporate SMDS to create the *walking in both worlds* thematic that toys with the notion of American Indian fetishism. This tactic results in American Indian financial empowerment and provisional cultural sovereignty while ironically, also participating in cultural commodification.

In conclusion, Ortiz uses the rhetoric of SMDS to communicatively operate in a variety of ways as follows: to call attention to and subvert conventional notions of dominant and submissive; to question role fixations and encourage role playing allowing audiences to *walk in both worlds*; to delineate power and status between dominance and submission; to provoke a re-thinking of dominant and submissive actions that empowers both roles; to blur nostalgic representations in order to encourage transformative ones; to invoke cultural commodification for personal and cultural financial gain and pro tem cultural sovereignty; and to spotlight and slyly engage in overall power negotiations between dominant and submissive. Ultimately, all of these communicative operations engaged by employing the rhetoric of SMDS are applicable in the intercultural dynamic between American Indians and the dominant culture. By employing the rhetoric of SMDS, Ortiz manages to mischievously maneuver American Indian art, representation,
and identity from mainstream constructions to the edges, creating possibilities for
American Indian representational re-thinking and identity re-articulations. Celebrated
contemporary Cochiti painter, Mateo Romero and his brother, Cochiti potter, Diego
Romero (as cited in Fauntleroy, 2000) comment:

I think it’s happening at the edges, right? There’s this tremendous vibration at
the edges. I think the middle of this regional art scene is too formulaic. It doesn’t
ask the hard questions, so there’s no movement there. But the edges seem to
vibrate more, and there’s that energy and pulse. One of the things that fascinates
me about artists like Virgil Ortiz, for instance, is that he’s working in a traditional
medium but in a very contemporary vein….That’s exciting to me – looking at
historical art forms that have been recontextualized into the here and now.
They’re not just material culture [says Diego]….And the edges are tending to
move into the mainstream, and I guess the question will be will they have that
same vibrancy as they move into the mainstream? And I think they will because
these artists we’re talking about have always had this critical look. They’ve never
flinched from the hard questions. (p. 234)

Ortiz, in fact, tackles the hard questions head on and flips them on their axes. He invokes
the spirit of the trickster16 to create transformational possibilities for American Indian
representational and identity self-sovereignty.

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16 Shanley (2006) explains that the trickster is common figure in the folktales of
many cultures that traditionally acts upon the world to teach, admonish, or break cultural
norms. She says, “The trickster figure is the manifestation of an energy force that all
cultures (particularly indigenous communities) possess” (p. 5). She states that a
community’s location and regionality influence the form that their trickster assumes.
Examples include a coyote/fox, a hare, a raven, etc.

She says, “Coyote is a classic trickster figure found in the folklore of many Native
American tribes, although various tribal traditions have resulted in slight nuances in
Coyote’s qualities and character” (p. 1). Shanley analyzes Salish author, Mourning
Dove’s (1933/1990) Coyote Stories and explains that Coyote is married to Mole, which
carries representative relevance. Shanley continues, “Mole is dutiful to the extreme,
almost masochistic, and Coyote is willful and individualistic to the point of almost being
sadistic…. But coyote also has a complementary part, Fox” (p. 3). Blackfeet tribal
member and educator, Greg Hirst (as cited in Shanley, 2006) explains that the Fox side is
the “wise protector” and the Coyote side is the “wily trickster” (p. 1).
Andrews (2004) explains, “Just as the 19th century Cochiti potters reversed the power play of the trading post art by comment[ing] on the potential buyer, Ortiz’s work, regardless of the medium, always plays with the viewer by returning the gaze, usually with a smirk” (p. 3). Ortiz’s work is all about role playing and revealing the power play – the negotiations and exchanges of power between sadist and masochist; dominant and submissive; male and female; heterosexual and homosexual; sacred and secular; and the dominant culture and American Indians. By employing the rhetoric of SMDS, Ortiz manages to invite audiences from all groups to step outside of their avowed or ascribed identities and play with power dynamics – with this preliminary play often laying the groundwork for serious strategic resistance, negotiation, and representational transformations and identity re-articulations.
CHAPTER 6: SELLING ORTIZ: SUBVERSION AND COMPLIANCE THROUGH BRANDING

Our behaviour appears to be guided, then, not by social institutions or doctrines, but by the example of individuals who are seen as both like and magically unlike ourselves (Barry, 2008, p. 251).

Personhood, self-identity, is itself a mask, a mask we all ‘wear’ of necessity precisely to the extent that we are persons (Clifford, 2001, p. 160).

In the highly commodified world in which we live, culture has become a product that can be invented, packaged, and consumed (Sorrells, 2003, p. 17).

Ortiz is motion. He is one of those seminal artists who spawn movements like monos revival and makes moves like noble savage reclamation in many worlds such as that of art, consumer capitalist, American Indian, and dominant culture. Baker (as cited in Andrews, 2004) says:

The artist is equally at home on the Plaza at Cochiti Pueblo, the haute couture salons of Europe, the loud and boisterous fashion world of New York, the posh extravagance of Beverly Hills – dashing off drawings on cocktail napkins in the belly of a transcontinental jet. (p. 2).

While globe-trotting, Ortiz is always searching for new frontiers in which to spur an expansion of American Indian representation that opens spaces for new identity considerations.

Ortiz labors to give the public the greatest show on earth and in turn give himself, his tribe, and his fellow American Indians the opportunities of a lifetime. To realize both goals, Ortiz subverts and complies with mainstream marketing techniques and the
dominant culture’s notions of American Indian representation and identity. Through his endeavors, Ortiz manages to transform contemplations of American Indians.

To understand how Ortiz shepherds in these transformative American Indian identity notions, I map out the strategies and tactics that Ortiz employs in his on-going marketing campaign. In addition to my academic perspective, I bring my professional publicity and promotions expertise to track Ortiz’s marketing maneuvers. Before investigating his stratagems, however, the terrain must be taken into account.

Botterill (2007) characterizes Baudrillard’s (1994), Eco’s (2001), and Jameson’s (1992) descriptions of late 20th century consumer culture as “drained of authentic meaning, replete with hyper-reality and simulation, and saturated with promotion” (p. 105). This characterization makes navigating this marketing maze spurred by consumer culture seem like an empty expedition into an artificial arena. However, as the adage suggests, “It is ultimately about the journey, not the destination.” In the case of artist, Virgil Ortiz, the journey itself is the more significant portion of the trip.

I term the marketing of Ortiz an artist’s journey because in many ways the marketing experience mirrors the intuitive, experimental path that artists often travel to realize the masterpieces in their minds. However, in today’s society, driven by both markets and marketing, the masterpieces are actually about the artists as much as they are about the art. For example, when considering the work of artist, Andy Warhol, pictures of

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17 I worked in publicity and promotion for three veritable marketing machines, a major motion picture studio and two celebrity-backed concept restaurants. Pairing my professional background with my pursuits in critical intercultural scholarship that focuses primarily on American Indian issues places me in a unique position to communicatively critique an American Indian artist’s entrepreneurial journey through consumer culture.
and sound bytes by Warhol, bombard the public as often, if not more so, than reproductions of his ubiquitous pop art paintings. Likewise, when promoting an upcoming *Coldplay* concert, the public is shelled with as many visuals of the artists/ band members, as they are socked with samples of *Coldplay’s* art form, music. Both examples suggest that effectively marketing an artist(s) is a crucial component to selling her/his/their art.

What is it about these modern times that compel the linkage of person to product and of artist to art? How are artists – a notoriously bohemian collective (Botterill, 2007) – addressing the vortex of modernity? Giddens (1991) declares, “Modernity opens up the project of the self, but under conditions strongly influenced by [the] standardising effects of commodity capitalism” (p. 196). McClintock explains that a commodity occurs “on the threshold between culture and commerce” (as cited in Merskin, 2007, p. 14), which I posit, positions both art for sale and in many cases, the producers of this art (a.k.a., the artists) neatly in this niche, as well. A commodity can be thought of in terms of an “exchange-value” (Giddens, 1991, p. 197) that something concrete (such as a person, water or oil) or abstract (such as time, beauty or health) holds. Commodities are created, shaped, and driven by capitalism.

As such, it is important to define capitalism. Cheney and Cloud (2006) explain, “There is not just one capitalism, but rather capitalisms…” (p. 522). As capitalism is but one factor involved in my research and not the primary trajectory of it, I avoid unpacking all of its forms and their subsequent effects. Instead, I provide the most pertinent definition to inform this project. The United States leans more towards what is termed, “pure capitalism” which McConnell (1981) defines as “the private ownership of
resources and the use of a system of markets and prices to coordinate and direct economic activity” (p. 35). However, as has become clear of late, government also plays a key role in the U.S. economy by intervening, “promoting economic stability and growth” (McConnell p. 35). This government entanglement positions the U.S. form of capitalism as leaning more towards pure capitalism but embodying some elements of a “command economy” that is centered around public property ownership and “collective determination of economic decisions through central economic planning” (McConnell, p. 35). I focus more on the U.S. economy’s propensity towards pure capitalism, which stresses the individual’s role in influencing markets.

As such, the individual becomes a powerful participant in capitalism, which shapes commodities and consumption and drives the markets (Giddens, 1991). Due to capitalism’s entanglements with individuals, commodities, and consumption, the project of the self becomes modified. Giddens says, “To a greater or lesser degree, the project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life” (p. 198). However, in spite of these cynical musings Giddens offers hope to marginalized groups, such as American Indians, facing modernity. He says, “Even the most oppressed of individuals – perhaps in some ways particularly the most oppressed – react creatively and interpretatively to processes of commodification which impinge on their lives” (p. 199).

I bring to bear the above questions and Giddens’ prescient thoughts to serve as a springboard to dive into how contemporary American Indian artist, Virgil Ortiz, navigates modernity’s capitalistic stronghold. I map out how he both subverts and complies with the dominant culture’s current entrenchment in commodity capitalism and
stale American Indian representations. Ortiz’s helmsmanship through this capitalistic realm provides innovative tactics for spawning new power dynamics, which ultimately, affects American Indian representational and identity constructions and manifestations.

In order to outline how Ortiz maneuvers this marketing maze propelled by a system of commodity capitalism that is driven by a consumer culture, several concepts need unpacking such as branding and personal branding. First, for clarity, I distinguish the concept of a personal brand from that of the activity of personal branding.

Personal brands such as Ralph Lauren, Martha Stewart, and Virgil Ortiz (a.k.a. VO™) are developed by and around a person and feature that person’s name as their brand name, prompting my use of the term, personal brand, to describe such examples. Personal brands, like the ones mentioned above, and brands, in general, engage in self-promotional activities to create the most strategic and seductive figurative versions of their enterprises for primarily, consumer consumption. In differentiation, personal branding is the self-promotional activity that an individual engages in to craft the most calculated and polished figurative version of her/himself for primarily, corporate consumption. Lair, Sullivan, and Cheney (2005) define personal branding as a strategy wherein “the concepts of product development and promotion are used to market persons for entry into or transition within the labor market” (p. 309), which usually implies entry into the corporate arena. However, I extend the boundaries of personal branding to include an artist’s journey to market and brand himself and his art for literal and figurative consumer consumption.

In other words, just as a jobseeker benefits from personal branding, a personal brand’s anthropomorphic nature enables it to also benefit from personal branding efforts
made on its behalf. At this point, the personal brand starts to behave much like an individual jobseeker who is trying to market him/herself to businesses. As such, the personal brand engages in personal branding by packaging, promoting, and publicizing itself much like a jobseeker does, with the target market being consumers rather than employers. When I refer to personal branding, I am specifically denoting it in terms of Ortiz personally branding himself and his personal brand, VO™, to consumers.

With these important distinctions made, I outline the mapping of Ortiz’s journey through the marketing maze. I open by revealing a new American Indian identity that Ortiz, as demonstrated, introduces in his art and, as will be substantiated, through his marketing efforts. I describe this new identity and detail how it impacts American Indians. Next, I impart pertinent information on the overarching concept of branding and include examples of how Ortiz packages and promotes his trademarked brand, VO™. Then, I address an offshoot branding approach that more closely aligns with Ortiz’s branding process. Thereafter, I introduce the concept of personal branding. I touch upon integral components of personal branding, which include promotion, packaging and publicity and detail how Ortiz participates in these activities. Specifically, I explore how Ortiz designs, packages, promotes, and publicizes both himself and his art. I also examine how Ortiz handles issues of race/ethnicity, culture, and authenticity while engaging in personal branding and brand building. Throughout this analysis, I investigate how his choices both subvert and comply with mainstream marketing techniques and with the dominant culture’s conventional notions of American Indians. I conclude by detailing how these seemingly self-centered activities actually result in conditions that are socially beneficial and ultimately, transformative.
Enter the Savage Noble

American Indian identity issues are no strangers to Ortiz, as evidenced through his production of an American Indian politics of representation in his art that speaks to intercultural power dynamics and signification self-sovereignty. As has been stated, the “noble savage” is a persistent stereotype that informs dominant representations of American Indians. Ortiz intervenes to re-claim and change this representation into an identity that is more liberatory in nature.

As has already been demonstrated in the unpacking of Ortiz’s representational politics in his art and as will be demonstrated in the unpacking of these politics in his marketing efforts, I claim that Ortiz carves out a space for the introduction of an alternative American Indian identity for consideration, the Savage Noble. Ortiz establishes a space through his art and marketing endeavors, wherein, he associates himself and thereby American Indians with the mainstream, the margins, and the surfacing underground communities. He positions the indigenous, the savage, the renegade in the spotlight, but adjusts the filter just enough so that a variety of audiences are attracted to, rather than blinded by, the spectacle. Ortiz celebrates freedom, individuality, and self-expression by reviving banished art forms like his monos and subverting the mainstream with inclusion of SMDS motifs in his body of work. He reclaims American Indian representation and identity on his own terms with attention to Cochiti beliefs and traditions. He claims the Other and makes it desirable, consumable, and profitable.

Ortiz’s politics of representation as demonstrated in and through his art and marketing pursuits indicate that either knowingly or unknowingly, he is crafting a
distinctly American political identity that Clifford (2001) terms the “Savage Noble” (p. 20). The Savage Noble emerges out of the play on the term *noble savage*, often historically used in conjunction with American Indians. Clifford’s Savage Noble represents a “private, autonomous individual” (p. 36) who problematizes notions of personal liberty amongst the discourses of discipline that Foucault refers to. Just as the noble savage of the past did, the Savage Noble complicates many systems operating within society, as society both constructs and is constructed by a web of disciplinary discourses.

In order to suggest that Ortiz’s political identity has links to the Savage Noble, it is helpful to expand the discussion of the noble savage. Clifford (2001) probes the question of why American Indians have been maintained in social and political *Otherness* more than any other ethnic group. He argues that some of the reason might lie in “the seminal importance of the Native American’s role as Noble Savage to the constitution of our own identities as Americans” (p. 90). Clifford expounds:

The noble savage is not simply the idealized figure of European imagination. From the beginning the noble savage has been our primary, our founding Other. This otherness is both figural, embodied in stale stereotypes and iconography, and practical, through the processes of exclusion and marginalization afforded by the reservation system. Like a prism through which white light is refracted and dispersed into the array of colors we know as the spectrum, the figure of the noble savage is a prism through which Western political identity is confirmed. But, as with a real prism, the white light which is the source of the spectrum is itself invisible, transparent, unseen. To that degree the Savage Noble remains transparent and hence unseen, even though it animates virtually every position along the American version of the political spectrum. (p. 90)

Ortiz employs the tactics of the dominant culture such as exoticism and essentialism to re-claim the noble savage, as is evident in his art and will be demonstrated in his
marketing. However, Ortiz goes one step further. He overhauls and re-conditions the noble savage to begin to offer a glimpse of this new Savage Noble identity.

Ortiz’s Savage Noble emerges as a transformative identity that challenges regulatory régimes of discipline and offers a space of distance from past confining identities in such examples as his monos that challenge who and what constitutes normality and appropriateness and in his fashions, which extend the parameters of conventionally-conceived American Indian art forms. However, as Clifford states, “No one escapes discipline” (p. 106). Ortiz avoids enough discursive discipline to achieve more than the mere word reversal of noble savage to Savage Noble through his art and marketing. His most profound achievement lies in the fact that the invocation of the Savage Noble identity provokes the exploration of the mechanisms of power through which both of these identities, the noble savage and the Savage Noble, are created in the first place. Clifford says:

The colonist ‘tames’ the wilderness; but in doing so transforms himself. He becomes the Savage Noble, and the civil laws of his civilized society must be such that they reflect and support his autonomous individualism. A closer look at this individualism shows that it actually functions as the ideological shield of the mechanisms through which we are really materially subjugated to the amorphous mass of the population and the dictates of the governmentalized nation-space. (p. 170)

In other words, in an attempt to give shape to this Savage Noble, Ortiz does more than *talk the talk*: he *walks the walk*. In other words, calling on the shapeshifter, Ortiz insinuates himself into the dominant culture through creating a desire for his art, his brand, and the lifestyle that his brand represents. At the same time, Ortiz remains culturally aware of and responsible for the consequences that come with his revolutionary actions.
In his art and marketing, Ortiz spotlights and questions the mechanisms of power/knowledge régimes that constrain American Indian representation and identity. He also acts within those régimes to cultivate a space for this hybrid, strategic, critical identity to exercise itself. For example, he reveals and highlights these régimes in his sculpture, *Willing*, through questioning conventional intercultural power dynamics. He acts within these régimes to produce fashions that both *speak to the savage* through the incorporation of organic elements and tribal designs motifs and *call to the civilized* through the use of refined textiles and haute couture designs to position consumers in the borderlands between identities and worlds. The stakes are high in manifesting a new American Indian identity that thwarts previous hegemonic constructions. The introduction of this more liberatory Savage Noble identity could begin to tip the *balance of power*. This new identity could also pave the way for numerous other American Indian identities to be hailed. Moreover, manifesting the Savage Noble could re-ignite and intensify the battle over signification sovereignty between the dominant culture and American Indians. Ultimately, summoning the Savage Noble is personally beneficial to Ortiz, tribally advantageous to the Cochiti Pueblo, and collectively promising for American Indians.

**Branding**

In order to understand how Ortiz is manifesting the Savage Noble, his marketing strategies, including branding and personal branding, are probed. Branding is not a new marketing strategy. According to Lair, Sullivan, and Cheney (2005), “Brand of some sort has been evident in product development and promotion since the mid-19th century with the linkage of certain stores and factories to particular products through print
advertising” (p. 309). However, as of the 20th century branding has become a popular and widely used strategy employed by large corporations, small businesses, and even individual entrepreneurs, like Ortiz, to gain market attention, dollars, and continued consumer loyalty and support.

The metaphor of branding originates from designating livestock as owned property (Lair et al., 2005). Lair et al. explain that “in the world of corporate communications, it represents an attempt to make direct, clear, and persistent bonds between symbols and products or services (p. 311). They continue by defining branding as “a programmatic approach to the selling of a product, service, organization, cause, or person that is fashioned as a proactive response to the emerging desires of a target audience or market” (p. 309). In other words, branders attempt to predict market wishes on the cusp of their formation so that they can effectively fashion their brand to capture their desired audiences, rather than losing target markets to their competitors. Simply put, in order to craft a successful brand, a visionary approach must be engaged that aims to predict market desires before they are fully formed. As demonstrated by the success of Ortiz’s art, he possesses this visionary approach that he then translates to his marketing.

McCracken succinctly defines a brand as “a bundle or container of meaning” (as cited in Merskin, 2007, p. 12). She explains that brands can contain meanings centered on various cultural identities including gender, status, nationality, ethnicity/race and can represent “notions of tradition, trustworthiness, purity, family, nature, and so on” (p. 12). Ortiz builds his brand on binaries and centers it on notions of authenticity and subversiveness, as is demonstrated through the savage/civilized motif running through his fashions. Hearn (2008) explains:
The term ‘brand’ is most commonly understood to stand for a distinct form of marketing practice intended to link products and services with resonant cultural meanings through the use of narratives and images….Branding does this by constructing a particular ambience, comprised of sensibilities and values, which may then condition consumer behaviour. (p. 199)

Once established, a brand can also function “as a value-generating form of property in its own right” (Hearn, p. 200). In other words, not only the products within the VO™ brand are valuable, but also associations with VO™ itself attach value to whatever or whoever is trying to connect with the brand.

A brand operates like a person who works towards self-improvement. Much like an individual, a brand invests in making itself the best it can be, which enables a brand to function as a form of “cultural capital”, as defined in Chapter 3, in its “embodied state” (Bourdieu, 1986/2002, p. 283). Bourdieu explains the embodied state of cultural capital as follows:

It thus manages to combine the prestige of innate property with the merits of acquisition. Because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital. (p. 283)

In short, this embodied state or brand persona or simply, brand, houses and represents a myriad of products in their “objectified state” (Bourdieu, p. 285). These products operate as actual economic capital (goods and services) or symbolic cultural capital (people, organizations, and causes). In other words, due to a brand’s embodied nature it can unobtrusively operate, much like a queen in support of her king, behind the noticeable showcasing of its products to hail audiences into its folds. Hearn (2008) points out, “So, while current branding techniques may no longer attempt to directly persuade consumers,
their function remains fundamentally persuasive; they work to colonize the lived experience of consumers in the interests of capital accumulation” (p. 200).

For example, have you ever found yourself buying a certain brand of t-shirt, like those from the VO™ Renegade collection, just because? The shirt does not actually increase your status. The t-shirt is not really anymore pleasingly constructed than any other graphically-inspired tee. The shirt does not literally provide you with something extra. If you think you purchased this t-shirt just because, branding has successfully hailed you. Branding is concerned with addressing all of these aspects that factor into your purchasing decisions such as status, aesthetics, and value. Branding is an entrepreneurial technique that appears to operate in the market’s forefront through product placement but nevertheless, conducts most of its operations in the market’s shadows by subtly instilling itself, its products, and the hypnotic effect of its suggested lifestyle promises into our lives.

**Ortiz’s Branding**

Ortiz comes by the entrepreneurial spirit naturally. He recalls how when he was eight years old his mother gave him $5 to buy a Star Wars action figure. She then encouraged him to use his clay-making skills to create pieces for sale that would enable him to buy additional Star Wars figures (Ortiz, as cited in Cline, 2006). “Ortiz grew up in a traditional pottery making family from Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico. Living in an environment where art is a part of every day life lit a creative spark in Virgil” (Southwestern Association for Indian Arts, 2006, p. 1). This creative spark that results in the production of a sizable inventory of work in numerous mediums subsequently ignites a marketing inferno, which brings critical and commercial acclaim to Ortiz.
The proprietary degree that Ortiz takes in his own marketing efforts is unknown, but I argue that he is wholly involved in spearheading his marketing campaign from its creation through to its continued trajectory. As evidence, I include Gibson’s (2005) observations:

Virgil Ortiz is becoming a brand name. Known initially as an innovative potter, he is now actively developing a name on the cutting edge of the international fashion world, and producing sterling silver jewelry while continuing to push the boundaries of pottery with his unusual figurines and more traditional bowls and other pottery work. He has a pack of people helping in various ways, yet the quiet-spoken 35-year-old Ortiz is clearly directing this high-energy ensemble. (p. 14)

I also cite Ringlero’s (2006) observation of Ortiz, “Accompanied by an entourage posse and agent, Team ‘V’ is the hot ticket amid the conservative art market of New Mexico” (p. 28). Finally, in Ortiz’s own words:

I worked hard to learn the advertising and marketing aspects of the art market. I just want the kids to know how it works, the power of it, so they can get their heads together and be successful with the skills and discipline I’ve learned through experience – and my mistakes as well. (as cited in Ringlero, p. 31)

These statements clearly demonstrate that Ortiz is at the helm of his marketing voyage. He charts the course, attempts to avoid the hazards, maximizes his distance traveled, and passes on crucial information to the next generation of artists/voyagers.

Along this journey, Ortiz occupies a variety of artistic identities including the following three: 1) tribal artist, being trained in the crafting of clay at age six within his Cochiti community that is internationally known for its pottery; 2) individual/tribal artist, creating both traditional and contemporary works in a myriad of mediums that represent his personal and cultural identities; and 3) a personal brand or brand, complying with and subverting mainstream tactics and notions to craft his own fashion house, VO™ that is in
the process of transitioning to subsume his other mediums to represent his entire repertoire of artistic offerings. The only other identity that Ortiz has yet to occupy is that of icon. Orr (2008) proclaims, “Virgil Ortiz will one day be an icon such as Gucci, Versace and Louis Vuitton – of that there is no doubt” (p. 13). Given Ortiz’s relatively young age, he has plenty of time to inhabit this coveted space.

Through the establishment of his brand, VOTM, Ortiz is well on his way to claiming this iconic identity. Brand development, cultivation, and maintenance are, in large part, due to engagement in effective promotion. In explanation, Wernick (1991) writes, “Promotion crosses the line between advertising, packaging, and design, it is applicable, as well, to activities beyond the immediately commercial” (p. 181). In other words, promotion can operate outside the realm of competitive exchange to espouse a cause or concept. By in large, however, promotion is that catch-all communicative act that advances “some kind of self-advantaging exchange” (Wernick, p. 181) whether it takes the form of actual goods, self-design, self-publicity, or self-advertising. Promotion is a goal-oriented communicative act that “is defined not by what it says but by what it does” (Wernick, p. 184).

Nevertheless, promotion is driven by a promotional message. Wernick explains, “A promotional message is a complex of significations which at once represents (moves in place of), advocates (moves on behalf of), and anticipates (moves ahead of) the circulating entity or entities to which it refers” (p. 182). These significations that represent, advocate, and anticipate are what allows promotion to manifest and maintain a brand, be it personal or otherwise.
Via examples garnered from his website and advertising, Ortiz showcases his progression from proficiency to mastery of the promotional *tease* and promotions overall and demonstrates his profound grasp of the importance of brand imaging. By spotlighting the evolution of Ortiz’s website that involves itself with the promotional tease and brand imaging, I explain how Ortiz produces American Indian representations that open portals for possible new identity articulations. Concerning teasing the market, Lair et al. (2005) observe, “In some instances, the preparation of the market before the product arrives effectively creates a consumer frenzy for the label/commodity…” (p. 313). Ortiz attempts to cash-in on this frenzy-inducing state produced by the promotional tease. An examination of the increase in his marketing savvy through the institution of both subversive and compliant tactics is vital to understanding the communication of expanded notions of American Indian representation and identity.

Ortiz’s website’s genesis is unknown to me; however, I present his 2006 and current (as of April, 2009) version for overall investigation of this promotional tease concept that includes an examination of Ortiz’s brand, VO™. Although the promotional tease or *teaser* is a tactic that he utilizes in both versions, its design has become more sophisticated over time, as evidenced by the opening page(s) of his website, www.virgilortiz.com.
For example, the 2006 version of Ortiz’s website (see Figure 22) features an opening page with a gray graphic of his brand VO™ in the top left corner within a black box. Gray hyperlinks are positioned along a thin black strip that runs along one-third of the page, which enables the viewer to click on “FASHION,” “POTTERY,” “ARTIST,”
“NEWS,” or “CONTACT” to form the top tier of his three-tiered webpage. A photo of three American Indian men in the background and one American Indian woman in the foreground striding out of brooding sky from hell onto a highway bound for who knows where occupies three-quarters of the second tier. They all don Ortiz fashions including his jeans, leather jackets, and suede shirts. The earth tones and monochromes of the models and scenery bathe the entire image with a sense of the organic. The remaining quarter of the second tier contains a photo of Ortiz’s monos (SFIM) that serves as the 2006 Santa Fe Indian Market poster winner detailed in the previous chapter. The headline under the photo reads, “Breaking the Mold & Making History.” The beginning of an article publicizing the choice of his monos as the Indian Market’s representative image runs under the headline and constitutes part of the third tier of the webpage. Just below this story is a separate piece about Ortiz’s artistic career that constitutes the remainder of the third tier. Due to the size constraints of the webpage, a hyperlink in orange text is included that invites the viewer to click and “get the story” to read Ortiz’s complete biography.

Below the previously mentioned saturnine image are three rectangularly-shaped color photos of Ortiz’s work and a promotional story or two for each that form the third tier. From left to right they include 1) three of Ortiz’s pots, 2) the back of his Indigene leather jacket, and 3) a feathered, hat-brimmed, black-masked, muzzled man. Beneath the image of the three pots runs the headline in black “Ground Breaking Exhibitions” that highlights Ortiz’s opening, in gray text, of La Renaissance Indigene at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York at the Gustav Heye Center that features both his clay works and fashions. Again, an orange hyperlink invites viewers to click “for
more information”. Directly beneath the hyperlink sits another black headline, “Free Spirit” that promotes, in gray text, an exhibit at the Stedelijk Museum’s Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands of five Southwest American Indian potters. Following this explanatory paragraph, is an orange hyperlink that directs viewers to click “for more information.”

Beneath the leather jacket image is the headline in black “Traditional Meets Urban Chic,” which promotes his latest collection Indigene, in gray text, that features handbags and outerwear with metal hardware. The text also mentions where this collection can be purchased both currently and in the future. Another orange hyperlink invites viewers to click “for more information”. Right below this link is the black headline “VO Sterling Silver Jewelry Collection” and below that another orange hyperlink inviting viewers to click to “view the collection”.

Finally, beneath the hat-brimmed, muzzled man reads the headline in black “Coming Soon: The Renegade Collection”. The gray text beneath the headline explains that a “deluxe” t-shirt line with “a modern interpretation of the nouveau Native Warrior and Native Femme Fatale” will be launched at the 2006 Santa Fe Indian Market and directs viewers as to where to purchase the shirts. There is no orange hyperlink included below this promotional story.

Aesthetically the webpage is busy with too much text and too many images that force the eye to pinball around the page. Additionally, both the brand and the tiers appear out of balance. Ultimately, the message gets lost in the three-tiered text and image extravaganza. Although the page is designed to be informative, it ends up bombarding the viewer with wordy explanations of numerous openings and launchings. The viewer is also avalanched by the “wow factor” rather than made to feel as if he/she was in on the
discovery of this covetable secret. In short, the 2006 tease operates like a whip to the backside rather than a pinch on the bottom. The mystery is lost in a mess of marketing and a heap of hype.

Figure 23. www.virgilortiz.com - page 1, 2009

In contrast, the 2009 version of Ortiz’s websites’ opening page (see Figure 23) includes far more understated yet powerful messaging. Upon clicking on the website’s address, a red flash of a large version of the VOTM logo, which is officially trademarked, appears in the center of the page. Following this glimpse, a smaller version of the logo is traced and constructed before the viewer’s eyes at the bottom of the page. Thicker red lines and small white lines move out from the trademark’s core at the bottom middle of the page to outline a red rectangle against a black background. A smaller red VOTM trademark is also traced and positioned at the top of the newly formed red box. White block-lettered words, “POTTERY,” “FASHION,” and “ACCESSORIES,” emerge from
the left side of the bottom trademark and the words “ABOUT VO,” “PRESS,” and “STORES” emerge from the right side of the trademark to serve as hyperlinks providing more detailed information about these contexts.

A larger, blue filtered, grayscale version of the same feathered, top-hatted, black-masked, muzzled man from the 2006 website fades in to occupy almost one-half of the red outlined box. However, in the 2009 version the viewer sees almost the entire top hat. The word “distortion” written in a captivating script materializes diagonally across the mysterious man’s top hat. An arrow then shoots through the “distortion” headline on the diagonal from left to right and disappears off the page. Three more arrows follow, all emerging from various places on the left to fly diagonally to the right with the final arrow landing just beneath the headline to, once again, spotlight it.

While the barrage of arrows is occurring, white letters are tumbling down from the top of the page to land in the other half of the red-outlined, black-backgrounded box that now appears to float in the middle of a gray screen. The verbiage highlights Ortiz’s upcoming show and reads:

Virgil Ortiz once again seamlessly blends the worlds of art and fashion in his upcoming show “Distortion”. Each piece in clay explores the boundaries of symbolism, sex and social commentary. They play on the distinction between mind and memory, reality and fantasy, artist and viewer. The resulting art work is a provocative insight into the world of Virgil Ortiz and entreats us to set aside our “distortions” and see the world through his eyes. (2009, p.1)

Ortiz’s words suggest that his vision of the world offers a clear, focused, and accurate view of it. His quote suggests that if the viewer repositions his/her “distortions,” which seems to function as a veiled term for misconceptions, misrepresentations, and outright prejudices, the viewer can experience Ortiz’s accurate world perception. In short, Ortiz’s
teaser ambitiously promises a transformative experience. In essence, the teaser assures the viewer that by buying into the VO™ brand, a customer/viewer can purchase/consume truth.

Following this spectacular enticement, outlines of models in a runway show materialize on the gray screen behind the foreground-featured boxed imagery and text. A model appears in grayscale silhouette, poses and stiltedly struts toward the viewer, turns and returns back to his/her starting point, and strolls off screen right or left. More models stand and strut, as if caught in the syncopated flashes of old-time movies. Due to the coverage of the foreground screen, only the heads, feet, and sides of the figures can be seen – rarely their middles, except when they escape the foreground obstacle by walking off the side of the page. As such, only fragments of their features are detectable – the crook of an elbow, a bowed head, four model’s heads and feet striding towards the viewer.
A second page is formed on the heels of this first page without the requirement of any viewer action (see Figure 24). First, an “x” that is often included on Ortiz’s pieces appears at the bottom of the section that originally housed the verbiage concerning “distortion.” The mysterious muzzled man and verbiage fades, and arrows begin to move straight across the screen from left to right. One lone arrow darts from screen left to land beneath and highlight the same scripted word “distortion” that emerges from screen right. An image of one of Ortiz’s nipple and ear-pierced, multi-horned monos moves from right to left to occupy one third of the screen. Devoid of legs, this character emerges from the floor below featuring the body from trunk upwards. Undulating lines emanate from his raised crotch directing the viewer’s gaze to his tattoo-laden trunk; banded upraised arms and neck; and horned head complete with a monocle covering his right eye. Given Ortiz’s inclination towards social commentary and given these war torn times, this monos could
represent a battle victim. Occupying the other two thirds of the box is the “x” that has now shifted to the top of the page drawing the viewer’s attention to the headline “NEW WORKS IN CLAY.” Additional information including the opening time, date, place, and gallery contact information completes the space. Once again, models pose and strut in silhouette behind the framed box.

Significant findings can be gleaned from the evolution of Ortiz’s website’s opening page(s). Both incarnations rely on the artist’s name and subsequently his initials to construct the brand’s name. Clifford (2001) unpacks the importance of a name in his statement, “A name represents the condensation of an entire milieu of interpretations, critiques, sentiments, preconceptions, and expectations” (p. 161). A name carries weight. A lifetime of emotional, intellectual, psychological, and historical baggage is housed in a name. Clifford continues by citing work that details the victims’ of oppression who have been ascribed names by those in power. He stresses the importance of a name by recounting their continual struggles to become legitimized by acquiring their own proper names. Clifford (2001) reveals the reality of these oppressed peoples’ situation, “Usually names are the nomina of familiarity, but in this case the names are inflected with the otherness and fractious alterity that preceded them” (p. 166).

Ortiz works to counter this alterity by utilizing the mainstream tactic of co-optation. Just as the iconic fashion house started by Coco Chanel, features her initials and interlocks the back-to-back “Cs” to serve as her brand logo, Virgil Ortiz commanders his initials “VO” and houses the “V” within the “O”. He adds sickle-like serifs to each side of the “V” that encircle a large portion of the “O” making the trademark appear both as protector and protected. The VO™ trademark resembles shuriken, commonly known as
Ninja throwing death stars – weapons that are both artistic and effective in the same breath, much like Ortiz himself. In explanation, often artists are content to create art and have someone else market and sell it, shifting the marketing and sales out of their control, which subsequently, impacts their effectiveness. Ortiz embodies the shuriken’s characteristics, in that, he is artist that, by in large, retains control of the marketing of his art and can therefore, claim responsibility for the marketing’s effectiveness and artistry, as evidenced by his sales.

Beyond artistry and effectiveness, the trademark conveys a sense of strength, challenge, and edginess. However, due to its similarity to other initialed logos like that of Louis Vuitton and Christian Dior, it is an edginess that is vaguely familiar. Hearn (2008) explains:

While the object of the logo or trademark was initially intended to guarantee quality, it has now become the sign of a definite type of social identity, which summons consumers into relationship with it. The material brand is the ultimate image-commodity: a fetish object par excellence, pursued and paid for by consumers who wish to become a part of its fabricated world of purloined cultural meanings. (p. 199)

Through his trademark, Ortiz fashions an edgy, trendy statement that is cleverly housed in the conventional, familiar packaging of his initials. The juxtaposition of these design elements fashions an oxymoronic message that is contemporarily nostalgic, strangely familiar, and wildly tame, which both dares and invites audiences to walk in both worlds – that of the mainstream and that of the subaltern. Simply stated, audiences are made to feel comfortable enough through mainstream motifs such as the use of initials in order to want to venture into the subaltern realm, as conveyed through the subversive serifs.
Although Ortiz’s trademark is present in both past and recent examples of his website, the 2009 version devotes much more strategic thought to brand positioning. Hearn (2008) states, “The material form of the brand as an image, logo, or trademark is the first line of any marketing strategy” (p. 199). As such, the 2009 version prominently features the red trademark flashing center screen, constructing itself, and spawning hyperlink verbiage rather than lodging itself in a corner lost in the clutter of three-tiered text andimagery.

Moreover, the 2009 website’s opening page welcomes the viewer into the house of VO™ through its captivating unfolding, rather than forcing the house of VO™ onto viewer who must then labor to unpack the flat, busy, pre-constructed page. This 2009 draw and dazzle strategy enables the viewer to amass a large amount of information without pertinent details getting lost in stale screen clutter. Additionally, the objects’ motions such as fading in/out, shooting, tumbling, etc. keep the viewer’s eyes enthralled without being overwhelmed. The implied metaphor of transformation runs throughout the 2009 version, as elements of the page are continually morphing and transitioning. Also, the 2009 version features an almost fully formed top hat placed atop the primitive, rather than the suggestion of a top hat as contained in the 2006 version. This calculated re-cropping re-claims the savage and dresses him up as a dapper dandy. Primitive becomes civilized without losing the shadings of the savage. Thus, primitive becomes civilized on its own terms.

The overall layout of the 2009 version is also more sophisticated due, in part, to the layering of the box over the silhouetted moving runway models. The elements in motion ramp up the cool factor. These complex yet uncomplicated design choices elevate
both artist and brand to a level a notch above – a realm where life is, ironically, simply rich.

Ortiz attains this state not only through his branding efforts on his website but also through careful crafting of his brand’s image in advertising. Williamson (as cited in Merskin, 2007) explains that advertisements, and I include promotional and publicity efforts, must “take into account not only the inherent qualities and attributes of the products they are trying to sell, but also the way in which they can make those properties mean something to us” (p. 11). Merskin echoes this statement, “Advertisements as vehicles of branding are used to boost the commodity value of product names by connecting them to images that resonate with the social and cultural values of society” (p. 12). So, how does Ortiz establish a connection between himself and the average U.S. American consumer?

Leonard states that the American advertising industry effectively employs racist “constructs and deploy[s] racialized tropes and images in its effort to sell a vision” (as cited in Merskin, 2007, p. 13). He goes on to say that often these tropes and images take the form of Us/Them constructions. In light of this statement, how does Ortiz, an American Indian artist and member of a small minority (in terms of comparative population numbers to other U.S. ethnic minorities) hail a consumer public, made up of the dominant culture and many other marginalized groups?
Ortiz does this through calculated brand messaging within his advertising. I compare two advertisements, one from the August 2007 edition of the *Santa Fean* and the other from one month later, to contrast their brand messaging and examine Ortiz’s subversive and compliant strategies in operation. In the August edition, Ortiz’s promotes his upcoming show, *Le Sauvage Primitif*, with a two-page advertisement (see Figure 25). Although a graphic of the VO™ trademark is ironically not featured in the ad, the VO™ logo is displayed on the models, be they human or canine, drawing attention to the product. A VO™ charm dangles from a chain on the leather clad lady and from her dog’s collar in the foreground. An additional VO™ tag is featured on a chain around one of the supposedly *sauvage primitifs* in grayscale in the background.

Another element for examination is the name of the show, *Le Sauvage Primitif*, which is written in stair step fashion in black, blood red, and gray text directly beneath
the familiar “X” and Ortiz’s full name with the “V” in Virgil and the “O” in Ortiz bolded. 

*Le Sauvage Primitif*, a French phrase, literally translates in English as “the primitive savage.” Ortiz’s other show and collection titles include *Turmoil, Distortion, Indigene,* and *Renegade.* The common denominator between these monikers is their location outside of the realms of peaceful mainstream society. The names in and of themselves are subversive and connote images that are dissident from the dominant culture.

An additional vital component for investigation is the American Indian model photographed in two different outfits – one more daytime-appropriate and societally conforming and the other more nighttime-appropriate and societally subversive. The binary opposition is obvious in the drastically different outfits. The *day lady* sports an aqua and black, knee-length, tartan plaid belted dress with a Jackie-O-type matching hood. She stands atop conservative black pumps with a wooden stacked heel and wood platform and carries a large cream VO™ bag with black tattoo-like organic graphics and silver metal stud detailing. Her alter ego, the *night lady,* dons an almost crotch-high black leather mini skirt and a form-fitting, metal, circle-studded black leather jacket with an innovative take on a French cuff. She wears provocative ankle-laced black leather platform pumps and carries her answer to Paris Hilton’s prissy pooch, a more menacing yet manageable Miniature Doberman Pincher. Both model and dog sport VO™ charms dangling from their necks.

Another binary is found in the juxtaposition of the in-color, foreground *day* and *night* lady in contrast to that of the in-grayscale, background fragmented *primitifs.* The *primitifs* include two males and a female. The female is featured from nose to waist in black leather gloves and a strapless black leather bodice with a metal spiked collar around
her neck. Both males sport feathers in their hair, black masking around their eyes, and
tattoos painted on their faces. The larger male image also has black organic tattoos
swirling around his chest and a VO™ charm hanging from a chain around his neck. The
background figures are far more in connotative sync with the night lady. However, the
background sauvage primitifs stretch the boundaries of mainstream society’s idea of an
edgy evening into full-scale savage/SMDS darkness.
Figure 26. Le Sauvage Primitif – Advertisement, September 2007

Like the 2009 website, the September 2007 advertisement (see Figure 26) is a more sophisticated version of the August ad. This full-page advertisement on a white background features the familiar “X” in the top left corner with Virgil Ortiz in black next to it. Once again the “V” in Virgil is bolded and the “O” in Ortiz is bolded. The words “POTTERY,” “ART,” “FASHION,” and “JEWELRY” are in gray, uppercase letters with
ochre colored dots separating them. Below these words is a mixed media triptych by Ortiz that features red, ochre, and blue panels with the same black-masked; feather-haired; black-tattooed; black leather loincloth-wearing *sauvage primitif* from the August ad. The red panel features his face. The ochre panel spotlights a fusing mirror image of him. The blue panel focuses on his body from eyes to thighs. Below the triptych in black text on the diagonal from top left to bottom right is the VO™ trademark and the words in all uppercase, block letters “EXCLUSIVELY AVAILABLE @” and “URSA” written in a bold black script. Centered at the bottom of the page in small black block-lettered text is information about the gallery. An off-center, upside-down watermark of the VO™ trademark in grainy gray is visible through the triptych and carries on down to the bottom of the page where it is cropped off.

The September version subtly packages many of Ortiz’s mediums under the house of VO™ as evidenced by the triple visibility of the brand – in the trademark, in the watermark, and the bolded letters of his name. This advertisement does not as much promote a particular product as it promotes the entire VO™ brand. The exotic images and sophisticated stylings beckon audiences to not only purchase a product but also to procure a lifestyle. While both the August and September ads are effective, the later version washes over audiences, like the watermark materializing within it, coaxing them into the brand buy-in. Whereas, the earlier version obliges audiences to expend more energy deconstructing the products and their messages. Both versions, however, feature race/ethnicity as a primary component – an element that is rarely featured in personal branding yet is often the focus in brand messaging.
Ortiz’s Identity-Based Branding

Ortiz has an acute sense of identity, as is demonstrated through his art. He parleys this identity acuity into his branding efforts to participate in an offshoot construct of branding termed “identity-based branding” (Burmann, Hegner & Riley, 2009, p. 113). Christensen and Cheney state, “The market of today seems to be demanding well-crafted identities, identities that are able to stand out and break through the clutter” (as cited in Lair et al., 2005, p. 312). Identity-based branding responds to the market’s demands. Branding is tailor-made to communicate images as identity in order to cut through the congested world of communication (Lair et al., 2005). Lair et al. explain:

The personal branding movement to some extent relies upon the image of an independent, resourceful, creative, and aggressive professional. This person is expected to be agile in a fluctuating job market, responsive to any opportunities, self-motivating, and self-promoting. (p. 318)

Although the image Lair et al. presents is made in reference to the jobseeker operating in the corporate world, the image’s characteristics are applicable to artist/marketers, like Ortiz, operating within the consumer world.

Burmann et al. (2009) describe identity-based branding as a type of branding that manages itself from the inside out, meaning from the standpoint of the owner/manager of the brand rather than the standpoint of the consumer’s notion of the brand image. Ortiz’s uses identity-based branding to market himself and his art, as this approach allows him to draw from the various forms of identity that he avows, that are ascribed to him, and that he wishes he could claim. Ortiz exercises signification sovereignty when crafting and presenting these identities to the consumer public. Ortiz’s numerous real and imagined identities stemming from the personal, collective, cultural, etc. function self-reflexively
and strategically to craft a personal brand image and a public persona, which consumers desire yet are not responsible for dreaming up. For example, as Ortiz demonstrates in his advertisements, he relies on his identity avowals as an American Indian and a renegade, which are both alluring and abhorrent to mainstream society, to craft his personal brand persona and public persona.

This type of identity-based branding is a two-dimensional process that relies on an internal stakeholder to shape an identity that becomes a brand persona, which external stakeholders can identify with and subsequently, consume (Burmann et al., 2009). In other words, brand identity is on the sender/owner/manager’s side and brand image is on the receiver/consumer side. Identity-based branding could be accused of falling prey to promoting “hyper-individuality based on a lack of deeper identity and self-awareness” (p. 314) and reductionistic identity articulations that Lair et al. refer to with regards to personal branding and its design.

In response to these two criticisms, I make two points. First, hyper-individuality does not necessarily convey that the owner/manager of the brand lacks a more profound sense of her/himself, rather the case is that the personal brand, brand persona, and/or public persona communicated to society lack the ability to be self-reflexive. Second, as long as personal identity can be ultimately distinguished from the personal brand, brand persona or public persona by the sender/owner/manager and the receiver/consumer, there is little harm in engagement with reductionism as a marketing strategy, especially if the sender/owner/manager, and in Ortiz’s case, the artist is in charge of these reductionistic tactics. In the end, as Hearn explains in her comments that are paired with Montoya’s:
Like all branding practices, you are hoping to colonize a piece of real estate in the mind of your consumer, as YOU Inc.: ‘Personal Branding is about taking control of the processes that affect how others perceive you, and managing those processes strategically to help you achieve your goals’. (p. 206)

As if heeding Hearn and Montoya’s directives, Ortiz – through self-knowledge, strategic vision, and an ability to either self promote, publicize, and package himself or hire the best people to accomplish these goals – shifts from the state of being colonized to that of becoming the colonizer.

Personal Branding

An offshoot of branding is termed personal branding. Lair et al. (2005) explain this progression:

The progress from consumer branding to company branding to the branding of a person and a career is hardly surprising when we consider the push for consolidating the branding movement via an ideology of individual efficacy, identity, and control. In a way, this development represents the ultimate marriage of marketing culture with the mythos of the American individual: In a world of change and opportunity, you can create and recreate yourself so as to be the master of your own destiny. (p. 314)

They explain this relatively new marketing strategy as a communicative response to an economic condition. They state, “Taking control of your own success and security in a turbulent economy through the development of a personal brand becomes even more urgent as personal branding becomes more popular” (Lair et al., p. 321). Hearn (2008) adds, “The practice of self-branding is clearly expressed and delineated in current management literature as a necessary strategy for success in an increasingly complex corporate world” (p. 198), and I add consumer world. Obviously, personal branding is framed as a necessary and in some cases, natural response to consumer capitalism. But what is it about personal branding that makes it so successful?
In the following sections I attempt to answer this question by clearly defining personal branding, giving shape to its scope with regards to my research, and referencing personal branding’s origins. Moreover, I reveal the focus, function, and discursive positioning of personal branding.

As previously mentioned, personal branding is often defined and understood along corporate lines. However, this project concerns itself more with marketing both art and artist for circulation in the consumer arena, rather than marketing a jobseeker for circulation in the corporate realm. Hearn says, “In the case of self-branders, however, we see a highly self-conscious process of self-exploitation, performed in the interests of material gain or cultural status” (p. 204). Self-exploitation, however, implies taking unfair advantage of oneself. In Ortiz’s case, I frame the process more as his maximization of embodied and objectified economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986/2002).

Tom Peters is generally credited with the term personal branding, a movement that emerged in the late 1990s following the success of his article entitled, The Brand Called You, in an edgy business magazine, Fast Company (Lair et al., 2005). They point out that self-help guru Peter Montoya also “lays claim to pioneering the concept in 1997” (Lair et al., p. 318).

Although the founders are noteworthy, the focus, function, operation, and positioning of personal branding are the more salient contexts to this project. First, Lair et al. relay the focus of personal branding:

Rather than focusing on self-improvement as the means to achievement, personal branding seems to suggest that the road to success is found instead in explicit self-packaging: Here, success is not determined by individuals’ internal sets of skills, motivations, and interests but, rather, by how effectively they are arranged, crystallized, and labeled – in other words, branded. (p. 308)
This statement should not suggest that the person behind the brand is but a mere fraction of his/her representation but that, in fact, the brand is the most calculated incarnation and polished presentation of the person, and in Ortiz’s case, of him personally, his public persona, and his personal brand. Understandably then, the word that is emphasized in the above quote is “packaging” and for good reason. Personal packaging plays a crucial role in an individual’s personal marketing campaign and is explored later with regards to Ortiz.

Moving on to the function of personal branding, Hearn (2008) explains, “The function of the branded self is purely rhetorical; its goal is to produce cultural value and, potentially, material profit” (p. 198). Lair et al. (2005) add, “At its most general level the rhetoric of personal branding encourages and endorses the process of turning oneself into a product – in effect, engaging in self-commodification” (p. 319). In essence, personal branding offers the promise of self-sovereignty through self-commodification by enabling an individual to craft his/her own brand for sale. This self-sovereignty pledge attempts to guarantee ownership of the product, a.k.a. the self, to insure that these enmeshed entities (product/self) produce a profitable outcome.

In order to reach this prized self-sovereign and self-sufficient market end result, personal branding operates in a specific way as described below with idiosyncratic nuances constructed by the individuals involved in shaping the brand’s form. For example, Hearn (2008) explains:

…Current inflections of self-branding are the product of an economy and culture in the West intent on constant innovation and flexibility. Work on the production of a branded ‘self’ involves creating a detachable, saleable image or narrative, which effectively circulates cultural meanings. (p. 198)
To this end, an individual must create a personal brand and/or public persona that are able to connect her/his identities to the desires of consumers without being subsumed by them. In Ortiz’s case, the branding of his personal brand and his personal branding efforts are co-constructed, co-promoted, and thoroughly enmeshed in order to increase overall brand value, monetary gain, and public recognition.

Montoya states, “A personal brand (is) built on the person’s true character, values, strengths and flaws” (as cited in Hearn, 2008, p. 205). The reference to, “true,” is a loaded term that complicates notions of the authentic self. Montoya clarifies, “A Personal Brand is not you; it’s the public projection of your personalities and abilities. That doesn’t mean you are losing ‘you the person’; it does mean you are shaping the perception people have of ‘you the person’” (as cited in Lair et al., 2005 p. 324). This shaping of you is in fact the creation of a persona for public consumption. Wernick meticulously explains the promotional practice of crafting a persona:

The subject that promotes itself constructs itself for others in line with the competitive imaging needs of its market….a persona produced for public consumption – is marked by the transformative effects of the promotional supplement….It is a self which continually produces itself for competitive circulation: an enacted projection, which includes not only dress, speech, gestures, and actions, but also, through health and beauty practices, the cultivated body of the actor; a projection which is itself, moreover, an inextricable mixture of what its author/object actually has to offer, the signs by which this might be recognized, and the symbolic appeal this is given in order to enhance the advantages which can be obtained from its trade” (p. 193).

Developing a personal brand than becomes about both strategic crafting of a public persona with attention to packaging and about a targeted launching of a carefully managed publicity campaign that generates maximum visibility for this persona (Hearns). In Ortiz’s situation, this public persona that is a product of his personal branding
endeavors also serves to advocate on behalf of, represent, and become enmeshed with his personal brand, VO™.

As a result of this unpacking of the focus, function and operation of personal branding, one can conclude that as Hearn states, “The branded self sits at the nexus of discourses of neoliberalism, flexible accumulation, radical individualism, and spectacular promotionalism” (p. 201). Personal branding then claims lodging at the following intersections: of free markets and free trade; of new technologies and sophisticated networking and organizational structures that help to compress the time-space continuum; of individual pursuits over participation in social organizations and institutions; and within the saturation-point for active advocation and advancement of products, people, organizations, and causes. As such, personal branding becomes about capitalizing on the current state of society by having a clear understanding of the concept of identity in all of its forms and all of its intersecting possibilities in order to position oneself and one’s brand in the most advantageous space.

**Ortiz’s Personal Branding**

The question arises as to how Ortiz comes to occupy this advantageous space. He situates himself in it by paying considerable attention to self-promotion through personal packaging and publicity. First, there are personal packaging considerations to examine. Lair et al. (2005) point to celebrity personal branding exemplars such as Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, and Madonna to further explain packaging:

…They speak to a long history of professional packaging movements: Carnegie’s (1936/1982) *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, first published in 1937; the 1970s ‘Dress for Success’ movement; and *Games Mother Never Taught You* (Harragan, 1977), to name a few that promise to give individuals control over
their own economic destiny by shaping the package they present to others. (p. 313)

These icons represent the ultimate personal packagers through vigilant crafting of themselves and their public personas through personal aesthetics and professional projects. By in large, every piece of clothing, every statement, every endorsement, every affiliation, etc. is carefully considered with regards to the public’s perception of these choices.

Ortiz follows in the footsteps of his predecessors and manages to become a master craftsman of public perception when it comes to his personal packaging as contained in the discourse that mentions him. For example, Ringlero (2006) observes, “Nevertheless, as edgy as his persona is perceived, Ortiz is inherently a village man whose surrealistic clay art forces audiences to gaze at the absurd stereotypes and outsider status of everyone through the eyes of another” (p. 28). How does Ortiz personally package himself to create this public persona balanced between modern and ancient and edgy and approachable?

Two of the ways he perpetuates this Sybil-like public persona are through his personal statements and his personal appearance. Ortiz says, “People say I’m doing all this way-out stuff, but it’s not new” (as cited in Fauntleroy, 1999, p. 28). Fauntleroy notes that he makes this comment while “dressed in black and leaning against a futon sofa in the black-draped living room in his Santa Fe apartment” (p. 28). Ortiz’s self-effacing observation, which draws attention to the edginess of his work while at the same time downgrading it to a more approachable position, achieves this goal of constructing a balanced public persona. His choice to conduct the interview wearing black garments in his black-draped personal space creates a mystique around him.
Another description of Ortiz that achieves this balance yet adds to his mystique comes from Servin (2003):

With his long hair, numerous piercings and penchant for wearing Marilyn Mason-ish contact[s] that distort or blank out the eyes, Ortiz lives the Goth aesthetic. Until, that is, he returns to Cochiti Pueblo, where his family gathers every month or two. When he visits, Ortiz takes care to put everyone at ease. Off come the scary contact lenses. (p. 1)

Ortiz adds, “It’s a small pueblo, and I don’t dress like that around here. They understand the deal; it’s all artwork” (as cited in Servin, p. 2).

Ortiz’s acknowledge of his public persona as just one of his many works of art in contrast to his private person on the pueblo reveals that Ortiz knows how to place himself in the appropriate niche to be deemed a player rather than the played. He creates a trendy, subversive public persona for some audiences to identify with and contrasts that to a traditional, serene private person for others to identify with to cover a large portion of the consumer market. He then draws attention to these contrasting personal images through his publicity efforts. Deats confirms of Ortiz, “…he sports piercings and tight leather clothing that make him a walking piece of performance art….When he goes home he leaves pop culture behind and becomes a free man again” (as cited in Touchette, 2003, p. 122). Ortiz adds, “The commercial world can be a lot of fun, but you have to watch your back in that environment. Friends and family are where it’s at” (as cited in Touchette, p. 122). Overall, Ortiz manages to walk that fine line between the worlds of public persona and private person by sublimely revealing that he knows that the whole journey through the marketing maze is a game. Whether complicit or subversive, Ortiz is in it to win it for himself, his community, and American Indians.
Publicity gained through self-promotional efforts, such as the interviews referenced above, often evinces into fame and celebrity. To distinguish between fame and celebrity Barry (2008) clarifies:

The engines of fame – royal recognition, state honours, religious canonization, the laurels of artistic achievement – in fact operate side by side with the engines of celebrity – the popular press, the circulation of printed images, theatre and music hall, public trials and hangings – in the early modern and Enlightenment world, as well as in our own. (p. 252)

In fact, Ortiz manages both fame and celebrity through artistic achievement; strategic personal branding; and calculated publicity, promotion, and advertising efforts in behalf of his personal brand, VO™. As evidence, Ringlero (2006) proclaims, “Virgil Ortiz is a supernova in the pantheon of stars of the American Indian art world” (p. 28).

Much of Ortiz’s fame and celebrity are products of his efforts to manage the mediums through which these conditions (fame and celebrity) are spawned. However, he also garners fame and celebrity from his nominations for and accumulations of various arts prizes, which in turn imbricate the increased value of the VO™ brand with the enhancement of his public persona. According to Street (2005), the “arts prize” (p. 820) indicates quality to the consumer and “nomination for an arts prize, let alone eventual victory, almost always results in increased sales” (p. 834). Nomination for or actually winning an arts prize has additional effects including the following: increases in artist bargaining power and status; validation of certain cultural forms that help to bridge the gap between critical acclaim and commercial success; recognition and/or legitimization of an unfamiliar genre in the mainstream; impact on the balance of power between the independent and the major sectors of the culture industry; and provocation of public discourse on art and artistic merit (Street, 2005). Street states, “The prize can be seen as a
form of the ‘consecration’ of art and artists that Bourdieu (1993, 1996) sees as essential to an account of the production of culture” (p. 821). He continues:

...We need to understand the arts prize as a particular kind of media event, one that is constructed through the actions of a variety of stakeholders (sponsors, media institutions, culture industries) and then deployed in the making and marketing of cultural artifacts. (p. 820)

I point out that in addition to Street’s list of stakeholders, the nominees and award recipients are also stakeholders, who can utilize the arts prize/media event to create additional publicity opportunities for themselves.

For example, through Ortiz’s garnering of a long list of nominations and awards including but not limited to the following stand-outs: the Heard Museum Guild 2004 Indian Fair and Market Award; the 2006 Santa Fe Indian Market Poster Artist; and the 2007 USA Target Fellow, Ortiz gains increased celebrity status. With increased status comes increased media attention and more varied coverage. For example, this star-artist status translates to a shift in press placement for Ortiz. Where once Ortiz might have only been mentioned or featured in an article having to do with art or artists, his celebrity status produced, in part, by receipt of arts prizes now deems him celebrity-worthy enough to be included in the Scene section of the Santa Fean, a glossy monthly magazine. The magazine taps into the homonymic nature of the word Scene, to cover the Santa Fe social scene and those who warrant being seen within it. Although additional publicity can only increase brand value, Deats (2003) cautions:

A young, brilliant, witty, terminally hip Native American artist is a magnet for mainstream media attention. Wannabe Indians and stimulus junkies feast on the excitement of edgy and powerful imagery without fully appreciating the traditions, the humor, the irony, and the excellence of the work. The artist is in danger of becoming a captive of fame. (p. 122)
However, on the heels of this quote Deats assures, “Virgil Ortiz has remained his own man” (p. 122). I concur based on Ortiz’s marketing actions, which demonstrate a keen sense of how far to push the public persona in order to capitalize on the market without losing one’s self.

Ortiz’s arts prizes function in more socially transformative capacities than as simple star-makers. His awards and nominations provoke discussion about American Indian traditional and contemporary art and artists, and incite debates about individualistic versus committed standpoints in American Indian art. Furthermore, Ortiz’s nominations and awards legitimize non-traditional American Indian art and broaden the public’s exposure to such examples. This provocation of discussion and extension in reach has the additional effect of communicating a broadened spectrum of considerations for American Indian representation and identity articulations to both the dominant culture and American Indians. By providing self-promoting materials to the press that feature his achievements, Ortiz participates in an aspect of the dominant culture’s adherence to the rhetoric of meritology that has varied effects.

Over and above distributing self-promotional materials to the press, Ortiz complies with this mainstream meritology mythos as demonstrated by his decision to create the VO™ brand in the first place, constituting the penultimate culmination of personal branding efforts. Personal branding provides a path for individuals to navigate an unstable economy and to take responsibility for their futures by recapturing “the ideals of self-reliance and self-sufficiency embodied in American icons such as Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Horatio Alger” (Lair et al., 2005, p. 323). They continue:
The highly individualistic nature of personal branding resonates strongly with the by-your-own-bootstrap mythos that has historically played a central role in American culture in general and American business culture in particular, as well as with the neoliberal economic philosophy that has become so prominent for many Western governments. (p. 322)

By participating in and refusing to challenge this meritology mythos, as demonstrated by Ortiz’s continued self-promotion, Ortiz becomes a complicit participant in the rhetoric of meritology that is veiled with the “rhetoric of tokenism” (Cloud, 1996, p. 122). This tokenistic rhetoric carries with it a number of other destructive “isms” such as racism, classism, sexism, etc. Ortiz functions as an American Indian token much like Cloud accounts for the framing of Oprah Winfrey. Cloud defines a token:

…As a persona who is constructed from the character and life of a member of a subordinated group, and then celebrated, authorized to speak as proof that the society at large does not discriminate against members of that group. Narratives about the culture token ‘advertise a promise of mobility’ by emphasizing the exceptional qualities of the token in a rhetorical justification of liberal meritocracy. (p. 123)

For example, in Ortiz’s case discourse loaded with tokenism and other “isms” circulates such as the following three examples:

In Virgil Ortiz we find a Native artist who is breaking down that stage, utilizing his traditions as inspiration for new work that moves well beyond the expected, therefore redefining any notions we may hold of traditional. These works are passionate expressions of the artist’s experience both real and imagined. (Baker, 2004, p. 2)

An artist who is very respectful of his Pueblo’s rules and traditions, he has nonetheless been able to extend his career beyond the city limits of Santa Fe. He shows in galleries across the USA and abroad. (Garth Clark Gallery, 2005, p. 1)

Ortiz is one of the new wave of Native American artists stretching the boundaries of traditional art, craft, and design. He’s as comfortable working with new media as he is with something as ancient as clay. Ortiz comes by it naturally. His mother, Seferina Ortiz, is an innovative potter whose pieces are sometimes satirical and often humorous depictions of figures. (McIntyre, 2004, p. 2)
The first statement positions Ortiz as a trailblazer who is “breaking down the stage” to move “well beyond the expected” and singles him out from other American Indians. The second quote refers to Ortiz’s by-the-bootstraps resolve that allows him to distinguish himself from other American Indian artists. The third assertion claims that Ortiz’s genetic predisposition to innovation, as passed from mother to son, is responsible for positioning him with an elite of group of unnamed “Native American artists” that serve as exceptional examples for all American Indians to follow. These statements are rife with essentialism, reductionism, and naturalism. While the museum curator, gallery representative, and journalist quoted above do not willingly intend to offend, belittle, or harm Ortiz, their tokenistic comments that actually feed into the discourse of meritology have potentially hazardous effects on Ortiz, American Indians, and all marginalized groups.

Cloud explains that the danger in the rhetoric of tokenism that supports the rhetoric of meritology is that these rhetorics “systematically obscure structure and system in favor of individualistic explanations of poverty and despair” (p. 134), which becomes particularly salient to American Indians who are the poorest marginalized group in the United States (Merskin, 2007). American Indians can then be made individually responsible for their own dismal economic situations rather than the systems that positioned them in these bleak spaces. I doubt Ortiz is in favor of the circulation of these types of potentially harmful rhetorics. However, his self-promotional activities that ultimately help to distinguish him from other American Indians and other American Indian artists; his promotional activities that publicize those distinguishing merits; and his lack of challenge to the circulation of these rhetorics overall, position him as complicit in
this process. Not only is Ortiz faced with navigating personal branding and identity issues with regards to meritology and tokenism, but also he is faced with considerations of ethnicity/race, culture, and authenticity that affect his personal brand.

Scholars attempt to explain identity complications that arise due to ethnicity/race. Communication scholars provide a reason for the lack of ethnicity/race presence in personal branding, which by extension impacts Ortiz’s personal branding efforts that consequently, affect his personal brand, VO™. Lair et al. (2005) state, “We believe that by ignoring issues of race, personal branding functions to keep the image of the White professional intact. The message is clear in its absence: Race does not appear to be a brandable characteristic” (p. 333). They go on to state that personal branding “leaves little room for alternative identities” (p. 332). Turney (1999), a sociologist, explains the constraints that ethnicity/race place on art production:

…Artists of colour are often labeled by their ‘ethnicity’ and considered incapable of producing art that is about anything other than their people, history and ‘culture’. Bound or particularized by their ‘ethnicity’, they are denied the universality that, it seems, is the privilege of the ‘white’ ‘western’ artist. (p. 428)

However, Ortiz escapes these constraints for several reasons. First, when scholars address personal branding they are speaking in terms that have applications to corporate rather than consumer markets. Ortiz’s personal branding efforts are ultimately on behalf of his personal brand, VO™ not for the purpose of securing employment. Race is, in fact, an extremely brandable characteristic for his personal brand development and any promotional activities that aid in this development. For example, by moving into a more universal, mainstream, mass-produced medium like fashion, Ortiz manages to escape the constraints of being bound to his ethnicity/race through production of traditional arts and
into a space where he can use his ethnicity/race and culture to actually trade off these identities to hail consumers.

Ortiz also escapes these constraints through mimesis, or in other words, by mimicking the dominant culture’s favored tactics of binary constructionism, exoticism, essentialism, and commodification in his art and through his promotional efforts that include website development and advertising. Ortiz reclaims these effective tactics for his use in brand building and messaging. Irigaray (as cited in Clifford, 2001) unpacks the subtle strategy of mimesis by explaining that it is the deliberate conversion of forms of subordination into affirmations that thus begins to foil the offending subordinations. She continues, “Through mimesis, identity itself is turned into a political stratagem whereby what had been invisible and taken for granted is now re-presented in such a way that it is rendered visible and, as such, problematic” (p. 166). In Ortiz’s situation, this identity is not only rendered visible but consumable. Ortiz re-claims the savage, puts him up for sale, and manifests the Savage Noble in tandem – no small feat.

Ortiz’s art and his marketing invite audiences to consume the Other similar to bell hook’s notion of “eating the other” (1994, p. 75). Crockett says that the “Consuming the Other” (Crockett, 2008, p. 255) strategy entails implicitly promising the audience symbolic appropriation of appealing cultural traits through product consumption. Ortiz promises entry into the exotic and forbidden through the purchase of his fashions. He provides inclusion in an inside cultural joke through an investment in his monos, and he dangles authenticity access through the procurement of his pots.

His promotional efforts, which include personal branding and personal brand building are centered on making connections to authentic American Indiannness. Turney
(1999) states, “…The question of authenticity holds a great deal of currency at a myriad of different levels in the struggles for a voice, self-determination and resources in contemporary US society” (p. 424). This claim proves true in the art world, as well. She continues, “The value attached to objects is often enhanced by the knowledge that they have been produced by ‘real’ Indians. As such, the ‘authenticity’ of the artist holds a market value of its own…” (p. 425). Botterill (2007) explains how authenticity claims are possible, “Individuals who were marginalized from prevailing social norms, or rebellious toward them, became exemplars of authenticity, because they appeared to resist or somehow escape the social process that thwarted quests for authenticity” (p. 111). She also adds, “According to Trilling, in the late 19th century, the character type of the artist came to epitomize the ideas of authenticity” (p. 112). Through Ortiz’s avowals and self-promotion, wherein he claims both an American Indian and a renegade artist’s identity, he positions himself as doubly authentic, if such a condition exists. Even after experiencing the fruits of his labor, Ortiz continues to strategically construct, position, and promote himself as an authentic American Indian artist who is pushing the boundaries of traditional notions of American Indian representation and identity. Through his marketing efforts, Ortiz makes American Indianness desirable, covetable, consumable, and ultimately, profitable.

The fact that Ortiz is part of an artistic industry rather than the white-collar corporate arena makes this strategy more operable. By featuring essentialized and exotic referents to ethnicity/race and American Indian culture, such as feathers and body paints; and by playing into binaries that pit day lady against night lady and modern day woman against le sauvage primitif; and by commodifying the overall mystique of the American
Indian, Ortiz’s brand messaging communicates several notions. The message is one of uniqueness within a mass produced world. It also promises the ability to shapeshift from conformist to rebel, day to night, and savage to civilized. Moreover, the message conveys authenticity through both its source and design. By both complying with and challenging the dominant culture’s notions of American Indianness, Ortiz manages to free himself from the shackles of the dominant culture’s imposition of ethnic/racial and cultural categorizations to claim representational self-sovereignty through his control of essentialism, exoticism, and commodification. Ortiz’s production of representational self-sovereignty through these acts of reclamation enables him to decide which authenticity markers are privileged and which are marginalized.

This allusion to authenticity brings me to the question of how Ortiz remains authentic while carrying out all of these artistic and marketing activities. The answer is not as much about whether he remains true to self, but given the stakes, whether the public perceives both artist and art as authentic because the public determines the profits. Botterill (2007) found that “authenticity is encoded by depicting a tension between work, formality and rules, and play, rejection, [and] creativity” (p. 118). Ortiz takes this notion one step further by depicting multiple tensions within his art, his personal branding, and his personal brand. Botterill examines advertisements for jeans, which “have a historical connection to the counter-culture that donned them in opposition to the grey flannel suit” (p. 114) to conclude that a “recurring mise-en-scène, which variously emphasized escape, challenge, and/or relaxation from formal rules” (p. 115) functions to encode authenticity.
These odes to authenticity are discernible in Ortiz’s art and marketing. As evidence, I offer the inclusion of the photo of the pot examined in Chapter 5 called, \textit{Warrior}, that ran in conjunction with an article by Fauntleroy about Ortiz in the August 2006 edition of the \textit{Santa Fean}. The vessel’s inclusion in the article’s layout – whether planned by Ortiz or his \textit{people} or whether chosen by the article’s author or magazine’s editor – builds on this authenticity motif that becomes enfolded in Ortiz’s personal branding and personal brand.

Botterill (2007) in speaking about the “black gangsta” explains that this figure is “one in a long line of popular cultural anti-heroes” that “serve as authentic enticements when recast from criminals who threaten the community into heroes struggling against a wider social system that threatened the ‘true community’ or ‘authenticating powers of the self’” (p. 120). By including this gun-toting warrior character on the pot and in the article, Ortiz challenges and calls attention to those systems, institutions, and groups that endanger the very idea of authenticity through his employment of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, 1987). Lee (2006) explains:

In countering the bugbear of authenticity, indigenous groups have made excellent use of what has been aptly named ‘strategic essentialism’, reinventing themselves as First Nations or First Peoples. Here arises a serious point of conflict between anthropologist and ‘natives’. While anthropologists critique the discourse of ‘primitivism’ that orientalizes and distances indigenous peoples, the people themselves may be saying: ‘Don’t take that away from us. We can use it to our advantage!’ (p. 470)

Ortiz takes full advantage of this strategy both within his work and through his marketing by invoking the trope of modern primitivism; the rhetoric of SMDS; and through reclaiming exoticism, fetishism, essentialism and commodifying them to construct American Indian representations as he deems appropriate to achieve his business goals.
Ortiz’s manner of employing strategic essentialism is similar to the way that Turney (1999) explains controversial artist, Jimmie Durham’s employment of this strategy with regards to American Indian authenticity:

… by skil[l]fully using irony as a subversive strategy, his work makes unstable the notion of the ‘authentic’ and centralizes the political nature of identity formation, i.e. the assertion and negation of identity is a political act, the question being to think about how Native identities have been constructed within a specific discourse. (p. 435)

Ortiz uses humor and irony in his art and his marketing. With regards to his work, for example, his monos function to reclaim a previously outlawed art form, which incorporates humor by parodying the dominant culture. Ortiz’s artistic homage to these historical clay embodiments re-visits history, and in so doing, liberates American Indians from the dominant gaze. With regards to his marketing, Ortiz employs irony in the spotlighting of binaries and seemingly discordant elements to confront hegemonic notions of American Indian representation and identity. He plays with them. He tries them on. He teases them out. He make-believes. And in so doing, Ortiz makes us believe.

In light of all of Ortiz’s artistic, personal branding, and brand building activities, it is easy to give into cynicism and suspicion and begin to question his motives and end goals. Lair et al. (2005) pose a provocative question, “For example, how might savvy, self-reflexive, or even cynical appropriations of personal brands actually lead to a form of social transformation – on the level of the individual, organizational, professional community, or even beyond?” (p. 337). In order to arrive at an answer to this thought-provoking overarching query, I present three statements that prompt additional questions about Ortiz. I eventually answer the overarching query by undertaking this question/answer process.
First, Hearn (2008) states:

The branded self is one of the more cynical products of the era of the flexible personality: a form of self-presentation singularly focused on attracting attention and acquiring cultural and monetary value. The flexible, visible, culturally meaningful branded self trades on the very stuff of lived experience in the service of promotion and possible profit. (p. 213)

In light of this assertion, does Ortiz create and promote only for monetary gain and public recognition? To add more fuel to the cynic’s fire, Lair et al. (2005) point to Sennett’s 1998 book that delves into how personal branding distorts social relations. Social relations become strained or non-existent because individuals trying to navigate the consumer and corporate markets are obsessed with staying ahead of their competitors and as such are continually re-vamping themselves (Lair et al). Thus, this constant attention to self leaves little time for philanthropic endeavors. In light of this comment, does Ortiz lack concern for others and avoid profoundly contributing to society? Lair et al. also point out that the personal branding movement tends to promote individuals’ alienation. In light of this statement, is Ortiz operating only to fill his coffers with little regard for working with others to change the way the art business is conducted?

To answer these questions, Ortiz’s position on money and recognition and his commitment to community and collaboration are revealed in the following comments from Ortiz and the media. Regarding wealth, Ortiz states:

I travel outside to all these cities doing shows and I see how other people live and what they are striving for and realized, oh my god, it’s all right here. I have everything I need to be happy. The pueblo is where I’m supposed to be. We have all the dances, the ceremonies, the traditions and my whole family is there. You can’t be any richer that. (as cited in Gibson, 2005, p. 14)

Obviously, Ortiz is pleased by the richness that takes many forms in his life. Ortiz affirms, “I don’t plan to get rich from the pottery – it was a gift that was given to me. The
whole of making the pottery is one prayer…But I don’t have a problem accepting a million dollar check for clothing” (as cited in Andrews, 2004, p. 1). But where does this million dollars go – into Ortiz’s pockets, his community, his brand? As will be demonstrated through the examples below, Ortiz’s ambitions are in line with amassing personal wealth and with amassing wealth for the good of his tribal community.

Morris (2007) reveals that Ortiz has a secret mission and explains, “But Ortiz’s hidden agenda has always been for the greater good.” (p. 220). She says that he “has a master plan that pushes Cochiti tradition into fashion and film – all for the sake of the kids” (p. 34). Targos (2005) affirms, “While his pottery is created for the tradition, his fashion is for monetary profit….His focus is to build the V.O. line so that it creates funding for a school on the pueblo” (p. 2). Ortiz recalls:

My mom told me, ‘Don’t take advantage of the money you could have from pottery.’ The pottery is completely sacred. Not just to us, but to our pueblo and to all pueblos. That’s why I branched into fashion. And it worked. After Donna Karan, people came to the pueblo and bought pottery from my family. (as cited in Morris, 2007, p. 220)

Not only did the consumer public take notice of the Ortiz family’s pottery, they also zoomed in to focus on Virgil Ortiz, which enabled him to fulfill one of his dreams. Morris (2007) recounts:

Putting his money where his mouth is, Ortiz spent his entire savings to build a 4000-square-foot studio space at Cochiti, now called the Seferina Ortiz Light House Foundation in his mother’s honor. Each summer, five young pupils attend, and ‘I [Ortiz] teach them everything I know – from fashion to photography, to give them all the info they need to become an artist, like the backbone my mother and father gave me, and all of the people who helped me,’ he says. (p. 220)
As is evident, Ortiz’s profits result in profits for all Cochiti Pueblo peoples. Ortiz embodies the notion of collective identity that shifts the focus from “me” to “we” as is demonstrated by construction of this commemorative arts space.

Not only does Ortiz provide a structure that benefits his community, but also he takes on the challenge of saving his native language, Keres, from extinction and, in so doing, is re-invigorating cultural traditions and pride (Morris, 2007). Ortiz creates characters that he repeatedly features in various mediums, such as the femme fatale that fronts his Renegade t-shirt line, with the idea being that one day these characters can transition into a feature film (Morris). Fauntleroy (2006) comments on Ortiz, “One of his dreams is to transform clay characters into animated Keres-speaking superheroes, in DVD movies or PlayStation games” (p. 194). The hope is that including these familiar American Indian, Keres-speaking heroes in kid-friendly media formats will encourage Cochiti children to learn and speak their dying language. Moreover, the Cochiti children would have American Indian characters with whom they could identify, rather than stereotypes constructed and circulated by the dominant culture. Regarding American Indian stereotyping, Merskin (2007) cautions:

Not only does stereotyping communicate inaccurate beliefs about Natives to Whites, but also to Indians. Children, Native American included, are perhaps the most important recipients of this information. If, during the transition of adolescence, Native children internalize these representations that suggest Indians are lazy, obligated to willingly provide their native/natural bounty to Whites, or alcoholic by nature, and violent, this misinformation can have a lifelong impact on perceptions of self and others. (p. 22)

Through his efforts to make language acquisition “cool” (Morris, 2007, p. 81) and to make art instruction and art appreciation accessible, Ortiz engages in a battle to gain the hearts and minds of Cochiti Pueblo youth.
According to Morris (2007), the feature film is already in process and is centered on the 1680 Pueblo Revolt. Upon the film’s completion, Ortiz plans to enter it in the independent film circuit. So far, the video game is in the idea stage. Morris says that Ortiz would like to offer the video game to “any pueblo wanting to use it for educational purposes, with the ability to substitute other indigenous languages for Keres” (p. 81). To hedge his bets, Ortiz branches out into designing a graphic novel using these same recurring characters, also with the 1680 Pueblo Revolt theme, that serves as an alternative approach to potentially provoking a video game spin-off. Once again, Ortiz’s actions verify that his motives are inspired by the personal and the collective.

In light of this claim, alienation does not factor into Ortiz’s work ethic. Ortiz challenges the notion that personal branding and developing a brand centered around a person leads to alienation, as evidenced by his participation in collaborative work and cross-promotions with other American Indian artists and artists from the dominant culture. Ortiz says, “If I can move the art market through my work for more artists to be successful, then that’s what I want for all of us” (as cited in Ringlero, 2006, p. 28). He collaborates and cross-promotes with artists including but not limited to the following: Dancing Earth founder, choreographer, and dancer, Rulan Tangen (Metis); metalsmith Kenneth Johnson (Muscogee/Seminole); Native photographer, Larry Price (Diné Nation Navajo); fashion mogul, Donna Karan; and milliner, Kevin O’Farrell (Gibson, 2005; Price, 2005; Richardson, 2005; Heard, 2006; Morris, 2007). Ortiz uses his celebrity status, his art, and his brand as a launching pad for highlighting a collective of artists. Due to these efforts, the alienation that supposedly is a product of personal branding diffuses and is replaced by a collaborative energy that fuels a full-scale artists’ collective,
which serves to benefit each artist’s work, the artist as an individual, and the artist’s brand, if applicable.

To answer the three previously outlined questions that are concerned with personal gain instead of public good; lack of concern for or contribution to society; and personal venture instead of collaborative ventures, I point back to the evidence previously presented. I reiterate that Ortiz clearly positions himself as an artist concerned with both personal gain and public good. He claims that he developed his brand specifically to garner profits. He then funnels those profits back into his community where he constructs infrastructures that maintain cultural identity. He also collaborates with and cross-promotes other artists and their work. Thus, I conclude that Ortiz’s activities satisfy the requirements of being socially transformative so as to the answer the overarching query in the affirmative.

Ortiz demonstrates that personal branding, which results in creating something as valuable as a successful personal brand and public persona, can lead to monetary gain, public recognition, celebrity, and the bargaining power that comes with all of these developments. Through enlisting the media and engaging in publicity efforts, this bargaining power can then be used to shift the focus from an individual artist and his/her work/brand to an artists’ collective and their work/brands and back again to an individual artist and his/her work/brand. These focus shifts that garner public and media attention serve to build upon one another. By circulating and re-circulating creative and consumer energy through the cycle, the artist, the brand, and the artists’ collective continue to remain fueled. For instance, as Ortiz becomes more valuable so does the VOT™ brand, and hence his fellow artistic collaborative community. Ortiz’s continued promotional
efforts function to keep this cycle in motion. As such, this idea of personal brand building can translate into an actual building in society and a figurative building of society. In other words, Ortiz’s efforts can be considered socially transformative. His endeavors that resulted in the erection of a Cochiti community art’s space and in the potential for an American Indian-produced media product that helps to perpetuate a language and spawn innovative articulations of American Indian representation and identity serve as exemplars of such social transformations.

Virgil Ortiz - saint or sinner? His subversive and compliant approach to mainstream marketing techniques and to the dominant culture’s notions of American Indian representation and identity positions the artist in a provisional purgatorial state dependent upon how you, the reader, interpret the artist, his art, and his journey through the marketing maze. My investigation of Ortiz, his art, and his marketing amounts to only one, albeit rigorous, interpretation of the data.

In an effort to meticulously and responsibly probe the data, I revealed and outlined Ortiz’s manifestation of the Savage Noble. I addressed the overarching concept of branding and unpacked an offshoot of it referred to as identity-based branding that Ortiz’s employs. I unpacked Ortiz’s marketing efforts in relations to both types of branding and analyzed these examples to point out instances of subversion and compliance. I also addressed integral components of personal branding including personal packaging and publicity and detailed how Ortiz engaged these marketing techniques. Throughout this analysis, I examined how Ortiz’s choices both subverted and complied with mainstream marketing techniques and the dominant culture’s notions of American Indian representation and identity. I concluded by outlining how Ortiz’s
marketing efforts are socially transformative. In light of all of this attention paid to one individual, the question still remains, Virgil Ortiz – *saint* or *sinner*? Given his representational productions and identity articulations conveyed through his art and marketing, I venture to guess that he would wink and hope you would answer, “A little bit of both.”
I have always observed a singular accord between supercelestial ideas and subterranean behavior. (Montaigne, as cited in Susman, 1984, p. 271)

No one can understand unless, holding to his own nature, he respects the free nature of others. (Graffito written during French student revolt, May 1968 as cited in Tripp, 1987, p. 665)

We are not powerless today....By speaking, opposing the romanticization of our oppression and exploitation, we break the bonds with this colonizing past. We remember our ancestors, people of color – Native American and African, as well as those individual Europeans who opposed genocide in word and deed. We remember them as those who opened their hearts, who bequeathed us a legacy of solidarity, reciprocity, and communion with spirits that we can reclaim and share with others. We call on their knowledge and wisdom, present through generations, to provide us with the necessary insight so that we can create transformative visions of community and nation that can sustain and affirm the preciousness of all life (hooks, 1994, p. 205).

The relationship between American Indians and the dominant culture is long-standing and entrenched. From the first encounter between colonizer and colonized in the late 15th century, American Indians were sized up, categorized, and representationally contained. American Indians were relegated to the realm of the primitive savage and the arena of the irrational and undisciplined.

Since then, the dominant culture consistently constructs a myriad of American Indian representations that produce a variety of American Indian identities, with some being more favorable than others, but all eluding American Indian control. The dominant culture maintains their representational authority over American Indians by vigilantly attempting to permanently fix meaning through a variety of oppressive strategies and
tactics, such as essentialism, appropriation, fetishism, naturalism, exoticism, reductionism, and commodification, as constituted in and through the dominant discourse. In effect, the dominant discourse produces and positions American Indians as “‘subjects’ – figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge which the discourse produces” (Hall, 2003, p. 56). In other words, American Indians are, by in large, trapped in the dominant culture’s web of representational maneuvers and mired in ascribed identities based on Eurocentric frameworks.

In response, many American Indian artists, scholars, activists, lawyers, and leaders are challenging these constraining hegemonic representations and identities through counter discourses, social action, and legal maneuvers. I chose to focus on contemporary American Indian artists, with Ortiz taking center stage, because art is one medium where the silenced divine their voices.

Moreover, I pinpoint art because art functions constitutively and discursively to produce meaning. In other words, art, with its emphasis on the visual, is an alternate medium to textual, verbal, and nonverbal languages that often incorporates elements from each for the purposes of meaning making. Art provokes an overall gestalt that communicates an all-encompassing feeling or mood between artist and audience. Art operates on the symbolic, social, personal, and cultural communicative levels to construct representational politics. Art is not representationally mired in time: it continues to produce meanings that shape experiences. In other words, art functions discursively to circulate ideologies, whose power employed through these systems of representation constitutes all forms of social action, making the study of such art/representations paramount to understanding how definitions and knowledge are produced. As such, the
examination of the poetics and politics of both Ortiz’s and the dominant culture’s representations regarding American Indians proves an illuminating exercise to decipher how American Indian significations are being produced and how these significations are being interculturally and intraculturally conveyed.

Contemporary American Indian artists self-signify by negotiating their representations and identities via the production of counter discourses, wherein they often avail liquiessent counter strategies and tactics that keep meaning in flux. However, by no means does each artist produce the same species of counter discourse. These individually produced counter discourses share a clear-cut common thread – they all resist the dominant discourse in some manner. Although many American Indian contemporary artists use humor and irony either subtly or overtly in their work, each artist employs strategies and applies tactics that are unique to themselves and often unique to their tribe.

Smith (1995) elaborates on American Indian contemporary artists, like Ortiz, who participate in counter discourse productions:

They dare to experiment, to theorize, to argue and harangue, to tease and joke. They are not following anyone’s instructions. To use the parlance of the late nineteenth century, these Indians have ‘strayed off the reservation.’ (p. 7)

These representations that *retreat from the rez* often counter historicized versions of American Indians by depicting images that speak to immersion in both worlds (the dominant culture’s domain and the American Indian arena). These representations also speak from and to a variety of locations within those worlds such as the underground, the mainstream, the subculture, and the mass market.

By signifying difference via maintaining an *Other* construct, American Indian artists also retain the ability to symbolically close ranks around themselves to promote a
sense of cultural meaning and cultural selfhood (Hall, 1997). These moments of “strategic and positional” (Hall, 1996, p. 3) assembly act as threats to the dominant discourse, as they induce the buckling of longstanding cultural and social orders.

During these junctures, American Indian lead materializations of the *phantom spectre that is American Indian* that Smith (1995) alludes to become possible. These contemporary American Indian artists’ work illuminates a vast array of authentic representations that convey the intersection of American Indian individual, collective, and cultural identities and promote self-sovereignty and cultural sovereignty in tandem. Jojola (as cited in Büken, 2002) eloquently implores:

> The heavy burden falls on the shoulders of Native American craftsmen, writers, poets, dramatists, artists, producers, directors, educators, lawyers, and entrepreneurs to expose what it is like to be a Native American citizen in contemporary America. Moreover, ‘to stop Indian stereotypes from being perpetuated’ or to halt ‘the process of stereotyping by outsiders, direct roles in the image industry are [to be] sought by native people. Native people need to infuse the diversity of their cultures into such image making. This will take patience, since the task is to counter generations of distortions that have been accepted in the mainstream as truths. Playing Indian should no longer be a one-sided game.’ (p. 48)

Ortiz takes up this call to arms by maintaining as much control of his artistic representations and his marketing as is possible given the number of stakeholders involved in the production, distribution, display, and marketing of art. To date, the measure of self-sovereignty that Ortiz achieves is evident in both the mediums and the media in which he participates. Ortiz works alongside his fellow artists to produce a counter discourse that claims American Indian self-sovereignty, challenges hegemonic notions of American Indian representation and identity, and offers alternative American Indian archetypes for consideration.
Conclusions

In order to systematically understand how Ortiz and his art realize this goal of the creation of a politics of representation that impacts the communication of American Indian identity, I return to my three research questions. Regarding the first question that asks how Ortiz, his art, and the discourse surrounding both art and artist negotiate prevailing notions of American Indian representations, I provide an accounting of Ortiz’s strategies and tactics as enacted through his art and his marketing.

Ortiz invokes the trope of modern primitivism personally and within his art and his marketing via the following inclusions: the tribally-inspired tattoo motif present in much of his work; the organic elements such as fur, leather, and feathers featured in his fashions; and the incorporation of both the tribal tattoo referents and the organic elements featured on his models that glide down his runways and pose in his advertisements.

Ironically, this trope is both divisive and unifying with regards to American Indians and the dominant culture. The trope operates divisively, in that the mere presence of tattoos creates a politics by artistically spurring in-group/out-group situations. It also functions divisively to challenge dominant notions of the sacred body in favor of the subversive notion of the scarred body. Modern primitivism subverts conventional ideas on the body’s proper use and on where art should be located and displayed.

The trope is also divisive because it opens the door for a maneuver to be enacted by American Indians in opposition to the dominant culture’s determinations. The trope’s partiality towards tattoos taps into the notion of inscription, which pairs well with Ortiz’s employment of re-inscription tactics within much of his work. Representational re-inscription signals a re-emphasis on American Indian collective identity, which enables
more strategic moves that offer the possibility of American Indian self-determination and sovereignty of signification.

The trope also functions in a strangely and sadly unifying way, in that Ortiz’s artistic ode to ink in the form of tribal tattoos reminds audiences of the bond forever linking the dominant culture and American Indians that was sanctioned in ink and staged in blood. Finally, the trope functions in a unifying manner through its attention given to tribal tattoos that communicates a symbolic merging of Us and Them, as infused through the skin. Ortiz propels this co-mingling to the next level by featuring tribal tattoos and organic elements in his art and in his ads to spark a consuming the Other frenzy in the form of purchases.

Ortiz also uses the rhetoric of SMDS to communicatively operate in several significant ways through his work and in his promotions. The rhetoric of SMDS enables his work to reveal, call attention to, and subvert conventional notions of what it means to be dominant and submissive. By rendering these power relations visible, role fixation is questioned and tension is created between these roles that destabilizes traditional power dynamics. For example, audiences are forced to unpack binaries when they encounter his art and marketing rife with the rhetoric of SMDS. This unpacking serves to blur the lines between contrasting dynamics. In so doing, gray areas emerge out of black and white that serve as bridges and spaces of negotiation. SMDS also blurs nostalgic American Indian representations in order to invoke transformative ones that spur a broadened spectrum of American Indian identity articulations for consideration.

Moreover, SMDS referents implore audiences to explore gendered power dynamics and to challenge hegemonically constructed gender roles. His work employs
cultural syncretism that affirms American Indian cultural/artistic expressions while at the same time challenges the dominant ideology with regards to American Indians and the mainstream’s endorsement of patriarchal vanilla sex. The rhetoric of SMDS also comments on the existing condition wherein all identity groups, with the exception of white, heterosexual males, appear to be chained to the patriarch.

SMDS’s destabilization of traditional power dynamics encourages role playing, which allows audiences to walk in both worlds – dominant and submissive; male and female; saint and sinner; dominant culture and American Indian. Through engagement in this symbolic role playing audiences can begin to delineate power and status between dominance and submission, which translates to this same demarcation occurring between the dominant culture and American Indians. Through the employment of the rhetoric of SMDS, Ortiz encourages the use of consensuality and negotiation to move towards modifying intercultural power quotients, which, in turn, empowers both groups.

Ortiz highlights the rhetoric of SMDS and the trope of modern primitivism particularly in his non-traditional vessels, fashions, and via his marketing that are party to American Indian cultural commodification. Ortiz commandeers exoticism and fetishism of American Indians to result in personal and cultural financial gain and provisionary self and cultural sovereignty. Through Ortiz’s pastiche, his art and brand marketing operate to both counter conventional constructions of what is fashionable and culturally affirm an American Indian/Cochiti/Ortiz lifestyle aesthetic. Within these examples, SMDS and modern primitivism move from operating as communicative tactics that question, challenge, role-play, and negotiate to operating more as intersectional and liberatory strategies.
Audiences are wooed into wanting the liberatory effects of the *walking in both worlds* experience that his contemporary vessels, fashions, and promotional activities promise. While, at the same time, audiences are being constrained by Ortiz’s engagement of their free will, as captivated by the tantalizing textiles of the American Indian *Other.* Ortiz’s use of these tactics lures the dominant culture to not merely gaze at the *Other* but actually to want to embody the *Other.* This play with fetishism locates Ortiz in the all-powerful position of the voyeur that gets to watch as consumers fetishize the *Other.* As often is the case in American Indian contemporary art, Ortiz’s work reverses the gaze and sanctions audiences to be questioned or judged rather than judging the pieces themselves.

Ortiz and his work counter conventional constructions of American Indian representation. Through foray into his fashions, entry into the exotic and forbidden is promised. Through investment in his monos, inclusion in an inside joke is provided. Through procurement of his pots, a connection to authenticity is established. Through his art, Ortiz always manages to return the gaze with a wink.

Ortiz’s marketing incorporates this same ethos. Ortiz’s marketing negotiates prevailing notions of American Indian representations by positioning Ortiz in the driver’s seat to produce his own constitutions of American Indian representation towards whatever ends he desires. He crafts these constitutions through his personal brand development, strategic personal branding, accumulation of arts prizes; and calculated publicity, promotional, and advertising efforts, which notably and simultaneously imbricate and implicate one another.

By understanding the overall *marketing machine* and the value of personal branding in the development of a personal brand, Ortiz crafts a trendsetting, dissident
public persona that is in stark contrast to his traditional, tranquil private self. He then publicizes those conflicting images, resulting in greater access to multiple consumer target markets and increased fame and celebrity.

He both garners and extends his fame and celebrity by amassing arts prizes, which re-surface the following topics for discussion and consideration that are beneficial to countering prevailing notions of American Indian representations: 1) American Indian traditional and contemporary art and artists; 2) individualistic versus committed standpoints in American Indian art; and 3) public exposure and legitimization of non-traditional American Indian art.

However, in an effort to maximize his fame and celebrity, Ortiz also complies with the dominant culture’s adherence to the rhetorics of meritology and tokenism by willingly publicizing these achievements and through the development of his own brand, VO™. Ortiz’s espousal of these rhetoric’s harmful messages, which spotlight the notion that individual American Indians should take responsibility for bettering their circumstances rather than highlighting the discourses and systems that position them in these difficult conditions in the first place, is controversial.

Ortiz also complies with the dominant culture’s prevailing notion that American Indians operate collectively yet subverts the scholarly opinion that participation in personal branding is an alienating endeavor, as demonstrated by his collaboration with and cross-promotion of other American Indian and dominant culture artists.

In contrast, Ortiz subverts the prevailing representational notion of American Indians as relics stuck in time and as a dying people through the creation of his valuable and commercially successful brand. His promotional and branding efforts also subvert the
academic community’s questioning of personal branding as a socially transformative mechanism. Ortiz’s personal branding efforts that result in the culmination of a prodigiously profitable brand enable capital, vibrancy, and hope to be injected into his Cochiti community. Ortiz’s entrepreneurial efforts provide the Cochiti Pueblo with a literal arts’ space and the figurative prospect of Keres language acquisition/continuance program through youth-friendly media. In other words, Ortiz, his art, and his marketing operate as socially transformative entities that literally and figuratively build societies.

In order to achieve and maintain this level of effectiveness, Ortiz closely manages the mediums through which American Indian representations are produced such as his website and his advertisements. Ortiz’s trademark development and the evolution of his brand messaging as conveyed through two versions of his website’s opening page and two versions of his advertisements demonstrate how Ortiz is acting to disturb predominant notions of American Indian representation. To create such disturbances Ortiz spotlights American Indian alterity in order to counter it by utilizing the mainstream’s tactic of appropriation. In other words, Ortiz co-optates or mimes the dominant culture’s American Indian representations, swathes them in his signature subversiveness, and then re-presents them to the public. Through his promotional activities, Ortiz prompts this oxymoronic strangely familiar confluence of the mainstream and edge-waters, which introduces new American Indian representations that beckon audiences to blatantly consume the Other and sublimely re-consider American Indians.

As in his art, he also employs strategic essentialism in his marketing in order to re-claim such mainstream marketing tactics as essentialism, exoticism, and commodification. By featuring essentialized and exotic referents to race/ethnicity and
American Indian culture such as feathers and body painted tribal tattoos that invoke the trope of modern primitivism; by employing irony in the spotlighting of binaries and seemingly discordant elements; and by commodifying the overall mystique of the American Indian, Ortiz’s both subverts and complies with the dominant culture’s marketing methods and their hegemonic notions of American Indian representation and identity. Additional examples are found in Ortiz’s brand messaging as conveyed in his website and via his advertisements. They communicate several convictions. His messaging imparts a sense of uniqueness within a mass produced world. His messaging conveys authenticity through both its source and calculated design, and his messaging manifests and utilizes the indigenously-inspired construct of the shapeshifter.

By both complying with and challenging the dominant culture’s notions of American Indianness and the mainstream’s suggested methods for engaging in promotionalism, Ortiz liberates himself and his brand from the dominant culture’s imposition of racial/ethnic, cultural, and economic categorizations to claim artistic self-sovereignty. By claiming artistic self-sovereignty, Ortiz can then decide which American Indian authenticity markers are privileged and which are marginalized.

Ortiz manages to remain true to himself and publicly appear authentic by depicting multiple tensions within his work, his personal branding, his public persona, and his personal brand. Ortiz employs the tactics of the dominant culture such as appropriation, exoticism, and essentialism to re-claim the noble savage. Then, he re-configures this noble savage to offer the beginnings of a glimpse of a new identity, which has the ability to shapeshift and walk in both worlds. Either knowingly or inadvertently,
Ortiz produces a politics of representation that manifests the Savage Noble, a distinctly American, private, autonomous, political, transformative identity that disrupts regulatory régimes of discipline and distances itself from past confining identities. The invocation of the Savage Noble is but one critical manifestation in his work, his greater achievement lies in the far more enlightening aspect of this manifestation: the provocation of the exploration of the power/knowledge régimes through which these identities, the noble savage and the Savage Noble, are created in the first place.

Ultimately, Ortiz’s communicative strategies employed through his art, himself, and his marketing efforts spotlight and slyly partake in power negotiations and exchanges between dominant and submissive; sadist and masochist; male and female; heterosexual and homosexual; and sacred and secular, which become applicable to the intercultural dynamic between American Indians and the dominant culture. By employing the strategies of the trope of modern primitivism; the rhetoric of SMDS; and strategic essentialism; and the tactics of appropriation, exoticism, fetishism, essentialism, binary constructionism, mimesis, and commodification, Ortiz lures audiences from a wide spectrum of positions to temporarily relinquish their avowed and ascribed identities in order to try on new roles and play with power dynamics. This preliminary play lays the groundwork for serious strategic resistance and negotiation, which can translate into representational transformations and identity re-articulations. He manages to sublimely maneuver American Indian art, representation, and identity to blur the seam between mainstream and subaltern spaces.

My next research question asks, “What affects do Ortiz’s representational politics have on popular notions of American Indian identity?” I posit that the politics of
representation contained in and through Ortiz and his work serve to disrupt many of the current ideas about American Indian identity and sovereignty. Ortiz, his art, and his marketing strategies and tactics unsettle notions of Indianness, avoiding the dominant discourse’s trap of “the fixed structure of identity to be (re)presented” (Gonzalvez, 1997, p. 180). Ortiz’s representational politics counter historicized and romanticized images of American Indians as vanishing relics, noble savages, and nature-loving primitives. In so doing, his work operates to “highlight the process of identity as an unfolding set of contradictions and possibilities” (Gonzalvez, p. 180) that is fluid yet recognizable and multi-vocal yet single-minded.

Moreover, Ortiz’s representational politics walk the line between committed and individualistic art standpoints, which straddle the sometimes conflicting sovereign space between one’s culture and one’s self. Ortiz avoids becoming mired in this space by preserving a balance between a sense of respect paid towards his culture and a sense of integrity paid to his vision. He spotlights this balance in his promotional efforts which espouse the idea that American Indians do not have to choose one identity over another. Instead, American Indians can hail the most advantageous articulations, dependent upon the circumstances, from each of their multiple intersecting identities. These multi-faceted identity performances communicate to the dominant culture as well, allowing for more prismatic considerations of American Indian identity, rather than the one-dimensional stale stereotypes or two-dimensional restraining binaries that currently circulate within the dominant discourse.

Overall, Ortiz’s representational politics broaden the spectrum of considerations of American Indian identity constructions. His politics expand the spectrum by
countering American Indian stereotypes and essentialism. Ortiz provides alternative archetypes, which ironically, are often hailed via his appropriation of the dominant culture’s oppressive practices of exoticizing and commodifying American Indians. Ortiz, however, exercises his definitional sovereignty through these practices to manifest American Indian identities that are empowered, self-sovereign, and self-signifying.

Ortiz replaces the conventional vision of the head-dressed American Indian with an image of a bevy of bonnets from which American Indians can choose to claim. Ortiz draws from the mainstream to the margins and the surface to the subterranean to create a representational politics that promotes understanding of multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and multiple American Indian identity articulations.

My final research question inquires, “How do Ortiz, his art, and the discourse surrounding both art and artist communicate expanded notions of American Indian identity?” Ortiz personally and through his art and marketing encourages the manifestation of American Indian self-sovereignty over the semiotics of representation, which impacts American Indian identity articulations. Ortiz, his art, and his marketing counter historical representations of American Indians by depicting images that speak to participation in two worlds – the world of the dominant culture and the world of American Indians – and point to the eternally wavering – sometimes solid and sometimes diaphanous – line between the two. Ortiz and his work convey more than duality depictions. Both art and artist actually act in both worlds to construct a discursive space that is shaped from an American Indian cultural perspective and an individual artist’s perspective, rather than by that of the dominant culture. This idiosyncratic discursive space enables “a new regime of knowledge,” (Hall, 2003 p. 53) that celebrates and
privileges American Indian knowledges and *ways of being*, which ultimately, threatens the hegemonic discourses produced by the dominant culture.

Ortiz’s new power/knowledge régime goes beyond politicizing American Indian identity through representation to actually expanding and transforming hegemonic constructions of American Indian identity. The circulation of Ortiz’s politics of representation impacts not only the dominant culture but also American Indians themselves. By charting the dark territory between both worlds, Ortiz distinguishes himself as a wayshower. He maps out a strategy that encourages American Indians to actually *walk in many worlds* – the white world, the American Indian world, the worlds of other cultures – in order to reap the benefits in the form of profits, plaudits, and power to then act as guides to the next generation. Ortiz’s discursive strategies enacted via his art and his marketing maneuvers promote self-sovereignty, Cochiti tribal sovereignty, and American Indian cultural sovereignty. Both Ortiz and his art afford American Indians the possibility of self-signification sovereignty and afford the dominant culture a clearer view of a possible régime change.

Perhaps, Ortiz conjures the American Indian figure of the shapeshifter to transact these transformations. Seal (2001) explains, “Shape-shifting may also be used for disguise in order to escape from bondage, elude pursuers, or enter otherwise impenetrable castles” (p. 229). Ortiz, his art, and his marketing efforts demonstrate a dedication to infiltrating these *impenetrable castles* of representational and identity containment erected by the dominant culture. Or perhaps, he invokes the spirit of the trickster to manipulate these maneuvers. Shanley (2006) explains that in accordance with American Indian traditions, the trickster’s dual nature enables him to “either purposely or
inadvertently” transform the world (p. 2). Although Ortiz might not change the world, he certainly fashions meditative spaces of transformational possibility for all people to re-conceive American Indian representations and illuminate new identities. Virgil Ortiz glimmers as the lamppost\textsuperscript{18} glows…

Limitations

As is in keeping with this study’s imbrication theme, the limitations, implications, and applications are entangled with one another. The limitations of this dissertation derive from taperings made in breadth, position, perspective, and voice. Regarding breadth, this project presents small inklings of a giant problematic that could be expanded to include the full body of Ortiz’s work. However, the following three reasons prevented me from addressing the entire library of Ortiz’s work: 1) the numerous mediums that Ortiz engages; 2) the difficulty in accessing examples from those mediums due to their location in private collections; and 3) their limited production or supply. Likewise, other American Indian artists’ representational stratagems could be examined to uncover additional maneuvers that expand American Indian representational and identity considerations and that outline a cross-section of strategic and tactical thematics.

Another limitation is a result of my position as a white, female scholar. As touched upon in my positionality statement, I am not American Indian nor did I have the benefit of commentary on this analysis from an American Indian or, for that matter, Ortiz. I did, however, heed the advice that notable American Indian scholars

\textsuperscript{18} The lamppost is a literal and symbolic reference featured in C.S. Lewis’ (1950/1978) \textit{The Chronicles of Narnia} that alludes to the point where two worlds meet and the fact that another world exists. The lamppost represents hope for both worlds in the space of enmeshment.
recommended to non-Native scholars when pursuing investigations into American Indians and their affairs. I also included a substantial amount of American Indian voices, as noted through their tribal affiliations referenced in parentheses throughout the dissertation. Again, I stress that I did not claim to speak for American Indians, and that I did not claim to speak for Ortiz. I merely proffered my own unique ideas on Ortiz’s discursive productions of American Indian identity through representation in an attempt to keep this problematic visible and voiced rather than shadowed and silenced.

While the methodological approaches of this analysis are well suited to reading intercultural imagery and approaching discourse in a critical manner, I discovered that alternative perspectives could be applied to the data. Examining Ortiz, his art, and his marketing from a performance studies perspective or through a queer theory lens could impart profound and provocative insights into this problematic. I kept finding myself thinking in terms of embodiment, acting, enacting, and performing. However, my relative lack of exposure to and knowledge of these disciplines prevented me from walking down either scholarly path in order to preserve the integrity of this project.

Finally, this dissertation is limited by a missing voice, as I chose not to interview Ortiz. I avoided contacting him, meeting him, or observing him in order to maintain critical distance. After experiencing the powerful effects of his art and promotional activities and given my predilection towards his aesthetic, I was concerned that my ability to be both reflexive and reflective might become impaired through contact with Ortiz’s charismatic real-life “aura” and with his manufactured “spell of personality” (Benjamin, 1936/1999, p. 75). While I included Ortiz’s voice in my analysis, the project could have benefitted from his insights and collaborative input. Ortiz’s contribution might have
prompted alternative dissertation directions, affording not only unique intercultural theoretical and interpretive juxtapositions but also entanglements.

Implications

The implications of this study are four-fold. First, I believe that those who identify themselves as American Indians, Indigenous Peoples, members of marginalized groups, artists, social activists, entrepreneurs, scholars, students, lawyers, and legislators could benefit by reading this analysis with the goal being to initiate discussions, spur debate, and incite social action. Often, concepts and issues mentioned in this dissertation are rendered invisible and go unseen, further perpetuating the operations of these oppressive régimes. When cultural definitions and representations are produced through discourse and conveyed in texts, seams are exposed that prompt meaning interpretation. As Hodder (2003) points out, “As the text is reread in different contexts it is given new meanings, often contradictory and always socially embedded. Thus there is no ‘original’ or ‘true’ meaning of a text outside specific historical contexts” (p. 156). More importantly, this meaning production and interpretation constitutes the circulation of power. This power circulation ultimately translates to greater power for some and lesser or the absence of power for others. Engaging in projects that unveil the mechanisms of power are integral to manifesting more liberatory and harmonious societal spaces.

My predecessors thought-provoking scholarship on power, identity, and representation both inspired and prepared me to undertake this multi-dimensional, intercultural problematic. My hope is that this work can serve as stimulus to, operate as a springboard for, or provide a much-needed nugget of information to aid the next generation of scholars in their studies of the complex issues involved in American Indian
representation and identity. These issues impact all marginalized groups and therefore, bear considerable attention.

Moreover, by demonstrating the viability of an artist’s strategies and tactics to broaden the spectrum of current considerations of American Indian representation and identity, I hope to trigger similar projects that use art as their locus to provoke more prismatic understandings of other marginalized groups. These projects that address signification issues could add to the scholarly conversation by providing additional and alternative formulations and executions of artists’ representational strategies and tactics. They could also spur transformative social movements that give marginalized groups a louder voice. Furthermore, these projects could aid in deterring the attempted erasure and silencing of marginalized groups and could help to diminish the negative and limiting social stigmas that are placed on them.

Finally, one of the primary reasons I pursued this topic was the hope that this analysis would unveil the formative stages of a model for the initiation of a more balanced experience and expression of power. Through Ortiz’s employment of various strategies and tactics, power dynamics between the dominant culture and American Indians are symbolically disturbed, challenged, negotiated, exchanged, and transformed. Exposure to this analysis could perhaps empower social activists to convert Ortiz’s symbolic maneuvers into literal stratagems to be enacted between the dominant culture and oppressed identity groups. Echoing this chapter’s opening quotes, I claim that through invoking the wisdom of generations in order to speak out against oppression and exploitation and through respecting the free nature of all, self-signification sovereignty
can be claimed. The uniqueness and preciousness of each of our multiple, intersecting identities can then truly be celebrated.

Applications

I have three suggestions of future applications for this study that are a result of my contemplations on theoretical and methodological approaches and voice. First, I envision this project operating to encourage more studies that cross-pollinate the art sphere with the communication’s circle. In other words, I picture more interdisciplinary studies occurring that benefit both worlds. Each field offers fonts of knowledge that add breadth and depth to the other. Taking a critical communication’s approach to art and antithetically, taking a critical aesthetic approach to communication can produce results that supersede each field’s current capacities. This dissertation and other projects like it that incorporate interdisciplinary scholarship bear the benefit of the potential emergence of entirely new thoughts, fresh ideas, and innovative concepts that come with what Fenske (2007) terms “synergistic conceptual collaboration” (p. 351). She explains that interdisciplinary scholarship that recognizes and accepts “contingency and change produces alternative histories and the possibility for imagining different futures” (p. 365). For marginalized groups such as American Indians, this approach holds particular promise.

A second illuminating and compelling application for this study would be to apply performance and/or queer theory to Ortiz’s work, as previously mentioned, and/or to the work of several up-and-coming American Indian artists who engage in different mediums. By approaching their art with either or both of these perspectives, I imagine that a number of reality-shifting stratagems and models for power negotiations would be
revealed. Adding to the American Indian representational arsenal could prove empowering for American Indians and other marginalized groups and could engender enlightenment within the dominant culture.

A final application for this study would be to transform the interpretations contained within it by collaborating with Ortiz. In other words, I invite him to comment on the interpretations, findings, and conclusions included in this project. I envision a scholarly *call and response* piece that would function as a critique of my critique. By including Ortiz’s authentic standpoint on himself, his art, and his marketing, I suspect the possibility that a more fervent unpacking of the intercultural dynamics between American Indians and the dominant culture would occur. By engaging in what Bakhtin (1923/1990) term’s “interlocation” (p. 79), Ortiz and I could entertain an unabsolute, fictive wholeness for the purpose of producing this scholarly article. Holquist (1990) further clarifies this interlocation as follows:

> A logical implication that I can see things that you cannot, and you can see things that I cannot, is that our excess of seeing is defined by a lack of seeing: my excess is your lack, and vice versa. If we wish to overcome this lack, we try to see what is there together. We must share each other’s excess in order to overcome our mutual lack.” (p. xxvi)

While this interlocative activity might seem far more theoretically wishful than realistically accomplished, I think efforts made towards this end are necessary. This activity is something to aim for in order to, as Bakhtin says, “consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within
himself” (p. 26), with this material generating significant insights into the intercultural power dynamics involved in meaning making.

Musings

Upon reflecting on this strange journey referred to as my dissertation, I am first and foremost grateful that Virgil Ortiz was my guide. With his assistance, I was reminded that representation is slippery. I confirmed that identity is most advantageous when construed in terms of liquiessence. I discovered that besides power being contested, resisted, negotiated and exchanged: power could be teased, harangued, and played with. I came to truly appreciate the grace of self-sovereignty, self-signification, and self-identification, for they represent the power of the individual to create meaning. Along the way, I acquainted myself with the shapeshifter, and from this figure I grasped the gravity of transmogrification when navigating academic and personal lives in the same breath. I also ran into the Trickster and from this spirit I procured the ability to wink in the face of adversity. As this voyage comes to a close, I realize that my understandings of American Indians have only just begun. Maybe someday soon I will catch up with Ortiz to undertake another type of trip, referred to as our journal article. In the end, I imagine that Ortiz stands at the lamppost concocting more methods for flipping stereotypes on their edges and reversing the gaze with a wink – and smiling all the way to the bank and into the hearts of the Cochiti Pueblo people. As this chapter closes, a portal of possibilities opens…
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