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Reservation Reelism

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Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and
Representations of Native Americans in Film

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Contents

List of Illustrations vi

Preface ix

Acknowledgments xv

- 1 Toward a Genealogy of Indigenous Film Theory: Reading Hollywood Indians 1
 - 2 Ideologies of (In)Visibility: Redfacing, Gender, and Moving Images 46
 - 3 Tears and Trash: Economies of Redfacing and the Ghostly Indian 102
 - 4 Prophesizing on the Virtual Reservation: *Imprint* and *It Starts with a Whisper* 145
 - 5 Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* 190
 - 6 Epilogue 221
- Notes 241
- Bibliography 291
- Index 319

1 Toward a Genealogy of Indigenous Film Theory

Reading Hollywood Indians

On November 17, 1940, John del Valle wrote an article in the *New York Herald Tribune* announcing a petition to what would become the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for recognition of a Native American tribe to be named the “DeMille Indians” whose membership was based on professional affiliation rather than consanguinity. Chief Thunder Cloud, the stage name of Victor Daniels, organized the effort and submitted the petition on behalf of a group of actors representing hundreds of Native American entertainers employed by Hollywood. “Hollywood has acquired a permanent colony of representatives of almost all tribes still extant,” del Valle noted, “With the cinema as their melting pot, these expatriates are taking on the semblance of a tribe all their own—perhaps the largest tribal group not on any reservation.”¹ Thunder Cloud, whose film career spanned twenty-five years, won acclaim as the first Tonto represented on film in the fifteen-part 1938 Republic serial, *The Lone Ranger*, as well as roles in many westerns, including *The Searchers* (1956).² He

was one of several hundred Native American entertainers who made Southern California a temporary or permanent home in order to work in the film industry.

The petition Thunder Cloud submitted may have been a publicity stunt intended to create a new Screen Actors Guild (SAG) of sorts for Native Americans and to draw attention to the already-established, nearly forty-year-old, transnational Hollywood Indian community in Southern California.³ Or it may have been an ironic attempt to collectivize a group of Indigenous actors whose identifications had undergone a tectonic shift from the specific epistemologies of their multiple homelands to incorporating cross-tribal worldviews influenced by the film industry. The petition is important because it marks a movement from the Hollywood Indian as a constellation of visual images predicated upon white-generated stereotypes to a politicized understanding of the ways these images circulate in popular culture. It also demonstrates how these images are deployed by and in dynamic, often diasporic, contemporary Indigenous communities.

Most likely, it was a combination of both. Prior to 1978, when the Federal Acknowledgment Project was founded within the Department of the Interior (the BIA is an agency within the Department of the Interior), tribal recognition was not a uniform process. It was determined on an ad hoc basis, sometimes granted through congressional action, presidential decree, or individual cases brought before the courts. Recognition required proof of a group's long-standing residency in a particular geographical region and attendant visible and enduring (according to European American standards) linguistic, cultural, and spiritual traditions. Tribal recognition was and still is a very long and arduous process.⁴ The group of actors petitioning what was at that time called the Office of Indian Affairs, whose residency in Southern California and whose traditions were very recent by the standards that typically determine a tribe's historical provenance, must have been aware that they would not qualify for federal recognition. Nev-

ertheless, they utilized this legal venue as a platform to publicize their existence and to open up discussion on what constitutes Native American collective identity and sovereignty.

One of the most striking things about the petition is that it sought to legalize an identity of relatively recent origin (that of a transnational professional community living in or near Hollywood) but seemingly made no specific land claims and invoked no treaty rights.⁵ Unlike other Indigenous nations whose sovereignty the United States and Canadian governments have recognized and whose identities are rooted in the pre-1492 era and appended to particular geographical locations with specific treaty rights, the DeMille Indians would be a new entity occupying a powerful, mass-mediated virtual reservation. By laying claim to this vexed social and imaginary geography where self-representation and stereotype collide and are continually negotiated, the DeMille Indians were members of a larger body of Indigenous people who have not mattered in the historical archive. But through an examination of the films they helped create and the cultural and pedagogical work Native American actors did off-screen through the production of activist and autobiographical texts, it becomes clear that Hollywood Indians were engaged in a complex dialogue with the prevailing forces of hegemony.

Although the actors did not come from a single tribe with unified linguistic, spiritual, and cultural customs, the petition for recognition is, in some critical ways, predicated on traditional Indigenous practice. Prior to 1492 Native American community identity was often flexible. Communities and families sometimes splintered for a variety of reasons and formed new bands, nations, and confederacies. With the codification of European notions of race in the eighteenth century and enforcement of laws alien to Indigenous people, Native Americans found it increasingly more difficult to maintain a system of creating new political and cultural entities, confederacies, and alliances. The establishment of the Federal

Acknowledgement Program in 1978 further drastically curtailed fluid and kinetic notions of Native American group identity.⁶ This program set forth a series of stringent criteria for defining what constitutes a government-recognized tribe in the United States, much of which relies on European American archival records and a relatively simple understanding of Native American history. Without federal recognition, Native American communities do not have much of a voice in governmental decisions affecting them, nor do they benefit from policies afforded to recognized tribes based on their special government-to-government status. According to the National Congress of American Indians, there are currently 562 federally recognized tribes and several hundred more petitioning for recognition through a time-consuming and arduous process.⁷

James Collins argues that the acknowledgement process is unduly complicated and that the criteria are difficult for unrecognized tribes to meet. "These criteria appear reasonable at first glance," he contends, "but they pose a number of difficulties, for they demand multiple evidence of prior recognition, and they require forms of continuity that are exceptional rather than typical among colonized and dominated peoples."⁸ The acknowledgement process essentially devalues traditional Native American forms of creating, recognizing, and sustaining community at the same time it imposes European American racial, political, and social definitions on Native people and privileges the invasion-contact period as the static and absolute moment of tribal organization. As the process now stands, it is virtually impossible to federally recognize a tribe formed in the post-eighteenth-century era, thus prohibiting a vital social, cultural, and political formation for Indigenous peoples. While the political exigencies of the current reservation system require the policing of the boundaries between Indians and non-Indians under settler colonialism,

it is important to remember that the loss of earlier modes of identification and change is a loss of one of the creative powers exercised by Indigenous people since 1492.

Reservation Reelism

This is a book about (among other things) film, imagination, self-representation, identity, and perception. It describes the ways in which Native American actors, particularly in early North American cinema, interacted with hegemonic representational forces to engage with the image of the Hollywood Indian. I begin this chapter with the anecdote about the DeMille Indians in order to investigate how Native American actors performed critical work both on-screen and off-screen to create cinematic, cultural, political, and geographical spaces for the exploration of images by and for Indigenous communities as early as the turn of the twentieth century.

The DeMille Indians' stories and the narratives they helped create disrupted dominant discourses even as they sometimes, in trickster fashion, seemingly helped validate conventional narratives through the roles they played. The fate of Thunder Cloud's petition for federal recognition remains unclear. It was either never officially submitted, was declined, or never reached the appropriate bureaucrat within the Office of Indian Affairs.⁹ Yet the DeMille Indians provide a provocative anecdote through which to explore how Native Americans have intervened in the public sphere via the medium of film and visual culture. They were not always the victims of corporate interests and ongoing attempts at colonization. Native performers were active agents whose work continues to influence, empower, and trouble contemporary Indigenous filmmakers and performers.

Most critically, Thunder Cloud's petition furnishes an early twentieth-century anecdote to counter the tendency in much

scholarship on Native Americans to envision Indigenous peoples—particularly those involved in the entertainment industry—as the innocent dupes of capitalism, institutional power, patriarchy, and colonialism. Thinking about the DeMille Indians, whose fate as an unconventional tribe is unknown, compelled me to grapple with the relationship among the largely forgotten Native American actors who starred in a wide range of filmic genres, Native American filmmakers from the silent era to the present (whose work has intervened in the construction of Indigenous images), and North American film history.

Decoding Indigenous Inferences

Throughout this book, I examine how disenfranchised, nonpowerful groups in capitalist society participate in shaping media and consumption-based representations of themselves in the dominant culture, with a focus on Native American media-makers. I extend an invitation to think critically about how the images presented on-screen by Indigenous filmmakers and actors in narrative films not only pose key challenges to dominant discourses on film theory and history but also supplement crucial debates on sovereignty, identity, and Indigenous knowledge production. I look at the entire representational process from the production of representations, to the political concerns of the participants who helped create these formations, to the cultural and ideological work of the images in different sociohistorical contexts.

I examine a range of questions relating to the intersection of Native American subjects and visual culture, particularly film. Why did so many Native American actors play roles that presented negative images of Indigenous peoples? Did Native American actors who participated in Hollywood films have an impact on the number and type of roles available to them? If so, through what channels did they work to affect their desires, and are these self-representations visible on the screen?¹⁰ What challenges do

figures such as the DeMille Indians pose to our understandings of Native American identity and notions of sovereignty? How do Hollywood Indians help us better recognize Native American relationships to popular culture and the work of contemporary filmmakers who engage in this complex history of Indigenous performance? By expanding film studies scholarship to include the cultural work of Native Americans, how can we reconceptualize North American cinematic history?

This book traces out a genealogy of Native American representations from the inception of the motion picture industry at the turn of the twentieth century to the present in order to construct an Indigenous film theory unique to North American cinema through an analysis of key figures, films, and narrative artifacts of the period. I explore the influence of Native Americans on North American cinema and examine a range of narrative and performative strategies created by Native American actors and directors to intervene with and trouble mass-mediated images of Indigenous people. The work is by no means an exhaustive history of Native Americans in film; other books have covered that subject. I offer instead a blueprint for a reading practice for narrative films that Native Americans starred in and sometimes directed—from B-grade westerns to award-winning feature-length films—as well as the multiple contexts from which these films, actors, and directors arose. The narrative highlights Native American film practitioners from 1900 to 1940, bringing them into dialogue with contemporary Indigenous film, video, and new visual media artists through an engagement with the concepts of redfacing, the virtual reservation, and visual sovereignty. The project examines the relationship of Native American media-makers and their work with the broader historical, social, cultural, and political context in which they operated.

In order to contextualize my discussion of Native American filmmaking practices, the first three chapters of this book focus

on how silent film actors negotiated representations of Indian images that were both self-generated and created by the dominant culture. I describe the ideological work they did both on-screen and off-screen as “redfacing,” a complex practice that was at times transgressive but reified negative stereotypes at others. Using the DeMille Indians’ petition as an interpretive lens, this chapter sets up the historical contexts and narrative strategies of Native American actors and directors who were involved in Hollywood film production during the first four decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter two analyzes how performances of gendered representations of Indians in visual culture from the contact period to the silent era complicate the visual logic of the sexualized “maiden” and the invisible drudge stereotype. As suggested in my analysis of films starring Native American actors Minnie Ha Ha and Molly Spotted Elk, the silent period offered up representations of Indigenous women that intervened in national discourses around race and gender in more visible and nuanced ways than occurred after the introduction of sound technology.

I propose a reconsideration of the cultural work of Iron Eyes Cody in chapter three as a bridge between the silent era and the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century’s Indigenous cinema production. While not a Native American by birth, Cody’s redface performance both on and off camera puts pressure on theoretical discussions of what constitutes Native American identity in general and how the identities of Hollywood Indians trouble conventional questions of community, identifications, and belonging. More specifically, I argue that as the most recognizable “Indian” actor, Cody underscores one of the most prevalent Native American stereotypes—that of the “vanishing Indian”—through his participation in the Keep America Beautiful Inc. campaign of the 1970s. At the same time, as an international celebrity, he opens up a

space for public discussion of contemporary Indigenous issues and the political work of Native American representations.

This stereotype of the vanishing or ghostly Indian, as I suggest in chapter four, constitutes a pervasive legacy with which contemporary Native American filmmakers have had to contend. As an imaginative site of critical engagement, the virtual reservation serves as a space to counter such stereotypes while also articulating new models of Indigenous knowledge through visual culture. Using the films *Imprint* (2007) and *It Starts with a Whisper* (1992) as examples, I demonstrate how Chris Eyre and Shelley Niro collaborate with non-Native directors on experimental films that take up the question of the Native American ghost figure in order to suggest an alternative reading of Indigenous spirituality and prophecy.

Chapter five concentrates on visual sovereignty—the creative self-representation of Native American visual artists—as expressed in the film *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*, a full-length feature film by the Inuit media collective, Igloolik Isuma Inc. *Atanarjuat* brings the discourses of ethnographic cinema and the history of redfacing into discussion with contemporary Inuit conceptions of oral storytelling and the productive space of film as a vehicle for thinking about Native American cultural production.

In the epilogue I connect the history of mainstream and alternative film production to recent experimental and “ephemeral” work by both professional and amateur Native American filmmakers on YouTube and other Internet sites through a discussion of the persistence of Hollywood Indian images. This work by contemporary media artists, which relies on continually changing technology, circumvents conventional circuits such as film festivals to provide innovative ways of accessing visual media by Native Americans. Because of the range of images presented by media-makers on these new sites, I suggest that these multiple

outlets for articulating competing, often tribally specific notions of what constitutes visual Indianness have provided and will continue to offer alchemies of change in the representations of Indigenous people from stereotypes predicated on dominant culture fantasies to a reflection of the lived experiences and desires of Indigenous people.

I am indebted to recent work in Native American studies that complicates conventional notions of representations of Indigenous peoples. I have also been influenced by feminist, critical race, and queer scholarship on how gendered, raced, and queer spectators were constituted through decoding prohibited and stereotypical representations. Patricia White, for example, argues that under the Motion Picture Production Code (Hays Code) queer subjects, plots, and images were prohibited from the 1930s to the 1960s, much as Native Americans were rendered simultaneously highly visible and invisible through legal, representational, and cultural strictures during the same historical period. The Hays Code censored "sex perversion or any inference," a euphemism for any display of queer subjectivity, as well as miscegenation and "indecent movements" in dance sequences.¹¹

As a result of the Hays Code, spectators employed imagination and fantasy to read "inferences" that were prohibited by law but nevertheless erupt on the screen to critique oppressive dominant values and power relations. White states, "The project of lesbian and gay readings of 'dominant' films is not simply a decoding process," but "a textual revision with the reader-critic as subject of its fantasy."¹² She discerns alternative spectatorial practices through close readings of films produced for female audiences. "While it remains difficult to conduct empirical work on lesbian and gay spectators," White claims, "we can reconstruct some of the discourses that intersected with film texts to broaden our analysis of how gender and sexuality were constructed by the cinema. Studies of stars, costuming, reception, source material, and authorship can all introduce traces of a lesbian historical pres-

ence that the narratives of the film exclude."¹³ Likewise, a richer understanding of Native American involvement in Hollywood films as spectators, actors, directors, critics, and technicians requires textual analysis of films, archival materials, and autobiographical narratives. This methodology is speculative as it is impossible to intuit exactly what Native American actors, filmmakers, and spectators really thought about the films they watched and how these films impacted their communities. Yet we can still attempt to consider how cinematic images structured their experiences in order to explain cinema's place of importance among Native communities and the ways in which Hollywood was influenced by Native Americans.

Through subtle forms of aesthetic diplomacy, the many Native American actors who played racialized roles in the first half of the twentieth century and the spectators who read their "inferences" performed an important function by attempting to convince directors and production agents to alter aspects of film scripts to conform more closely to early twentieth-century Native American sensibilities. Through redfacing, Native actors performed the complicated role of human shields to absorb, deflect, redirect, and placate the fantasies projected on these "celluloid Indians"¹⁴ by the dominant culture. It would be easy to judge Native actors harshly for bequeathing to us the array of stereotypes contemporary Indigenous people are called upon to grapple with and regard with contempt. The ideological and cultural work that redfacing enacts, however, complicates any easy reading of Hollywood Indians.

My project centers on the figure of the visually imagined Indian, a figure that has been crucial in serving as the universal foil against which European colonies and later the U.S. and Canadian governments have established legal and ideological claims of dominance in the "New World." The Native American performers who have helped create and critique the character-

ization of Indigenous figures in film have not mattered much in the dominant historical, literary, or visual culture narratives. Nevertheless, they have challenged (and sometimes complied with) hegemonic discourses of power in subtle and sometimes overt ways. Through archival research, close examination of a selection of films, and attention to the narratives produced by actors, directors, and their descendants, my research locates Native Americans not at the margins of cinematic history and culture but at its core, enmeshed in an evolving and sometimes paradoxical web of race, gender, citizenship, and sovereignty on the virtual reservation. This is especially true in the present as the proliferation and influence of narrative films by Native American media-makers attests. These films, which draw on earlier modes of self-representation and the strategies of redfacing, transform conventional cinematic genres to create a corpus of visual sovereignty whose importance is felt at all levels of Native American social, cultural, and political life.

The Only Good Indian Is a Dead Hollywood One?

To bring Indigenous film practitioners from the early twentieth century into dialogue with more recent film practitioners demonstrates how contemporary filmmakers fit within a broader history with roots in precontact performative traditions of creation, contestation, and collaboration on visual markers of identity and community. There is a strong confluence of performance, identity and identifications, and narrative in Native American visual culture and literary studies. For many scholars working in the field of Native American studies, images of the monosyllabic (if not absolutely silent), doomed American Indian in films from the turn of the twentieth century to the present are incorrect and irredeemable, representing the final chapter in the victimization of Indigenous peoples.¹⁵ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, for example, argue that the simultaneous absence and presence

of Native Americans in early Hollywood films operated as “an ambivalently repressive mechanism [that] dispels the anxiety in the face of the Indian, whose very presence is a reminder of the initially precarious grounding of the American nation-state itself. . . . In a temporal paradox, living Indians were induced to ‘play dead,’ as it were, in order to perform a narrative of manifest destiny in which their role, ultimately was to disappear.”¹⁶ While most images of Native Americans in film have been overwhelmingly negative, there are more nuanced ways of looking at the performances of Native American actors who were involved in public spheres that take into consideration their own cultural and historical contexts.

Playing Indian roles provided these actors with class and geographic mobility, financial security, independence from the restrictions of white reservation agents, opportunities for political and social activism, and access to a limited range of institutional power. Some of these performers—notably James Young Deer, Princess Red Wing, Luther Standing Bear, Ray Mala, Molly Spotted Elk, and Jay Silverheels—joined their historical predecessors Matoaka-Amonute (Pocahontas), Samson Occom, Kahgegagahbowh (George Copway), and Tekahionwake (Pauline Johnson) as a growing number of international Indigenous celebrities. They used their privileged status in the service of their reservation or home nation, as well as broader transnational, urban communities.¹⁷

Other individuals employed film acting as a personal means to engage in activities that were illegal or not socially sanctioned. Lizzie Pablo, a Nez Perce elder from Kooskia, Idaho, told Harrold Weinberger, an assistant director scouting for Native American actors to star in *Northwest Passage* (1940), that she had starred in films previously and “would like to go back and kill soldiers.”¹⁸ Obviously the roles she anticipated were ones in which history would be rewritten from an Indigenous perspective, not the



1. Lizzie Pablo, a Nez Perce actor who auditioned for a role in *Northwest Passage* (1940). Photograph from the Harrold Weinberger manuscript collection at the Margaret Herrick Library. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

more common ones where her gender and age would limit her to more sedentary and anonymous scenes. She noted that she was a widow and was “free to travel” with the film crew, demonstrating her eagerness to participate in filmmaking.¹⁰ Her clear articulation of film as a means of imaginative and interactive revenge demonstrates how important entering the public sphere via cinema was for both prominent and uncredited Native American actors.

Philip J. Deloria employs the term “Indian modernity” to encapsulate this complicated social,

ideological, and cultural position that Hollywood Indians inhabited as active agents negotiating new terrain while simultaneously reenacting scenes of violence and domination.²⁰ Native actors engaged in narrative pleasure to create new stories about Indigenous peoples that would not have been afforded them on reservations that offered limited options. They operated within what W. E. B. DuBois, an African American contemporary of early Hollywood Indians, called “double consciousness,” which he describes as “a sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”²¹ For Native Americans the twentieth-century “problem of the color-line”²² would be further complicated by the fact that the “amused contempt and pity” focused on Native Americans is coded as always already in the past. Native American actors and directors were forced to examine themselves through the eyes of others, but this necessitated a looking backward through the mists of history because Indigenous peoples had been written out of the present and the future of the United States through various forms of discursive genocide. Thus, they are ascribed the value of absence through assimilation and disappearance and the value of excess through the compulsion in Hollywood media to return continually to the scene of Indian-white contact.

One of the common assumptions made about Hollywood Indians is that they are an abject repository of the dominant culture’s national visual fantasies about race, gender, legal discourse, and anthropological knowledge. As Ralph E. Friar and Natasha A. Friar contend in *The Only Good Indian . . . The Hollywood Gospel*, if the nineteenth century witnessed the culmination of nearly four hundred years of violence against Native Americans in a remark attributed to Indian fighter General Philip Sheridan: “The only good Indians [he] ever saw were dead,” the twentieth

century would, through visual representations of Native Americans, further contribute to the popular notion of the vanishing Indian through a rephrasing of the physical violence implied in Sheridan's declaration: the only acceptable, non-threatening way of existing as a Native American is to play one on the silver screen.²³

Friar and Friar are representative of much of the scholarship on images of American Indians when they claim "Hollywood has continued to be a co-conspirator in committing cultural genocide by subverting the Native American's various ethnic identities and retaining him [*sic*] as a racial scapegoat," further arguing that "the cinematic assault upon the Native American is only comparable to the actual massacres at Sand Creek, the Washita, Summit Springs, and Wounded Knee."²⁴ Beverly R. Singer calls filmmaking "the white man's craft that betrayed Native Americans and promoted our demise."²⁵ While statements like these pack a kind of rhetorical punch that can be politically useful as a critique of stereotypes and public policy, the active participation of Native Americans in shaping North American cinematic history somewhat undermines (or at least problematizes) these claims. I agree with the general argument that the images created in Hollywood films of Indigenous peoples have been, at least to our contemporary sensibilities, inaccurate and negative, but in this study I attempt to offer up a more subtle consideration of the screened images and the agents behind them.

A number of important volumes on images of Native Americans in film have been produced in the past three decades that portray the figure of the Hollywood Indian as the site of harmful stereotype and victimization. Fortunately, recent scholarship has begun to move from a universal condemnation of images of Indians to a more complex (and, in my mind, more accurate) holistic understanding of the ways Hollywood constructs Native Americans and how these representations interact with other

narratives about Indians, some of which are Native-produced. Angela Aleiss's *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies*, for example, is an exploration of production materials that "sheds light on how Hollywood studios created its Indian characters."²⁶ While work such as Aleiss's is important because it illustrates the ambivalent images created by Hollywood, I am more intrigued by the interventions of Native Americans themselves on cinematic representations of Indigenous people.

My interest in the study of contemporary filmmakers' work was generated by the relative silence surrounding discourse on contemporary Native American filmmaking practices.²⁷ Two prominent filmmakers from the silent era—Edwin Carewe and James Young Deer—were of Indigenous heritage, and Native Americans have participated in various aspects of film production since the inception of motion pictures. But Native North American filmmaking and television broadcasting gained momentum, alongside the work of other minority groups, in the late 1960s.²⁸

Although this study is limited to work that is being produced in Canada and the United States, in the past four decades Indigenous film, video, and television production has also proliferated in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Scandinavia, and Oceania. These filmmaking traditions constitute part of broader historical moves from cinema produced by European settler and colonial nations to what Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino term "Third Cinema" to a variety of Indigenous cinemas that incorporate local epistemes with new visual technologies.²⁹ While Third Cinema is a postcolonial movement that grew out of cultural and political changes in Africa, Latin America, and Asia in the 1960s to denounce Hollywood-style entertainment in favor of a national, popular, and activist vernacular, Indigenous cinema has its roots in specific Indigenous aesthetics with their attendant focus on a particular geographical space, discrete cultural practices, notions

of temporality that do not delink the past from the present or future, and spiritual traditions.³⁰ Dorothy Christian, Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, Victor Masayesva Jr., and Steven Leuthold describe Indigenous aesthetics as grounded in tribally specific notions of place, the sacred, time, and orality.³¹

Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay has theorized this ideological and classificatory approach as "Fourth Cinema": "If we as Maori look closely enough and through the right pair of spectacles, we will find examples at every turn of how the old principles have been reworked to give vitality and richness to the way we conceive, develop, manufacture, and present our films."³² Fourth Cinema, in Barclay's view, is a flexible space in which Indigenous filmmakers "may seek to rework the ancient core values to shape a growing Indigenous cinema outside the national orthodoxy."³³ Barclay cites the Saami director Nils Gaup; North Americans Zacharias Kunuk, Chris Eyre, and Sherman Alexie; and Pacific Islanders Vilisoni Hereniko, Merata Mita, Lee Tamahori, Don Selwyn, Tama Poata, Ivan Sen, Tracey Moffat, and himself as practitioners of Fourth Cinema. The ways these filmmakers operate "outside the national orthodoxy" is not only economic—most rely on inconsistent domestic funding sources and shoestring budgets—but culturally specific by incorporating an entire Indigenous framework into the filmmaking project from start to finish. Transnational Indigenous media production rethinks Audre Lorde's dictum that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" by insisting that the very foundations on which the master's house is built are Indigenous and should be reterritorialized or repatriated.³⁴ Moreover, Indigenous filmmakers working within the framework of decolonization have found ways of appropriating some of the "master's tools," such as some forms of media technology, to Indigenous ends in order to rebuild their own houses.

As Barclay notes in his specific context, films are presented to

local communities as part of the vibrant protocols of the people who produced them: "Maori filmmakers have been insistent on occasion that their films be accompanied to a new venue and be presented to the people of the area with full ceremonial."³⁵ One of the elements that sets this cinematic tradition apart is the filmmakers' continued investment in the public life of their visual product. Videos and films are often screened for home communities prior to the film's national and international release. This is done not so much to censor the content of the film but out of respect, to place the film back in relationship to the community. Indigenous-produced films serve as aesthetic objects that may or may not represent a particular community metonymically. At the same time, this work operates as a cultural ambassador of sorts, providing a space of mediation for an individual or community's artistic, cultural, and political concerns on Indigenous terms. The aesthetic diplomacy that the films enact complicates a colonial binary where the Indigenous subject is merely talking back to the metropolis, often through a non-Native interpreter. Not only does Fourth Cinema offer up a critique or revision of national and colonial cinematic practices, it also engages laterally with filmmaking traditions in other Indigenous contexts, allowing new aesthetic and political possibilities.³⁶

This practice, which locates Indigenous cinema in a particular historical and social context while leaving room for individual, national, and tribal distinctions, is akin to the concept of visual sovereignty whereby Indigenous filmmakers take a holistic approach to the process of creating moving images. Visual sovereignty simultaneously addresses the settler population by creating self-representations that interact with older stereotypes but also, more importantly, connects film production to larger aesthetic practices that work toward strengthening treaty claims and more traditional (although by no means static) modes of cultural understanding.

The Cultural Work of Redfacing

Redfacing—the cultural and ideological work of playing Indian—is closely aligned with the traditional role of the trickster figure. Tricksters operate in the service of their community, albeit in an often clumsy, violent, outlier, sexualized, or humorous way.³⁷ The trickster serves a savvy, pedagogic function that predates European settler colonialism, often sacrificing something special in order to do good, or placing himself or herself outside the boundaries of the community in order to make a didactic point.

The Pueblo, for example, stage public performances that serve to take attention from private communal practices of sacred ceremonies. Santa Clara Pueblo anthropologist Edward P. Dozier notes that in the dances performed at these public ceremonies, “Novel forms are permitted, and improvisations are constantly made. Often these dances burlesque the whites, especially tourists, and their purpose is obviously for amusement and entertainment rather than to serve religious purposes.”³⁸ These Pueblo performers also borrow from Plains Indian powwow culture by wearing costumes made of contemporary materials such as mirrors and colored feathers. These dancers may not perform in other ceremonials that take place simultaneously, but they enact important work in their communities as trickster figures, much as Hollywood Indians do, transgressing non-Native cultural mores in order to teach something new about the fluidity of Indigenous culture. They both shield other performative practices from non-Native eyes at the same time they critique European American spectators and dominant culture expectations. Pueblo performers demonstrate the social, cultural, and political transgression of the trickster by creating a pleasurable space where innovation and cultural appropriation can be tested and a critical site where colonialism can be mocked.

Likewise, legendary tales of Native American actors refusing

to play dead when shot on film sets, replacing revolver blanks with live ammunition, and performing staged ceremonies incorrectly in order to subvert the potential power of the act attest to the on-screen and off-screen attempts on the part of Indigenous entertainers to subvert Hollywood hegemony.³⁹ Hollywood Indians, particularly those of the early twentieth century, function as trickster figures who are at times fully aware of the stakes of representation and from whom we can learn something about twentieth- and twenty-first-century spectators—ourselves, our parents, and our grandparents—even if they lead through what appears to be negative self-fashioning.

Redfacing refers to the complex performances of the Hollywood Indian both on-screen and off-screen. It resembles the ambivalent cultural and political work created by African American performers who appropriated the controversial and sometimes subversive valences of black minstrelsy during the Victorian and Progressive eras.⁴⁰ Hollywood Indians engaged in the same kinds of performative practices and felt similar conflicting pressures as early Asian American, Latino, and African American actors. Redfacing is a refraction of the image held up by Hollywood that foregrounds issues of uneven power relationships between Native Americans and European Americans. Redfacing describes a series of acts performed by Native Americans that draw upon Indigenous performance contexts and spiritual traditions but are staged under conditions controlled, more often than not, by white filmmakers using new technologies and often in conflict with Indigenous self-representations. At the same time, the term redfacing signals the ways in which the work of Indigenous performers, like that of the trickster, is always in motion and therefore creates acts that operate ambiguously, acts that open themselves up for further reading and interpretation.

Redfacing also provides a means of protection as a kind of vir-

tual, visual prophylactic that keeps Native American cultural and spiritual practices somewhat sacrosanct, or at least hidden from the white tourist gaze. The pervasiveness and complexity of the image of Native Americans in film is not surprising given James C. Scott's work on what he terms hidden and public transcripts. "The greater the disparity between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised," he writes, "the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast. In other words, the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask."⁴¹ The ways that subordinate groups confront and critique dominant forms of power more covertly constitutes, conversely, "hidden transcripts" by Scott, and these locations of resistance can be found in both narrative and nonnarrative forms such as dance, oral literature, private writing, and graffiti.

Traise Yamamoto discusses similar strategies in the autobiographical articulations of women who have been marginalized from both the public and hidden transcripts by dominant and racialized communities. She argues, "Through psychological, narrative, and metaphoric forms of masking, Japanese American women writers enact a mode of discursive agency that allows them to claim a viable and resistant subjectivity."⁴² This form of "discursive agency" is similar to the redfacing strategies performed by Native Americans in film. I argue that in some key ways redfacing becomes a protective gesture—a mask, if you will—that takes the pressure off of tribal communities to perform dominant culture expectations in their quotidian lives.

Native American performers and directors (as well as spectators) have had an active, important, visible, and often-vexed role in the production and dissemination of Indigenous images throughout the history of North American cinema, especially during the first three decades of commercial film history. Many early twentieth-century performers launched their careers in film after working in other entertainment venues such as the Wild



2. Director Edwin Carewe (center) consults with actors Lupe Velez and John Boles on the set of *Resurrection* (1931). Photograph courtesy of General Photographic Agency/Getty Images.

West shows, world's fairs, vaudeville, the circus, federal Indian boarding school theater groups, the opera, sports (especially boxing and wrestling), and stage dance troupes. These figures include the two key Native American directors of the silent era: Edwin Carewe, a Chickasaw actor, director, producer, and screenwriter who created *Rio Grande* (1920), *The Girl of the Golden West* (1923), *Resurrection* (1927 and 1931), and *Ramona* (1928); and James Young Deer, an actor, director, and screenwriter of Ho-Chunk ancestry of over a dozen one-reel melodramatic western films.⁴³



3. James Young Deer (center) and Princess Red Wing (left) in Fred J. Balshofer's *Young Deer's Return* (1910). Courtesy of the Museum of the American West, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; photograph #94.36.1.115.

During his brief but influential career, Young Deer was employed by several different film companies including Kalem, Lubin, Biograph, Bison, and Vitagraph. He was hired as West Coast studio director for Pathé Frères in 1910 and cut an impressive figure with his wife, Lillian St. Cyr (Princess Red Wing), in motion picture circles from the East Coast studios to Southern California. "Before *movie star* became an institutionalized identity," Philip J. Deloria notes, "Red Wing was a visible presence in American popular culture, the first widely recognized Indian actress."⁴⁴ Red Wing, a Ho-Chunk actor and graduate of Carlisle Indian Industrial School,

starred in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Squaw Man*, among other key films throughout the 1910s and 1920s.⁴⁵ She and Young Deer would become one of Hollywood's first "power couples" alongside their contemporaries, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks.⁴⁶ Although Carewe and Young Deer were well known during the first two decades of the twentieth century, like many directors and actors of the time, they did not make the successful transition to "talkies."

Hundreds of Native American actors, consultants, screenwriters, and technicians also made their home in Southern California, drawn to the possibility of regular employment as well as the personal and professional pleasures and perils Hollywood afforded. Some of the most well-known Native actors of the silent era include: Charles Stevens, an Apache actor whose career spanned nearly fifty years and who starred in over two hundred television episodes and films, including D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of the Nation* (1915), where he was reportedly discovered by Douglas Fairbanks; Minnie Ha Ha (Minnie Devereaux), a Cheyenne actor who starred in comedies and westerns in the 1910s and 1920s alongside Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle and Mabel Normand; Ray Mala, an Inupiaq actor who began his career as a cameraman and actor with the Danish and Greenlandic Inuit explorer Knud Rasmussen, then moved to Hollywood in 1925, later starring in his most well-known film, W. S. Van Dyke's *Eskimo* (1933);⁴⁷ Luther Standing Bear, a Lakota actor, film consultant, and writer whose thirty-year entertainment career was launched with the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show; Chief Tahachee (Jeff Davis Tahchee Cypert), a Cherokee film and stage actor, stuntman, costume designer, and director who played a number of different ethnic and racialized roles from 1920 to 1960; Chief Thunder Cloud; Nipo T. Strongheart, a Yakima actor, camera operator, and technical advisor who began his career as a trick rider in Wild West shows and who starred in George B. Seitz's



4. Yakima actor Nipo T. Strongheart. Courtesy of the Yakima Valley Libraries.

The Last Frontier (1926) and William B. Wellman's *Across the Wide Missouri* (1951);⁴⁸ Jay Silverheels (Harold J. Smith), a Mohawk actor most famous for the role of Tonto in *The Lone Ranger* television series who spent the latter part of his nearly sixty-year career training Native American actors and advocating for the use of Indigenous actors in film and television; and Chief Many Treaties (William Malcolm Hazlett), a Blackfeet actor who starred in films in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴⁹

While most of these entertainers migrated to the state from



5. Actor Jay Silverheels as Tonto in *The Lone Ranger* (1949).

elsewhere, the film industry attracted California Indians as well, although in fewer numbers. The demographics of the Hollywood Indian community reflect the racist attitude towards Indigenous Californians during much of the twentieth century, many of whom were considered too dark to play Native American roles except as extras and whose Spanish surnames led them to be cast as Mexican characters instead. It also illustrates the ubiquity of the cinematic Plains Indian image. Many Native actors were required to furnish their own costumes on set. California Indians who did not possess the standard war bonnet and fringed buckskin costume could not compete



6. Joseph "Suni" Vance Chorre. Image courtesy of Heather Chorre Garcia.

with actors already trained to perform as the dominant culture's Plains Indian on the Wild West circuit.

One of the several California Indians cast in film roles, Tatzumbie DuPea, a Paiute actor born in Lone Pine, California, began her acting career late in life. She starred in at least two films, *Buffalo Bill* (1944) and *Across the Wide Missouri* (1951),

both directed by William Wellman, in uncredited roles alongside Chief Many Treaties, Thunder Cloud, Tahachee, and Nipo Strongheart.⁵⁰ Suni War Cloud (Joseph "Suni" Vance Chorre), a Luiseño professional wrestler, dancer, and actor, is perhaps the most well-known California Indian from the early cinema period. During his twenty-two-year film career, he landed roles in films such as DeMille's *Union Pacific* (1939) and Michael Curtiz's *Jim Thorpe—All American* (1951).

Chorre attended Sherman Indian High School in Riverside, California, as did his brothers, Bennie and James, and sister, Marie, who also acted in films. Several Native actors used Sherman as a place to live while performing on set or as a dormitory to house their children when they relocated to Hollywood. Joseph Chorre, whom Sherman administrators fault for taking too much time from school to devote to motion pictures, applied to live in a Sherman dormitory while attending Riverside Community College and continuing to act in films. Ira Walker, a Sac and Fox Carlisle graduate from Shawnee, Oklahoma, enrolled his son, George Lee Walker, at Sherman in 1924 so he could continue to pursue his acting career. George excelled at Sherman, where he played in the band, served on student council, and was on the honor roll. He also played minor roles in *Redskin* (1929) and was recruited by Richard Davis (Chief Thunder Bird) to star in *Battling with Buffalo Bill* (1931).⁵¹ Joseph Chorre's mother, Gertrude Chorre, attended Sherman when it was located in Perris, California. When given the limited choice of a career as a domestic servant or as an actor, she chose Hollywood.⁵² She starred in Allan Dwan's *Frozen Justice* (1929) as well as bit roles in other films. She also served as a language informant to linguist André Malécot.⁵³ As was the case with many Native American actors, she chose to live off-reservation in Riverside and Los Angeles. But the Chorres, like other Native American entertainment families, maintained contact with their tribal community

through voluntary attendance at federal Indian boarding schools such as Sherman and frequent family visits.⁵⁴

Native American actors and directors worked and lived within strict institutional, legal, and ideological parameters imposed by the dominant culture. They created, sometimes in collaboration with non-Native filmmakers, self-images that performed important work on-screen and in their respective personal and professional communities. These filmmakers and actors labored under the radar of mainstream culture, and their work also served the interests of tribal communities through visual sovereignty. Sovereignty in the filmic world emerged to challenge dominant representations of Native Americans created by the studio system. Randolph Lewis suggests that a "cinema of sovereignty" emerged in the twentieth century with the generative and important work of Indigenous documentary filmmakers.⁵⁵ He defines representational sovereignty to be "the ability for a group of people to depict themselves with their own ambitions at heart."⁵⁶ While this aligns with my own definition of visual sovereignty and is critical to understanding the processes by which Indigenous people rework and represent notions of sovereignty, visual sovereignty has a prehistory in the crucial practices of early Native American directors and actors, as well as in precontact artistic forms. It also extends past cinema, as Lewis anticipates in his study, to the fields of performance art, studio art, Internet media, and the televisual.

Native directors and actors have appropriated the narrative and visual conventions of the film medium stereotypes of themselves for their own interests and to their own ends and have strived to display tribally specific knowledge since the turn of the twentieth century. Through intervention in the production side of film representations of Native peoples in particular, such as the construction of identities, political activism, and language preservation, Native entertainers engaged the place of Indigenous communities in popular culture. Native peoples in the pre- and

post-studio system shaped visual modes of sovereignty to reflect Indigenous knowledges through these activities.

Native American actors and filmmakers expressed visual sovereignty by creating performances of the "Indian" for various reasons, such as the search for economic opportunities to alleviate poverty, provide a decent living for their families, and escape oppressive conditions on their own reservations. One of the first scholars to ascribe agency to Native American public performers, L. G. Moses intimates that Indigenous employees of *Wild West* shows continued to live somewhat autonomous, traditional lives even while acting in staged plays that heralded their defeat and disappearance. Despite government policies to curtail their free movement off the reservation, Indian agents and administrators were "incapable on occasion of regulating the Show Indians' lives."⁵⁷ Deloria notes that Native performers traveled with *Wild West* shows and later relocated to film sets because they "felt a mission to serve as scouts charged with finding out about the United States" and the rest of the world.⁵⁸

Native media-makers also wished to engage institutional power directly since most filmic representations of Indigenous peoples perpetuated stereotypes and were insensitive and untrue to the lived experiences of Native peoples in North America. When Native actors and filmmakers wore tribally inaccurate costumes or inverted the conventions of the ethnographic tradition in film, they performed important ideological and cultural work. They intentionally distorted the stereotyped filmic images of Native peoples through mocking white ignorance or offered affirmative and Native-centered film narratives as public pedagogy to change the dominant culture's attitude toward Indigenous peoples. In this project, I am less interested in situating specific performances of Indianness by Native American actors and filmmakers along an aesthetic and moral register than I am in thinking about the kinds of ideological and cultural work these embodiments perform and

the complicated contexts that make archiving, accessing, or even imagining these moments (and their attendant aporias) difficult due to the shifting, legally and culturally unstable category of Native American identity and identifications.

Native American involvement in both mainstream film and independent media production has been marginalized at best and completely elided at worst. This condition reveals much about film historiography, racial politics in the United States and Canada, and competing discourses around the concept of the nation and liberal white manifestations of guilt and its attendant forms of identity, belonging, and what Renato Rosaldo has termed "imperialist nostalgia." He defines this term as a strategy of ameliorating guilt on the part of European colonizers who express sadness for the disappearance of traditional cultures without acknowledging their hand in effecting radical change through violence in colonial and postcolonial communities throughout the world.⁵⁹ But even in this fraught environment, the complex, untidy, and tricksteresque performances of Native Americans such as the DeMille Indians deepen our understanding of the politics of race and representation in North America. Redfacing allowed Native directors and performers to exercise agency in participating in image production at the same time it revealed the powerful hegemonic forces Hollywood exerted in controlling those images.

The complexity of the lives that Native American performers created in Southern California also complicates conventional understandings of Indigenous identity. Most scholarship on Native urban diasporas focuses on the Urban Indian Relocation Program of the 1950s.⁶⁰ But the transnational Indigenous community in the Los Angeles area is much older, spanning from the precontact era through the first decades of the twentieth century to the present as Native actors moved to Hollywood to establish their careers. Native actors utilized their relatively privileged



7. Richard Davis Thunderbird. Courtesy of the Braun Research Library, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; photograph #P.36265.

positions as stars to forward activist agendas. Some, like Luther Standing Bear, advocated for the extension of voting rights to Native Americans prior to the 1924 American Indian Citizenship Act. Others pushed for better wages and working conditions for Native American media-makers, many of whom were paid less than animals used on the set. The ability to travel freely in a city that was much more diverse than their reservation hometowns

must also have been enticing. For example, Richard Davis Thunderbird, a Cheyenne writer and actor whose film career spanned over three decades, owned a home in Pasadena that served as an intellectual and social hub for Native and non-Native organizations and individuals. Thunderbird maintained his identity as a Cheyenne while he also participated in the vibrant new urban community formed by Native American actors. Thunderbird assisted other Native Americans in the film industry and was a visible presence in Los Angeles.⁶¹

Reservation Reelism: Hollywood Indians and North American Film History

Few images are as ubiquitous and loaded as those of Native Americans in popular culture. With a genealogy rooted in a variety of Native American aesthetic media such as wampum belts and pictographs, these images also stem from non-Native portrayals in Medieval and Renaissance woodcuts and engravings of European invasions of the "New World"; painted portraits of prominent leaders; staged performances of Indigenous people in Wild West shows, public dances, world's fairs, and international expositions; and daguerreotypes and photographs.⁶² Representations of Native Americans in moving pictures have been particularly pervasive and powerful. Recent films such as Terrence Malick's *The New World* (2005), Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto* (2006), Marcus Nispel's *Pathfinder* (2007), and James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) demonstrate the continued popular interest in mainstream films with Native American subjects and films that metaphorize contact between Indigenous communities and invader-settlers.

Stoic and silent though hardly static, the Hollywood Indian became iconic with the advent of new visual culture technologies in the late nineteenth century. Since its inception, the commercial motion picture industry in North America has been fascinated with the image of the American Indian.⁶³ Hundreds of actuali-

ties featuring Indians engaging in putatively quotidian practices were shown in nickelodeons in the first decade of commercial filmmaking alone. Thomas Edison produced three kinetoscope films in 1894, *Sioux Ghost Dance*, *Buffalo Dance*, and *Indian War Council*, that featured Lakota performers employed by Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show reenacting tribal dances on a stage at Edison's Black Maria studio in New Jersey. Although these films and others with Indigenous subjects from around the world permitted a new kind of endlessly available tourist gaze for the masses, recycling contemporary racist modes of understanding "exotic" cultures, they also challenged already prevailing notions of Native Americans as an extinct people relegated to dusty anthropological monographs and sepia-toned photographs.

This was particularly so during the silent film era when the representational focus shifted slightly from nineteenth-century reenactments of famous battles and "traditional" cultural forms, such as dance. These dances were popular with Wild West show audiences and fixed Native Americans as peoples in the past with an uncertain future.⁶⁴ Silent films of the 1910s and 1920s often presented Native Americans with contemporary roles and dramatized the ongoing tensions between Indigenous communities and European American invader-settlers.⁶⁵ Young Deer worked closely with his wife, Princess Red Wing, to create films that presented a more nuanced view of Native Americans within the limited confines of the silent western genre. He was recognized for his skill in negotiating both audience expectations and the limitations of the burgeoning studio system when he was appointed head of Pathé Frère's West Coast studio in 1909. According to Andrew Brodie Smith, Young Deer and Red Wing created and portrayed Native American characters "more sympathetically and in more complex ways than any other silent-era filmmakers."⁶⁶

Yet even Young Deer's work presents stylized and often fanciful images of Native Americans to be consumed by North American

and European audiences, including Native American moviegoers themselves. While much of his work attempts to underscore controversial subject matter such as miscegenation, racism against Indigenous peoples, and compulsory assimilation, according to Smith, "By the teens, Young Deer's Indian westerns had become indistinguishable from other filmmakers' similar product."⁶⁷ Jean Baudrillard's work on the "hyperreal" serves as a useful critical paradigm in thinking about how persistently these images bleed into the fabric of Native American lives off the page or screen as the Hollywood Indian has come to stand in for self-generated representations of Indigenous people: "Simulation . . . is the generation by models of a real without origin in reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it."⁶⁸ This simulation is not an "indiscriminate, inchoate condition," as Baudrillard supposes, but an everyday practice that Michel de Certeau would locate as "the place from which discourse is produced."⁶⁹ The cinematic Indian is what Meaghan Morris calls a "banality" that continually reproduces itself like the Land O'Lakes butter maiden who holds up an image of herself that reflects endlessly but has no stable point of origin.⁷⁰ It is predicated on constantly shifting binary oppositions and paradoxes along a vast circuitry of representations: noble vs. bloodthirsty savage, faceless horde vs. lone warrior in defeat, beautiful maiden vs. shapeless drudge, inscrutable enemy vs. loyal sidekick, assimilationist vs. traditionalist, sexual predator vs. emasculated "last of his breed," to name just a few. The "excess" of such images, Gregory J. Seigworth contends, "finds the *potential* of its politics within that virtual space" that I call the virtual reservation.⁷¹

And in the end, with the tension between and overlapping of the discourse-generated representations of Native Americans through the texts of literature and visual culture and the embodied, material world beyond the page or screen—what Craig Womack has described as the vexed "intrinsic and extrinsic" relationship

between "the world of literature and the very real struggles of American Indian communities"⁷²—the representations have come to serve as the markers of Indigenous identity and identifications for both non-Natives and some Native American people. In many ways the Hollywood Indian can serve as a kind of ground zero for the kinds of critical work on the multiple nodes of identity, performance, and race in which postmodern and post-postmodern theorists have been engaged.

In *Making the Movies* (1915), one of the first histories of early U.S. cinema, film critic Ernest A. Dench argues, "To act as an Indian is the easiest thing possible, for the Redskin is practically motionless."⁷³ In contradistinction to cultures depicted as within the bounds of modernity, cultures that were becoming more kinetic and active through new motion picture technologies, Dench's assertion demonstrates how Native Americans in the twentieth century were portrayed as nearly static, receding to the vanishing point of national history. Despite the European American impulse to eradicate the Indian, Native Americans have still been influential in both North American mainstream and independent cinema since the inception of motion pictures in both obvious and less visible ways. The drive to subdue the wilderness began as "regeneration through violence," a myth that "became the structuring metaphor of the American experience."⁷⁴ Conquest is conjoined to twin desires that seek to simultaneously celebrate Native American cultures by domesticating them for mass consumption and, in a more literal form of consumption, embody in European Americans the desire to be Native American.

Actors, particularly in the silent era, worked within and against this hegemony by influencing the way Indigenous people would be portrayed through professional relationships with filmmakers and through their work as film consultants. For example, Luther Standing Bear, whose fascinating life led him from the Oglala



8. Luther Standing Bear in regalia. Courtesy of the Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, call number X-31857.

Lakota Reservation in South Dakota to Carlisle to London with the Wild West show to Hollywood, argues in his autobiography, *My People the Sioux*, that although films featuring a Native American plot were overwhelmingly based on stereotype and the industry often exhibited a hiring preference for non-Indian actors, well-known directors of the period were amenable to, and even welcomed, criticism.

In 1912 Standing Bear wrote that when he first arrived in Southern California, he and director Thomas H. Ince spoke at length about representations of Native Americans. "I told him that none of the Indian pictures were made right," Standing Bear notes. "He seemed quite surprised at this and began asking me questions. I explained to him in what way his Indian pictures were wrong. We talked for a long time, and when I arose to leave, he said, 'Standing Bear, some day you and I are going to make some real Indian pictures.'"⁷⁵

Standing Bear, who died on the set of *Union Pacific* in 1939, never had the opportunity to collaborate with Ince on any "real Indian pictures," although Ince recruited Native Americans from reservations in South Dakota to star in silent melodramas and westerns that were sympathetic, by early twentieth-century standards, to Native Americans.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, he did continue to struggle on behalf of his community through his activism for universal suffrage for Native Americans and his behind-the-scenes work on film sets, including founding an "Indian Employment Agency" in 1927.⁷⁷ Standing Bear serves as an example of the many Native American performers and show business workers who complicated representations of Native Americans in the first years of film production.

For Standing Bear and other Native American actors, acting in films permitted a socially acceptable way of talking back to colonialism. In his autobiography he recalls an anecdote about being forced to receive a European American name to replace his

Lakota name, which school administrators found unacceptable. "When my turn came," he wrote, "I took the pointer and acted as if I were about to touch an enemy. . . . The first few times I wrote my new name, it was scratched so deeply into the slate that I was never able to erase it. But I copied my name all over both sides of the slate until there was no more room to write . . . then I took a piece of chalk downstairs and wrote 'Luther' all over everything I could copy it on."⁷⁸

In a world where Standing Bear could no longer complete a culturally sanctioned process of attaining manhood through traditional Lakota practices, he initiated his own ritual of adulthood in the midst of an incredibly alien and oppressive context. He not only defused the new name's power over him by touching it according to a Lakota test of bravery and possession, he reinscribed the name with power by making it his own, engraving it so deeply on everything he could find that it could not be erased. By counting coup on his "enemy"—his new European American name and institutionalized education—he fulfills his promise to his father to "do some brave deed, and then come home again alive,"⁷⁹ demonstrating how his Lakota worldview served as a guidepost to lead him through the complex and difficult program of assimilation relatively unscathed. Acting in films could function for him as an extension of this innovative way of counting coup and making an unfamiliar representational world his own, even if the motion pictures he starred in did not necessarily reflect his views on Native Americans.

Native American spectators also engaged in public debate about Indigenous images in films. By the first decade of the twentieth century there were movie theaters near or on many reservations, and Native American spectators filled the seats.⁸⁰ The majority of Native American spectators who entered the public sphere via letters to the editor of newspapers were concerned with

verisimilitude and authenticity of visual iconography, particularly costumes. John Standing Horse, a Carlisle student, for example, critiqued representations of Native Americans in motion pictures as well as studio hiring practices. He wrote in 1911 to the trade newspaper *Motion Picture World*:

If the directors of the moving picture companies knew how foolish their women and girls look in the Indian pictures, with from one to three turkey feathers stuck in the top of their heads, they would be more careful. . . . We always laugh and think it a great joke when we see the leading girls in the pictures made up as Indians, with the chicken feather in the hair. It is funny, but they would all look much better without them. The braves wear the eagle feather, one or two, after they are braves, but they have to earn them. The chief and council-chief have the war bonnet. Have also seen pictures with all the made-up Indian men with big war bonnets on their heads. Another big laugh, but don't think the managers know this; if they did, they would do different. Then again, they should get the real Indian people.⁸¹

Not only does Standing Horse provide ethnographic information that would correct "inauthentic" costuming and argue for hiring practices that would privilege Native American actors, but he also deflates the dramatic import of silent movies with Indian themes by suggesting that he and his friends laugh at these films. Native Americans are considered in popular representations to be a group of people utterly devoid of humor; however, Standing Horse corrects this stereotype by arguing that Native Americans are not only capable of humor, as active spectators they laugh at dominant portrayals of Indigenous people. In her study of Indigenous film reception, JoEllen Shively notes that Native American spectators "liked humor and wit in western

movies and valued this trait in their friends. Humor is a source of joy for them—a gift.⁸² Humor is deployed by spectators not only as critique, but as a mechanism of survival.

Laughter becomes the strategy of the oppressed in Standing Horse's critique. It encapsulates a dual purpose that Keith Basso calls "a form of play" and "a negative statement that contains within it an implicit negative metastatement."⁸³ The representations Standing Horse mocks are both "funny" because they are inaccurate and "dangerous"⁸⁴ because the act of calling into question these representations could have dire consequences in a settler colonial nation state that Dylan Rodríguez characterizes as the site of "biological and cultural genocides, mass-based bodily violence, racialized domestic warfare, and targeted, coercive misery."⁸⁵

Native American critiques of images of Indians suggest that Indigenous people were not only laughing at what they interpreted to be ludicrous caricatures of Indian subjects, but publicly protested against them as well. In 1911 a delegation of over thirty Anishinabe (Ojibway) men from Minnesota traveled to Washington DC to join "in an 'uprising' against the motion pictures," according to a *Motion Picture World* article entitled "Indians War on Films."⁸⁶ Members of the delegation charged that even those films that portrayed Native Americans as figures in larger twentieth-century dramas such as the boarding schools still perpetuated stereotypes and were "grossly libelous."⁸⁷ Their activism suggests a sophisticated response to dominant culture paradigms of representation that welds a negotiation of compulsory assimilation practices on the part of the U.S. government to Indigenous ways of making meaning out of the unfamiliar, a means of counting coup in much the same way Standing Bear took charge of his name and new social context.

Following so closely on the heels of the violent massacres of Indigenous communities by U.S. troops all over Native America,

a military uprising against those who created unacceptable images would likely have been immediately suppressed. Instead, the Anishinabe delegates from Minnesota fought motion picture representations on the dominant culture's discursive terms. They counted coup on their enemy through a means that registered to European American culture. According to the newspaper account, they circulated a signed petition and were considering "a call at the White House . . . to lay the case before President Taft, and may ask for congressional action looking into the regulation of moving pictures in which Indians are shown." Whether or not the petition reached its intended audience, Native Americans since the inception of the motion picture industry—from spectators to filmmakers—have found various ways of counting coup on Indian representations and rendering these images acceptable on their own terms.

Life on the Virtual Reservation

Native American media-makers and spectators have enacted agency in Hollywood through functioning as trickster figures and transforming their experiences with visual media into Indigenous epistemes, as Standing Bear and the Anishinabe delegation demonstrate by counting coup on film stereotypes of Indians. The space in which Native Americans create and contest self-images and where these images collide with mass-mediated representations of Indians by the dominant culture can usefully be thought of as a virtual reservation, a topic I take up at length in chapter five.

From their creation, reservations have been often-perverse tourism sites where non-Indians would travel to experience a glimpse into a purportedly "vanished" culture. Reservations became living dioramas where tourists could putatively step outside of time and space to see "real" Indians (or what passed for the "real" in the settler nation's national mythology). By relo-

cating the Native American experience to celluloid, film became a virtual reservation for a viewing public eager for Indigenous images, but lacking the spare time and money to visit a geographical one. This would prove to be especially so for European immigrants and the working class in the early twentieth century, for whom, as Miriam Hansen argues, silent cinema created a space for imagining a unified national spectator.⁸⁸ Reservations, of course, continued to bear the brunt of this fascination with Indians, as roadside attractions near Indian communities would demonstrate, but the presence of films with Native American plots and subplots helped ameliorate the situation in some important ways by diverting the gaze from reservation communities to the virtual reservation of the filmic space.

Drawing from the work of Marcel Proust, Henri Lefebvre, and Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze defines the virtual as "real without being present, ideal without being abstract."⁸⁹ Seigworth elaborates on this idea, "More exactly, the virtual gives account to the contextual space of an actual moment in time without necessarily abstracting or arresting this moment in time."⁹⁰ Cinema as virtual reservation exemplifies this space in between "real" conceptions of space, physicality, and time and the purely imagined.

Native American actors, particularly those living and working in Hollywood, would have sustained access to philanthropists and policy makers located far from reservation communities, thereby creating opportunities for social change that would have been much more limited otherwise. Reservations would come to signify both the space of confinement and disempowerment and, paradoxically, liberation and the retention of tradition. Virtual reservations sequester Native Americans (as visual and imagined representations) but also provide Indigenous people with an organizing principle that allows communities and individuals to coalesce around commonly held as well as contested ideas and objectives.

Conclusion

When the DeMille Indians sent in their petition in 1940 they were expressing their visual sovereignty. Even though the group's traditions were recently established and would most likely disqualify them by the European American standards typically used to determine whether or not a tribe would be federally recognized, they united in their common condition as Indigenous actors, and they utilized the resultant power their images on the silver screen had to capture the imagination of the public. The DeMille Indians effected reverse frontier expansion by staking out their territory in Hollywood, a powerful imagined space on which they could create a virtual reservation. Their acts of visual sovereignty in the films they starred in and their work organizing a collective Hollywood Indian community set the stage for later generations of Indigenous artists who would borrow from, contest, and operate in dialogue with images produced by this first generation of film actors and directors.