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# “Reel Navajo”: The Linguistic Creation of Indigenous Screen Memories

*Leighton C. Peterson*

As Philip Deloria reminds us, popular cultures are key sites for the “production of expectations,” and as a major form of popular culture, film has figured prominently in the circulation and reproduction of expectations about Native American peoples since the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Deloria suggests that such expectations assume a status quo that is often built around failure—a failure to engage technology, thwart Manifest Destiny, exist with non-Natives in a contemporaneous modernity, and—as many of the articles in this issue illustrate—maintain their heritage languages or speak in otherwise “correct” ways. Visual representations such as film and video, tools of what James Faris called “the gaze of Western humanism,” have been integral to a multitude of colonial projects such as salvage ethnography and the promotion of government policies, and they continue to fuel expectations and misrepresent histories in a range of genres and styles including children’s movies.<sup>2</sup> They also have been most often produced in colonial languages. Due to assumptions of reality and objectivity—as well as the expectation of spectacle, illusion, and entertainment—that are often embedded in films, they have been especially powerful in reflecting and recreating dominant histories and ideologies about Native peoples.<sup>3</sup> They are also powerful tools in countering such expectations.

Throughout the past twenty years, there has been a significant increase in the number of films in a variety of styles and genres written, produced, and

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directed by Native American and First Nations filmmakers.<sup>4</sup> These films are sometimes made as direct responses to dominant ideologies and expectations, as indigenous perspectives on marginalized or misrepresented histories, as documentation, or as entertainment for local and global audiences in a process of what Faye Ginsburg calls the making of “screen memories.”<sup>5</sup> Creating screen memories, as Ginsburg notes, involves “resignifying the traditional,” refiguring stories for the aesthetics, requirements, and political economy of dominant media institutions and ideologies while engaging the concerns of local communities.<sup>6</sup> They also very often mean engaging with indigenous languages and ways of speaking for the purposes of documentation, aesthetics, “authenticity,” or practicality. Although global indigenous media and media makers have received growing scholarly attention in recent years, relatively scant attention has been paid to the implications of indigenous linguistic representations in film, especially in North American productions.<sup>7</sup> This article explores the ideologies and practices involved in the process of making screen memories in Navajo; that is, of Navajo filmmakers making films in the Navajo language, in whole or in part, as well as the ideologies and practices that inform, encode, and are observable in these Navajo films.<sup>8</sup>

The linguistic creation of indigenous screen memories brings together new practices and ideologies, as well as questions confronting filmmakers regarding apposite linguistic, visual, and narrative representations. The creation of the Arapaho-language version of the animated Disney classic *Bambi*, for example, necessitated new engagements with—among other things—the appropriateness of animated animals speaking the language on-screen, as did the animated Navajo-language coyote stories produced by Utah’s San Juan School District during the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Discourses and practices in Native communities are continuously emergent and can directly counter colonial language ideologies and expectations, which is aptly illustrated in this volume by Wesley Leonard’s work with *myaamia*-language revitalization or Anthony Webster’s research on the Englishes of contemporary Navajo writers.<sup>10</sup> Phenomena such as Tiwa-speaking teenagers scripting soap operas occupy what Erin Debenport calls herein a “fictional space” between languages and media that provides new opportunities for intratribal social critiques, ideological transformations, and language socialization and linguistic vitality.<sup>11</sup> In Navajo communities, bilingual e-mails, rapping, and Navajo-language radio broadcasts are all exemplary of the range of communicative practices that engage such fictional spaces, as do Navajo filmmakers, who—in the process of filmic resignification and making screen memories—actively reflect and transform expectations, discourses, and linguistic ideologies embedded and encoded in a range of media practices by Navajos and non-Navajos alike.<sup>12</sup>

In this article I explore this nexus of language ideologies and representational practices involved in the production and circulation of Navajo ways of speaking in film. First, I contextualize Navajo filmmakers within broader histories and discourses of indigenous media. I illustrate how the (mis)use of Navajo communicative practices can be (de)legitimizing for audiences and integral to the creation of indigenous screen memories, and—when appropriately deployed—how the use of Navajo creates social intimacy through the representation of shared sociality and linguistic realities.<sup>13</sup> The filmic site of production—during casting, rehearsals, shooting, and editing—is where cultural producers often have a heightened awareness of representational practices and their implications, and it is an especially fruitful site to investigate the linguistic creation of screen memories. I argue that filmmakers are challenging the tropes and expectations of technological incompetence and language loss while creating social intimacy by actively resignifying and representing “reel Navajo.” That is, they are engaging the many ways of speaking and imagining Navajo, English, and Navajo English found in Navajo communities and making them relevant for Navajo audiences. In the process, they contribute to the heightened awareness of local sociolinguistic realities among global audiences and to the indigenous language ideologies being transformed and refigured in a constant process of renewal by speakers, cultural producers, and audiences.<sup>14</sup> I argue that Navajo filmmakers exhibit what Paul Kroskrity identified as “the more self-conscious and discursively aware forms of agency” in the linguistic creation of screen memories, and in the process, they are seizing what Deloria has called the “moment of paradox and opportunity” to engage and challenge performance frames, stereotypes, and linguistic ideologies while remaining engaged therein.<sup>15</sup>

## CONTEXTUALIZING NAVAJO FILM

Deloria reminds us that the presence of Native filmmakers should be considered neither unexpected nor anomalous, as indigenous peoples have been involved in movies from directing and producing to editing and acting since the beginning of the filmmaking industry. Native cultural producers such as James Young Deer, Princess Red Wing, and John Big Tree were challenging early filmic representations, including dominant ideologies of assimilation, gender, and miscegenation.<sup>16</sup> Yet, as Deloria revealed, off-screen indigenous participation in the production of early Hollywood films often was hidden, furthering expectations of technological incompetence and disengagement with popular cultures. Faye Ginsburg related the story of Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), a classic in documentary and ethnographic film,

and the ways in which the filmic representation hid the “engagement with the cinematic process” that Inuit peoples had in many phases of the production, part of “the deliberate erasure of indigenous ethnographic subjects as actual or potential participants in their own screen representations.”<sup>17</sup> Although these early producers were later marginalized in the metanarratives of violence, conquest, and pacification that became central to Hollywood’s Indian-themed repertoire, their early engagements set the stage for contemporary indigenous cultural producers, themselves operating in some of the same fields, ideologies, and expectations as their predecessors.

Despite the exclusion of indigenous voices, Native languages and ways of speaking indexical of Native peoples have made numerous appearances in Hollywood productions, most of which were imagined and created by non-Native cultural producers. These ways of speaking include what Barbra Meek has called the “Hollywood Injun English” that has appeared in so many films, a dehumanizing and expectedly dysfluent “English,” but in more recent times has come to include locally recognizable speech in contemporary indigenous communities reflected in Chris Eyre’s (a well-known Cheyenne/Arapaho filmmaker) groundbreaking film *Smoke Signals* (1996), as well as such phenomena as film icon Kevin Costner and Cherokee actor Wes Studi speaking Lakota for the Hollywood epic *Dances with Wolves* (1992).<sup>18</sup> Navajo has been often represented in films, from Navajo-speaking Comanche in John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956), to the Navajo woman (played by Geraldine Keams) in Clint Eastwood’s *The Outlaw Josie Wales* (1976), to director John Woo’s portrayal of Navajo code talkers under the protection of Nicolas Cage in *Windtalkers* (2002). The Navajo language has also been represented on PBS’s *Sesame Street*, in countless documentary films, and even on the popular Fox TV series *The X-Files*, in which we learned during season 6 of the connection between the “ancient, written Navajo” inscription on an extraterrestrial object washed ashore in Africa and the alien origins of human life.<sup>19</sup>

Although Navajos had been appearing—and were most likely very much engaged—in a variety of ethnographic, documentary, and Hollywood films since the turn of the twentieth century, the credits and ultimate control remained very much in the hands of others.<sup>20</sup> The advent of Navajo filmmakers is often attributed to Sol Worth and John Adair’s Navajo Film Project during the 1960s, which interestingly, due to the wishes of the Navajo participants and despite being an experiment in cognitive anthropology, did not incorporate synchronous sound in the filming process—and thus no dialogue.<sup>21</sup> The films emerging from the project are part of the fields in which contemporary Navajo filmmakers operate and are analyzed, and in Worth and Adair’s analyses of the filmic language, it was the filmmakers’ alteric use of space, pacing, and narrative structure that was uniquely Navajo.<sup>22</sup> The first high-profile work by a Navajo

filmmaker outside the confines of an ethnographic experiment was Arlene Bowman's provocative 1986 short film *Navajo Talking Picture*.<sup>23</sup> Bowman, a UCLA graduate student at the time, filmed visits to her grandmother's home on the Navajo Reservation, where the grandmother's growing resistance to being filmed and Bowman's inability to communicate with her in Navajo frame the narrative.<sup>24</sup> The work foreshadows themes appearing in later Navajo films—the role of language in creating or disrupting intimacy and the interplay of “traditional” Navajo modes with “outside” influences.

Since these early endeavors, the number of Navajo filmmakers has grown exponentially. In my own experience as a producer for a Navajo filmmaker and as a participant in a range of film festivals, one often hears discussions by programmers and indigenous producers alike about the number, for better or worse, of Navajo filmmakers and films in circulation, going as far to call it an “industry.” Filmmaking by Navajo cultural producers has been so prolific in recent years that Randolph Lewis has called it an emerging “Navajo national cinema.”<sup>25</sup> Such a national cinema, he argues, is important for understanding contemporary Navajo filmmaking, as it is “a form of strategic essentialism that benefits Navajo filmmakers on symbolic and practical levels, but it also focuses attention on Navajo lives in a way that may sustain the political sovereignty of the vast Navajo Nation. As much as is possible within the inherently transnational medium of cinema, these are films of Navajo particularity, quiet assertions of indigenous nationhood that dramatize Navajo lives, explore Navajo concerns, and emphasize the vitality of contemporary Navajo culture in its many forms.”<sup>26</sup>

In creating screen memories, Navajo filmmakers are frequently engaged in representing and refiguring histories and personal stories with “Navajo particularity,” that is, with forms, aesthetics, and narratives often seen by their creators and audiences as indexical or iconic of Navajo-ness.<sup>27</sup> These films come in a variety of styles and genres, including comedies, documentaries, “road trip” films, children's films, and animations.<sup>28</sup> As with many global indigenous productions, they have often been relegated to the margins of global cinema, and, with few exceptions, they most often screen in specialized festivals or as a “sidebar” to prestigious venues.<sup>29</sup> Not all of these films, however, are produced for global audiences; in any case, filmmakers often keep an eye toward Navajo audiences, and, at this point, a majority of them have addressed “Navajo culture in its many forms.”<sup>30</sup> One of the most important cultural forms Lewis speaks of is language. To imply that filmmakers assert nationhood through the use of Navajo is by no means an overstatement as the language has become iconic of Navajo identity for many community members, and it is an especially important marker in more public and performative contexts, including film.<sup>31</sup> For some Navajo filmmakers, there is a compulsion to shoot narrative films in

Navajo while questioning or challenging their own linguistic competencies, as well as those of their actors or participants. As I illustrate below, this has been done for the sake of historic “authenticity” (getting it right) or for “intimacy” (with local audiences and film subjects), yet rarely in these cases is this done with a direct eye toward documentation or linguistic vitality as in the case of some indigenous productions.

Not all films made are completely in Navajo, if they are at all, which is reflective of observable linguistic realities in Navajo communities—of code switching, language mixing, and language shift—and of producers’ communicative competencies. They are, however, embedded in broader concerns of language and identity among many Navajos and Navajo speakers. Anxieties about the viability of the Navajo language, for example, or of younger Navajos’ skills and interest in learning the language remain high for many community members, language activists, and scholars alike.<sup>32</sup> Despite recent shifts toward linguistic valorization and an increasingly iconicized relationship between the language and Navajo identity, there is a continuing decrease in the percentage of the population who self-identify as speakers, and scholars and educators point to recent decreases in the numbers and skills of child speakers as an ominous sign.<sup>33</sup> Many studies have shown how ideologies and practices among Navajo speakers have shifted over time, which can include accommodation or rejection of “recent” practices such as mixed codes and grammatical shifts, as well as a variety of attitudes toward the language shift to English.<sup>34</sup> In her work with younger Navajos, Tiffany Lee explored the complexities of heterogeneous language ideologies among teenagers, including the feelings of inferiority that teenagers experience regarding their Navajo-language skills, which are fueled by and contribute to expectations of their disengagement with traditional modes.<sup>35</sup> Although the actual situation may remain elusive and unpredictable, the anecdotal, sociolinguistic, and ethnographic evidence—and, most importantly, the concerns of community members—suggests a transforming relationship among the Navajo language, its speakers, its practice, and Navajo identities.

However, there can also be misrecognition of the linguistic competencies and practices of younger Navajos or nonspeakers and, as Lee and others have pointed out, of their desire to learn about tradition and language.<sup>36</sup> Disagreement and misrecognition on what constitutes “Navajo” exists, as competencies and practices from a wide range of speakers include elements from Navajo, English, Navajo English, and “bilingual codes” sometimes called “Navlish.”<sup>37</sup> Margaret Field has documented, for example, recent grammatical shifts and loanword incorporations in Navajo, as well as ways in which Navajo communicative elements can be retained in English.<sup>38</sup> Contemporary Navajo filmmakers who make films in Navajo must possess the competence and/or

the desire to engage a broad range of ideologies about language and linguistic practices. Often members of the younger generations (under forty), what these filmmakers challenge are not just histories. They are challenging the tropes and ideologies regarding linguistic vitality and the younger generations' relationships with "traditional" modes, including language. At the same time, they may feel compelled to adhere to extant ideologies and tropes surrounding the Navajo language, including those of indigenous purism and the erasure of historical variation and language mixing.<sup>39</sup> Thus "reel" Navajo is many things. It is code switching, mixed codes, Navajo English, and "English." It also includes representations of "real," authentic Navajo, an idealized form tied to processes of iconization and traditionalization, and, in this case, of particular ways of imagining spoken Navajo in the past discussed below.<sup>40</sup> In at least one case, it is not Navajo at all—it is Apache.

### "REEL NAVAJO" AND SOCIAL INTIMACY

In the linguistic creation of screen memories, the use of Navajo or other local ways of speaking creates a social intimacy with Navajo audiences similar to what Webster identified with Navajo poets.<sup>41</sup> That is, they foster linguistic intimacy with audiences, revealing gulfs and chasms between those with shared sociality and those without. For example, Webster illustrates the ways in which author Laura Tohe dramatizes a particular "emotionally salient meta-discourse" that Navajo should be the language of social intimacy for Navajos. In Tohe's work, "there is no explicit statement concerning the relative value of one language or another. Instead, Tohe presents an image of Navajos using language to create affective bonds between Navajos."<sup>42</sup> Filmmakers also subtly create these bonds, and the proper use of Navajo ways of speaking provides screen memories with legitimacy and intimacy—between filmmakers and audiences, as well as between filmmakers and their subjects or actors. These cultural producers are also encoding these particular ways of speaking with new legitimacy, allowing viewers to relate their "characterological value" to ways of speaking that, as Asif Agha suggests, "do not merely represent the realities of social life, they amplify and transform them into more memorable, figuratively rendered forms."<sup>43</sup> This process operates on many levels, and viewers can relate—or not—to emergent characterological values.

For any media maker, the inappropriate use of Navajo can be delegitimizing for Navajo audiences. The popular US public-television program *Skinwalkers*, for example, was based on the Navajo-themed mystery novels by Tony Hillerman, produced by Robert Redford, and directed by Chris Eyre. The program, the first of a series, was critiqued in Sam Pack's study of Navajo



audiences for many reasons, but most especially for “the purported claim that Joe Leaphorn [a main character], did not know the meaning of *bilagaana* [sic], the Navajo word for Anglo. Every Navajo, no matter how assimilated or urban, knows this particular word.”<sup>44</sup> Ignorance of this kind could very well have been a narrative device designed to be inclusive of non-Navajo audiences, but it serves to distance Navajo audiences rather than create social intimacy. It is also significant that the producers, writers, director, and lead actors were not Navajo, a point made to Pack and often made to me as well by a range of Navajo viewers. This is a fictional story written by a non-Navajo. However, Pack’s analysis of viewers engaging the Hallmark Hall of Fame television production of *The Lost Child* (2000), based on an autobiographical account of a Navajo woman’s return home after an extratribal adoption decades earlier, elicited harsh ridicule from viewers for its use of the Navajo language: “The most vocal scorn . . . was reserved for the characters’ persistent mispronunciation of common Navajo words. They would repeatedly say ‘Dee-NAY’ instead of ‘Din-EH’. . . . They actors even pronounced the more mainstream tribal moniker as ‘NAH-vah-ho’, when no self-respecting ‘Na (long a)-veh-ho’ would verbalize it that way. Similarly, the characters kept referring to the Navajo girl’s puberty ceremony as a ‘keynalda,’ when it is supposed to be enunciated ‘ki-na-al-DAH.’”<sup>45</sup>

As with the earlier example, in this case neither the production personnel nor lead actors were Navajo, and such linguistic representations are one way in which audiences can judge authenticity, positionality, and sensitivity to those portrayed on-screen. These examples indicate a lack of social intimacy for Navajo viewers, a chasm between the media makers and some Navajo audiences. These misrepresentations are not unique and as illustrated are not always perpetuated by non-Indians. In yet another example, the prominent Salteaux actor, Adam Beach, one of the best-known First Nations actors, has had numerous occasions to practice his Navajo-language skills, most notably as Detective Jim Chee in *Skinwalkers* and as code talker Ben Yahzee in *Windtalkers*. According to publicity materials, Beach spent six months learning Navajo for the role of Yahzee, a skill he then applied as Detective Chee.<sup>46</sup> According to most of my own consultants, however, Beach needed more practice with his Navajo skills, a suggestion echoed by Pack and others due to his misrepresentation of Navajo words and embodied practices as a non-Navajo actor. Despite these critiques and a long history of misrepresentation, many Navajo audiences enjoy them and are happy to have these stories told—and the language depicted—at all in global mediated spaces.<sup>47</sup>

However, these examples also speak to the importance of getting language “right” on-screen, especially for Navajo filmmakers who have to keep in mind “how it will play on the Rez,” that is, to Navajo audiences. Pack has also

shown how the use of the Navajo language in films can be a legitimizing aspect of representation for some Navajo audiences. In his analysis of the acclaimed documentary film *The Return of Navajo Boy* (2000), Pack noted that one monolingual family matriarch in his study “particularly enjoyed this film because a large portion of the dialogue was spoken in the Navajo language, which bequeathed it with instant credibility in her eyes,” especially as she claimed it was the first movie she had ever really understood.<sup>48</sup> This documentary, which aired on US public television’s *Independent Lens*, is about Elsie Cly Begay and her family’s relationship with old films and photos, uranium mining, and extratribal adoption, which are issues of critical importance to Navajo and Native communities.<sup>49</sup> The fact that a significant portion of the film’s dialogue is in Navajo was due to the involvement of coproducer Bennie Klain, a fluent Navajo speaker and filmmaker who also acted as translator during the filming and editing process, as well as director Jeff Spitz’s empathetic approach and desire for accuracy.<sup>50</sup> As Spitz, a non-Native, recounted to me, “In order for the story that they told to be in their own words . . . it had to be interpreted and translated. That’s the first real problem. The second problem is once you start the translation process, . . . it opened up my eyes to nuances of language and their feelings, their sense of humor, friction, where they’re speaking from. It’s so much richer.”<sup>51</sup> Although the need to translate may seem obvious, there are numerous documentary films about Navajo peoples that are done almost entirely in English, yet note Spitz’s realization about “the nuances of language” that he couldn’t penetrate.

While English is certainly “a Diné language,” as Webster points out in this issue, the use of Navajo opens up opportunities that the use of English does not. Spitz’s assertion that “it’s so much richer,” refers to voice—the nuance, feelings, humor, and friction that he mentions when engaging multiple linguistic realities and communicative practices. As the relationships among Spitz, Klain, and the Cly family developed, Spitz began to realize that the problem of telling a Navajo story from a Navajo point of view went beyond simply translating the material, “if all the decisions about what stays in and what goes out are made by a non-Navajo.” To his credit, Spitz was quite cognizant of his own inability “to choose what is most representative and most connected to Elsie . . . and what would be most resonant for Navajo audiences.” These judgments fell in part to Klain, who as coproducer and translator was also present during the editing process, a crucial juncture in any film. Spitz’s initial indecision was further complicated when others in the media business told him that there was no way Elsie as a main character could carry his story: “People were saying, ‘she can’t carry your story Jeff. You can barely understand the woman. She’s old. You can’t focus on her.’ Then the whole sensibility that Bennie brought to

it was something that I didn't anticipate which is an irreverence and an insight and a deep sense of commitment to Elsie and Elsie's voice and her feelings."<sup>52</sup>

Although illuminating in terms of the nature of the collaboration and the creation of the final narrative, what is most telling and relevant are the comments about Elsie's voice, especially the media professionals' comments that "she can't carry your story . . . you can barely understand her." They were referring not to the Navajo-language scenes that would appear in later versions, but to scenes portraying Elsie's use of Navajo English that were prominent before Klain's involvement in editing. At once, there was misrecognition on the legitimacy of her ways of speaking in relation to the local context the filmmakers were trying to portray, as well as a judgment on appropriate ways of speaking English in film. Yet Pack noted how Navajo audiences appreciated the Navajo English spoken by narrator Lorenzo Begay, Elsie's son, which also legitimized the film in their eyes.<sup>53</sup> However, this works both ways: at a screening of the film at the American Anthropological Association meetings in 2000, a viewer criticized Klain for choosing to include subtitles over some Navajo English dialogue in the initial scenes. His response was that he did it "to get viewers used to the language" at the beginning of the film, but the justification was not accepted as it was seen as delegitimizing to Navajo English, a claim rejected by Klain.<sup>54</sup> His act of cultural and linguistic translation was misrecognized as marginalizing.

In screenings of Klain's subsequent award-winning documentary film *Weaving Worlds*, which began airing on US public television during late 2008, audiences inevitably comment on the language used by characters.<sup>55</sup> This film is an artistic and intimate portrait of Navajo weavers, reservation traders, and the global market for Navajo rugs, one of the most iconic and commodified symbols of Navajo culture.<sup>56</sup> Much of the film is in Navajo, again due in part to the fact that the director is a Navajo speaker, and some of the participants were either monolingual or more comfortable—or more consciously aware of—speaking Navajo on film. As Klain related,

Having learned from *Navajo Boy*, I know that using the language gives off a certain intimacy, a kind of kinship. But I didn't want to force any of the participants hands about, you know, "you have to speak Navajo." So one of the methods we used when we did our preinterviews, was to make a point to speak nothing but Navajo with them. So when it came to shooting they were very well aware that I could do that, but I didn't force them. And I guess that's what I was trying to do in all of my interviews in Navajo, I was trying was to forge that kinship bond so they would be more open with me.<sup>57</sup>

The Navajo dialogue provides intimacy and legitimization for a variety of audiences. Doing interviews in Navajo, however, does not mean that interviews

and dialogue are entirely in Navajo. As the producer of the film, I have seen how audiences often note the frequent code switching during interviews with weavers and the *vérité* scenes, which show daily life, that is, sheep shearing and office work, making such comments as, “I like how they easily switch between languages.” Audiences are also invariably surprised, as was Klain at first, with one-time trading-post owner Elijah Blair as he converses and jokes with former customers in fluent Navajo; they are also shocked and surprised about the sexual nature of his joking with elderly Navajo women.<sup>58</sup> Navajo viewers almost never comment on these moments in the same way. These moments of realization, of recognizing the unexpected as perhaps not anomalous, teach audiences something of the realities of language use—and lives—in Navajo communities. They are also important for challenging the expected: the fact that Navajo is only spoken by Navajos, elderly Navajos are always spiritual or serious, or when one speaks “Navajo” it is mutually exclusive to other codes or ways of speaking.

A different linguistic reality is portrayed in Navajo filmmaker Billy Luther’s documentary *Miss Navajo*.<sup>59</sup> The film, which is predominantly in English, follows contestant Crystal Frazier as she prepares for and competes in the annual Miss Navajo pageant during the Navajo Nation Fair. One of the qualifications, apart from sheep butchering and possessing “other skills and talents,” is that Miss Navajo must speak Navajo. This skill is judged in part through lengthy interviews by a panel, and the process puts the young contestants on the spot. For example, the film opens with a sequence in Navajo, with one of the judges quizzing Crystal: “I am going to ask you a question in Navajo, and I hope you understand it. If you were to say, ‘Come to my house for coffee,’ how would you teach us to get there from where we are in this area of Window Rock? How far is it and what roads do we take?” Crystal is silent, looking down, and finally asks—in English and directly into the camera—to have the question repeated in English. As the opening scene, it sets the tone for the entire movie, and as with much of the Navajo dialogue, the scene is neither translated nor subtitled. A later scene shows Crystal trying to cram a language lesson from her parents on the ride to the pageant, for which she gets scolded by her mom in Navajo about waiting to practice: “You should have been practicing every morning with your father!”

That Miss Navajo, a highly visible and symbolic ambassador of the Navajo Nation, is expected to speak Navajo is indexical of the importance of the language on a “national” level and is one way in which the language has become an iconic marker of Navajo identity.<sup>60</sup> This film portrays one of the heterogeneous linguistic realities in Navajo communities, and it speaks to the linguistic and generational disconnects previously discussed. It also shows how a speaker’s awareness and willingness to engage the language can

be forefronted in performative contexts like a national pageant and, in this case perhaps, by knowing the events were being filmed. This awareness of engagement with the language includes the filmmakers, and such moments in film create many kinds of social intimacy. After a screening of *Weaving Worlds* that I attended in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a young Navajo woman who grew up off the reservation got up during the Q&A session after the film and started crying. She told the audience, "I never learned my language. Watching this film makes me want to learn more." Klain, also in attendance, was struck. Such reactions were not the intent of the film, but they speak in part to unexpected audience reactions, if not the symbolic power of the language in film. As Klain told me about the encounter, "In and around the Southwest area, there's always someone in the audience who has a similar reaction. . . . I know there's people out there who grew up without the language, you read about it in books and publications, but when it's articulated to me so emotionally it becomes very real."<sup>61</sup> These moments of intimacy—between filmmaker and subject, audience and film, filmmaker and audience—are integral to the creation and circulation of Navajo screen memories, to audiences (re)signifying characterological values, and to the recognition and (re)legitimization of particular ways of speaking.

## IMAGINING AND RECLAIMING "REEL NAVAJO"

Navajo screen memories often reflect what Jennifer Denetdale identifies as those Diné histories based on oral tradition and kinship, the kinds of stories and histories that have been most likely overlooked by non-Native scholars—or filmmakers.<sup>62</sup> As Denetdale notes, these histories are very personal and have most often been told in Navajo among extended families; uncovering and representing these stories is an important aspect of what she calls "reclaiming Diné history."<sup>63</sup> The documentary films discussed above represent such Diné histories, yet the concerns of narrative films (sometimes referred to as "fictional"), although embedded with similar expectations, are also unique, and both forms are important to the creation of screen memories.<sup>64</sup> Regarding linguistic representations, however, the nature of filming, scripting, and rehearsing in narratives is often more "imaginative" than the process of recording and editing interviews and the *vérité* scenes in documentary. In his analysis of Tohe's *No Parole Today* (1999), a collection of poems and stories centered on boarding-school experiences, Webster suggests that such literary works by Navajo authors are an "attempt to creatively imagine that complicated speech environment," in this case, the oft-misrecognized heterogeneous speech situation of some boarding schools.<sup>65</sup> In the filmic resignification of Diné

histories, Navajo filmmakers also must rely on imagined audiences and ways of speaking, including ideologies of what constitutes proper “historical” Navajo. In the process, they are legitimizing their stories as historically accurate while (re)legitimizing particular Navajo ways of speaking, reflecting what Richard Bauman called the “process of traditionalization,” whereby legitimacy is actively and symbolically constructed through discursive links to the past.<sup>66</sup>

Two acclaimed short works by Navajo producers illustrate these points: Larry Blackhorse Lowe’s film *Shimásání* (“Maternal Grandmother”) and Nanobah Becker’s film *Conversion*.<sup>67</sup> Both films played at the Sundance Film Festival, among other prestigious international venues, and share similar themes: a little Navajo girl’s curiosity to discover the outside world during the early 1930s puts her at odds with members of her family. Becker’s protagonist in *Conversion* carries a small color drawing of Jesus Christ out of fascination, as her grandfather, a traditional medicine man, lies dying. Lowe’s protagonist sneaks around her family’s *hooghan* with a textbook from the local boarding school in order to admire pictures from an “outside world” she yearns to know. Both films are a form of screen memory and are entirely in Navajo. Lowe notes that the decision to shoot *Shimásání* in Navajo was easy, as it was dictated by content: “It was based upon my grandmother’s own stories about wanting to go to boarding school back in the 1920s and 1930s, so it wasn’t so much a choice to do it in Navajo as I guess you could say that the choice was already made because it was a period piece, and so there really was just no choice in the matter—it had to be Navajo.”<sup>68</sup>

There are two important points here. First, the film is a personal story, one family’s oral history of its relationship with dominant institutions and a grandmother’s desire to attend boarding school—exactly the kind of Diné history that Denetdale privileges. In terms of language, Lowe was looking to represent what he called “the 1930s Navajo dialect,” which, based on the final filmic representation, means neither loanwords nor code switching into English, reflecting ideologies of historical indigenous purism and monolingualism.<sup>69</sup> Becker echoed Lowe’s comments regarding historical accuracy, noting that, for *Conversion*, “you kind of have to believe this is a period piece. If you’re Navajo you know that everyone was speaking Navajo back then. That was my audience.” To represent history and create screen memories, accuracy counts; in these cases “history” happens in Navajo, and Navajo audiences have this expectation, integral to the representation and traditionalization of particular ways of speaking. That is, cultural producers are imagining historic language, and, at the same time, they are encoding the language and the screen memory with new legitimacy. Echoing the discussion of social intimacy and appropriate language use previously mentioned, Becker noted that the Navajo represented in her film had to be believable. “It would take an audience out of it, if it was

really horrible. Like, if you see a movie and someone speaks bad Navajo, it totally takes you out of it. So it had to be acceptable. Why spend all this money if you're not going to make the effort to make it sound okay?"<sup>70</sup>

In order to mitigate this, both filmmakers conducted careful and thorough auditions; casting actors is largely based on the director's overall vision for the script and on strong intuition in knowing who is "right" for a part. This "rightness" is often based on the actor's look and quality, but for Lowe and Becker, these elements took a back seat to their experiences with language, and both directors noted the difficulty they had in casting Navajo-speaking actors. Lowe said that "in order to make that come alive I needed the Navajo fluency, in order to really sell the time, sell the characters. . . . And the actors that we looked for had to at least have a certain understanding, or at least a capability to actually speak Navajo."<sup>71</sup> In the process of casting two female leads in the film, Lowe noted that "we'd get Navajo girls who could probably deliver on the goods as far as emotions and physicality, but who couldn't grasp their own language. . . . If they're not able to give you a high tone or at least a glottal, they can't make the language come alive."<sup>72</sup> In this statement, Lowe is referring to specific phonological markers indexical of Navajo, the presence of high tones and glottal stops requisite to "make the language come alive," two phonological features that, especially when placed together, can be difficult for non-Athabaskan speakers to master successfully—a point of pride among speakers. Lowe and Becker decided to cast for Navajo speakers in and around the Navajo Nation, in locations perceived to have the most fluent speakers, with different results. Becker's quest for Navajo speakers took her to more "remote" parts of the Navajo Nation: "And then I went out to the small communities that are mostly Navajo speaking. But it's just that the people who are really fluent Navajo speakers usually live a more traditional lifestyle and . . . are more shy, and they don't want to put themselves out there. . . . I feel like that was an issue for me. . . . They were just too shy. I had open auditions, and they would come in and just sit there."<sup>73</sup>

In this statement, Becker speaks to a recurring problem in Navajo filmmaking—finding participants who possess acting skills (in a dominant sense) and Navajo-language proficiency. Becker is also speaking to local ideologies of where and how speakers of Navajo live a more traditional lifestyle in the small communities. These ideologies were challenged by her ultimate choice of actors; disconnects between local interactional styles and filmic expectations were overcome by casting actors from Albuquerque, the largest urban center in New Mexico, rather than those actors living on the reservation. Lowe also noted the challenges of socializing potential actors into filmic and linguistic requirements: "When they first came around we gave them all of the dialogue in English. . . . And once they got that and were able to pick up the basic

knowledge in how to break down scripts and break down character, we gave them the dialogue in Navajo, but without any coaching. So when we sent them away, if we liked them, we tweaked the Navajo and had them learn it and come back and see what they could say and what they couldn't."<sup>74</sup>

In order to facilitate the linguistic negotiation of the screen memory, Becker and Lowe both had a collaborative language-learning process on set, which is necessary in these cases for actors and directors alike. Becker indicated that *Conversion* challenged her own linguistic competence, noting "there's not a lot of dialogue in my film, probably for the reason that I'm not fluent. . . . I wouldn't know how to write it."<sup>75</sup> Yet the final version is in Navajo, reflecting Lowe's vision of the Navajo language during the 1930s, which does not exhibit code switching or loanwords. In the case of *Shimásání*, Lowe's mother, who was also a secondary-school language instructor as well as one of the actors, acted as dialect coach and interpreter on the set ensuring ideologically informed accuracy in the young teenagers' portrayal of the "1930s dialect." In one case, she recorded Navajo dialogue on an Apple iPod so that the other actors could practice their lines; her ideologies, as well as those of the filmmaker and actors, were also a part of the negotiation of the narrative.<sup>76</sup> However, the language experts went well beyond family members for *Conversion* and included other members of the crew: "Our boom operator is from Torreon, and he's totally bilingual. He would be there. He was right there with them the whole time, so he would help them between takes with their pronunciation and stuff. Pretty much anyone who was on set who was a Navajo speaker would help if we needed it."<sup>77</sup> These examples challenge expectations of why and how some community members learn and engage with the Navajo language.

They also speak to the dialogic and collaborative nature of making screen memories. The narrative and dialogue in each film were also negotiated based upon linguistic competencies. Becker related her own experience in creating her story, which eventually changed based upon her young child actor's inability or unwillingness to speak Navajo in this performance frame: "We tried to have her phonetically learn her lines. It was too hard for her, and she resisted and she cried. So I ended up giving all her lines to the Navajo speaker who was complaining anyway that she didn't have enough dialogue. So that all worked out."<sup>78</sup> The little girl's lines were transferred to the adult lead, Charmaine Jackson, who, according to Becker, practiced her own Navajo dialogue with her mom and her husband. The little girl eventually learned her few lines, but knowing the "back story," her silence is notable. Lowe also negotiated the story and characters based upon the linguistic competence of the actors: "When they got to too long of a word we kind of had to switch around our thinking on how she would say certain lines of dialogue, so it was just a matter of trying



to make things work better for her. . . . But it changed.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, in these cases, linguistic skills and engagements with the dialogue influenced the representation of screen memories. “It’s part of filmmaking,” Becker noted. “You just have to pick your battles and compromise.”

These examples illustrate the importance and complexity of negotiating linguistic representations in reclaimed histories in film, in discursively linking Navajo screen memories to the past. They illustrate the active participation of not only the filmmakers but also of the actors and language experts in engaging language ideologies and encoding their productions with legitimacy embedded in processes of linguistic traditionalization. In these cases, a form of Navajo free of code switching reflects and recreates ideas about how Navajo was once spoken; as a filmic creation and an audience expectation it represents one kind of “reel Navajo.” These cultural producers are resignifying these ways of speaking “into more memorable, figuratively rendered forms.”<sup>80</sup> By challenging their own language competencies as well as those of their actors, these filmmakers and their productions illustrate the multiple ways in which language socialization and engagements with traditional modes can work.

This story also contains the unexpected, in imagining reel Navajo and in its speakers. The first example of the unexpected is from Lowe’s comedic short film *b. Dreams* (2009).<sup>81</sup> Like the Navajo-speaking trader in *Weaving Worlds*, *b. Dreams* features a non-Navajo—an actor of Tongan descent—speaking Navajo, whose initial foray into the language was met with astonishment. As Lowe recounts his decision to include a Tongan actor, “he was the first actor who was not Navajo who could pick up the screenplay with Navajo dialogue, who could actually read word for word and make it sound believable. And he hit every glottal and high tone perfectly.” Again, note the importance of phonology, glottal stops, and tones in judging “believability” in Navajo. His choice of actor also guided the narrative—the film portrays a Tongan who travels to the Navajo Nation to learn Navajo so he can make a film and, in turn, falls in love.<sup>82</sup> In another example of the unexpected when imagining reel Navajo, Norman Patrick Brown’s forthcoming feature film *The Rainbow Boy* portrays the clash of cultures and values as characters from contemporary and mythical Navajo eras meet.<sup>83</sup> In order to portray ancient ways of speaking Navajo in the film, what he called “the language of the warrior people” found in some creation stories, Brown chose to use the closely related Western Apache language. As Brown recounted to me, when set against Navajo in dialogue, “it sounds more masculine” and, thus, more warrior-like.<sup>84</sup> These examples are a strong reminder that agency and imagination in representing reel Navajo are not predictive and can take many (un)expected forms.

## CONCLUSIONS

Reel Navajo and the linguistic creation of screen memories require attention to the ways in which identities and histories are linguistically encoded in film, as well as which ideologies and ways of speaking are appropriate for filmic representation. They are tied to processes of linguistic traditionalization, language socialization, the reclamation of history, and the negotiation of identities and shared sociality. Such practices are also spaces for agency, for active participation in the linguistic representations of screen memories, and for active engagements with one's own linguistic skills. Klain's direct involvement with a non-Native director on the Cly family's story in *The Return of Navajo Boy*, as well as his self-conscious decision to use Navajo in *Weaving Worlds* in order to create intimacy and forge kinship, are very important acts. So are Becker's and Lowe's active engagement with representing history and a particular kind of Navajo on-screen, despite the many linguistic and performative obstacles. In these cases, the creation of screen memories was directly influenced by linguistic ideologies and competencies, as well as the expectations of local and global media productions. The actions of these filmmakers suggest a kind of agency that Kroskirty calls "an awareness leading to the transformation of selves and systems" and a "noncompliance to language shift."<sup>85</sup> They are directly challenging the performance frames and dominant discourses, and by making films in Navajo, they are challenging the trope of increased disengagements with the Navajo language. By presenting Navajo-speaking traders and Tongans—and supposedly nonfluent members of younger generations—they are challenging expectations of who can—and does—speak Navajo.

Thus Deloria's "moment of paradox and opportunity" has been seized. The moment of paradox—of impending or perceived language shift, indigenous filmmakers marginal to mainstream global mediascapes, the need to conform to certain conventions of mainstream film, and "resignifying the traditional" while remaining engaged and entwined (as always) with modernities—has perhaps been upon us for a while.<sup>86</sup> The moment of opportunity—of emergent spaces for Navajo filmmakers, moments ripe for the creation of indigenous screen memories, and moments ripe for reel Navajo—is upon us due to the agency of indigenous cultural producers. In the creation of Navajo screen memories, Navajo filmmakers are subverting ideologies of linguistic realities while exposing and recreating them. They are making films of "Navajo particularity" and exploring "Navajo concerns," creating social intimacies with local audiences while engaging the expectations and misrepresented histories that have been fueled by—and continue to circulate in—global mediated spaces.<sup>87</sup> The Navajo language becomes iconicized in film; it acts as the medium and impetus for learning language among cultural producers; and, most importantly, Navajo

ways of speaking garner symbolic capital thus increasing the pride and valorization of Navajo among audiences and community members. The importance of this cannot be overstated.

It is perhaps too early to tell whether Navajo or other indigenous filmmakers are producing what Kroskirty calls “language ideological change” in the same way as Mono elder Rosalie Bethel’s engagement with the filming of her own narrative performance.<sup>88</sup> What they are doing in the linguistic creation of indigenous screen memories is significant, and it speaks to some unexpected transformations, yet the implications of these acts of agency are only beginning to become known. When asked about the impact of his film *Weaving Worlds*, Klain put it this way: “I just wanted to get the weavers’ stories, and the most authentic way to get the weavers’ stories was to do it in Navajo. I didn’t go into it saying, ‘I’m going to save my people.’ I didn’t go into it thinking that. In hindsight, I see those dynamics taking place. . . . In hindsight, it’s having more implications than I thought.”<sup>89</sup>

### *Acknowledgments*

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### NOTES

1. Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 53–108.

2. On the “gaze” and western humanism, see James C. Faris, *Navajo and Photography: A Critical History of the Representation of an American People* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996). On the colonial implications of visual culture and Native Americans, see, e.g., Faris, *Navajo and Photography*; Harald E. L. Prins, “Visual Anthropology,” in *A Companion to the Anthropology of American Indians*, ed. Thomas Biolsi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 506–25. For analyses of children’s movies and popular culture, see Pauline Turner Strong, “Animated Indians:

Critique and Contradiction in Commodified Children's Culture," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 405–24; Pauline Turner Strong, "Playing Indian in the 1990s: Pocahontas and *The Indian in the Cupboard*," in *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*, ed. Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 187–205.

3. The literature on this topic is quite significant and cannot be fully addressed here. For an overview of Hollywood representations of Native peoples, see Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005); Rollins and O'Connor, *Hollywood's Indian*; Ann Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame: Alaska Eskimos in the Movies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995). For insight into the relationship between film and ethnographic representations, see Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Harald E. L. Prins, "Visual Media and the Primitivist Perplex: Colonial Fantasies, Indigenous Imagination, and Advocacy in North America," in *Media Worlds*, ed. Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 58–74.

4. See, e.g., Faye D. Ginsburg, "Atanarjuat Off-Screen: From 'Media Reservations' to the World Stage," *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 4 (2003): 827–31; Kristin Dowell, "Indigenous Media Gone Global: Strengthening Indigenous Identity On- and Offscreen at the First Nations\First Features Film Showcase," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 2 (2006): 376–84; Beverly R. Singer, *Wiping the War Paint Off the Lens: Native American Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). The Film + Video Center at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (hereinafter referred to as NMAI) maintains a Web site in Spanish and English that is a wonderful resource for and about indigenous filmmakers and films from the Americas: <http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu> (accessed February 15, 2011).

5. Faye D. Ginsburg, "Screen Memories: Resignifying the Traditional in Indigenous Media," in Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, *Media Worlds*, 40–41.

6. Ibid.

7. The literature is quite extensive, but for useful examples of contemporary work about global indigenous media makers, see Jeffrey D. Himpele, *Circuits of Culture: Media, Politics, and Indigenous Identity in the Andes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Randolph Lewis, *Alanis Obomsawin: The Vision of a Native Filmmaker* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Jennifer Deger, *Shimmering Screens: Making Media in an Aboriginal Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

8. Research for this project is based on numerous short-term periods of fieldwork conducted from 2000 to 2010, during my time as a producer for TricksterFilms LLC and Native American Public Telecommunications on the documentary films *Weaving Worlds* and *Columbus Day Legacy* (USA: TricksterFilms, 2011) and the narrative films *Share the Wealth* (USA: TricksterFilms, 2006) and *Yada Yada* (USA: TricksterFilms, 2002). Research included interviews and conversations with a range of indigenous film professionals and audiences, participant observation during all phases of production and distribution, and participation in diverse film festival venues.

9. Steve Greymorning, "Reflections on the Arapaho Language Project, or When Bambi Spoke Arapaho and Other Tales of Arapaho Language Revitalization Efforts," in *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, ed. Leanne Hinton and Kenneth Hale (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2001), 287–97; Jim Dandy, personal communication, 2002. Dandy provided the voices for these wonderful, oft-overlooked films, which have been recently remastered. See <http://www.sanjuan-schools.org/media> (accessed February 15, 2011).

10. See also Wesley Y. Leonard, "When Is an 'Extinct Language' Not Extinct? Miami, a Formerly Sleeping Language," in *Sustaining Linguistic Diversity: Endangered and Minority Languages and Language Varieties*, ed. Kendall A. King, Natalie Schilling-Estes, Lyn Fogle, Jia Jackie Lou, and Barbara Soukup

(Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 23–34; Anthony K. Webster, *Explorations in Navajo Poetry and Poetics* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

11. Erin Debenport, “As the Rez Turns’: Anomalies within and beyond the Boundaries of a Pueblo Community,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 35, no. 1 (2011): 87–109.

12. For examples of Navajo language use in mediated contexts, see Leighton C. Peterson, “Tuning in to Navajo: The Role of Radio in Native Language Maintenance,” in *Teaching Indigenous Languages*, ed. Jon Reyhner (Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University, 1997), 214–21; Bennie Klain and Leighton C. Peterson, “Native Media, Commercial Radio, and Language Maintenance: Defining Speech and Style for Navajo Broadcasters and Broadcast Navajo,” *Texas Linguistic Forum* 43 (2000): 117–27; Leighton C. Peterson, “Technology, Ideology, and Emergent Communicative Practices among the Navajo” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2006).

13. *Intimacy* as it is used here derives from Hill and Zepeda’s definition of *intimacy* as “social closeness, the mutual involvement of interlocutors.” Jane H. Hill and Ofelia Zepeda, “Language, Gender, and Biology: Pemonic Ingressive Airstreams in Women’s Speech in Tohono O’odham,” *Southwest Journal of Linguistics* 18, no. 1 (1999): 36.

14. For a discussion on “renewal” in relation to Native language ideologies and practices, see Margaret C. Field and Paul V. Kroskrity, “Introduction: Revealing Native American Language Ideologies,” in *Native American Language Ideologies: Beliefs, Practices, and Struggles in Indian Country*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity and Margaret C. Field (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 3–28.

15. Paul V. Kroskrity, “Embodying the Reversal of Language Shift: Agency, Incorporation, and Language Ideological Change in the Western Mono Community of Central California,” in Kroskrity and Field, *Native American Language Ideologies*, 207; Deloria, *Unexpected Places*, 225.

16. Deloria, *Unexpected Places*, 52–108.

17. Ginsburg, “Screen Memories,” 39–40.

18. Barbra A. Meek, “And the Injun Goes ‘How!’: Representations of American Indian English in White Public Space,” *Language in Society* 35, no. 1 (2006): 93–128; Joanna Hearne, “John Wayne’s Teeth: Speech, Sound and Representation in *Smoke Signals* and *Imagining Indians*,” *Western Folklore* 64, nos. 3–4 (2005): 189–208.

19. The alien inscription contained, among other things, the entire human genome as well as the philosophical foundation for the earth’s major religions. The series, which ran from 1993 to 2002, contained numerous story lines related to the Navajo language with recurrent appearances by character Albert Hosteen, a former Navajo code talker and medicine man, played by Dakota actor/musician Floyd Red Crow Westerman. See Chris Carter, *The X-Files: The Complete Collector’s Edition* (Century City, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2007).

20. For a brief history of these early films, see Randolph Lewis, “The New Navajo Cinema: Cinema and Nation in the Indigenous Southwest,” *Velvet Light Trap* 66 (2010): 50–61.

21. On the Navajo Film Project, see Sol Worth and John Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997). The project has been analyzed thoroughly, with a range of supporters, for its foresight and innovation, and with detractors, for its colonial tinge. See, e.g., Sam Pack, “Indigenous Media Then and Now: Situating the Navajo Film Project,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 17, no. 3 (2000): 273–86; Margaret D. Dubin, “From Artful Ethnography to Ethnographic Art: The Enduring Significance of the Navajo Film Project,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 14, no. 1 (1998): 73–80.

Regarding the lack of synch sound recordings, Richard Chaffin, the graduate assistant on the film project at the time, later explained, “they didn’t want to do it—we asked—they elected not to add sound,” despite Adair openly suggesting to filmmaker Al Claw (in violation of the project’s protocol) that he add sound. See Worth and Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes*, 346.

22. I am dubious of claims that these are the first films made by Navajos, due to the historical erasure that Ginsburg and others have pointed out about indigenous media makers and due to the historical exclusion of nonreservation Navajos in the academic literature. However, I have scant evidence to prove otherwise at this time. For analyses of the films emerging from the project, see Worth and Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes*; see also Sol Worth and John Adair, "Navajo Filmmakers," *American Anthropologist* 72, no. 1 (1970): 9–34.

23. Arlene Bowman, *Navajo Talking Picture* (USA: Women Make Movies, 1986).

24. This film has generated much controversy over the years, perhaps misplaced, regarding the ethics of filming unwilling subjects. Randy Lewis has suggested the possibility that Bowman's intent, and perhaps the participants' roles in the production, has been misinterpreted; see Randolph Lewis, "Navajo Talking Picture: Cinema on Native Ground" (n.d.). For further discussion, see Singer, *Wiping the War Paint*, 73–77.

25. Lewis, "Navajo Cinema," 50.

26. Ibid.

27. Some of these markers—apart from language—can include iconic reservation landscapes such as Monument Valley or Shiprock; they also very often involve traditional elements such as sheep, sheepherding, or sheep butchering.

28. For a thorough list of Navajo filmmakers, see Lewis "New Navajo Cinema." See also the NMAI Film + Video Center Web site, <http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu> (accessed February 15, 2011).

29. Despite continued marginalization or deliberate local orientation, some indigenous productions have received international acclaim in recent years; see, e.g., Dowell, "Indigenous Media"; Ginsburg, "Atanarjuat Off-Screen."

30. This is by no means to say that all films by Navajo producers engage Navajo topics; e.g., Bennie Klain's award-winning short films *Share the Wealth* and *Yada Yada* index no particular tribal affiliations. Likewise, some directors, such as Arlene Bowman, whose recent films veer from Navajo content, and Larry Blackhorse Lowe, have stated their desire to move away from Navajo and Native American topics. See Lewis, "Navajo Cinema."

31. Although House has called such public performances "ostentatious Navajo-ness" that masks dire linguistic realities, Webster has analyzed such phenomena in the context of poetry performances in terms of processes of traditionalization and iconization; I prefer the latter interpretations. See Deborah House, *Language Shift among the Navajos: Identity Politics and Cultural Continuity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 83; Webster, *Explorations in Navajo Poetry*.

32. See, e.g., House, *Language Shift*; Bernard Spolsky, "Prospects for the Survival of the Navajo Language: A Reconsideration," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2002): 139–62; Tiffany Lee and Daniel McLaughlin, "Reversing Navajo Language Shift, Revisited," in *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved?* ed. Joshua A. Fishman (Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters, 2001), 23–43.

33. On language valorization, see House, *Language Shift*. For studies of pedagogy and younger speakers, see Paul Platero, "Navajo Head Start Language Study," in Hinton and Hale, *The Green Book of Language Revitalization*, 87–97; AnCita Benally and Dennis Viri, "Dine Bizaad ('Navajo Language') at a Crossroads: Extinction or Renewal," *Journal of Bilingual Research* 29, no. 1 (2007): 85–108.

34. See, e.g., Margaret C. Field, "Changing Navajo Language Ideologies," in Kroskrity and Field, *Native American Language Ideologies*, 31–47; House, *Language Shift*; Evangeline Parsons-Yazzie, "Perceptions of Selected Elders on Navajo Language Attrition," *Journal of Navajo Education* 8, no. 2 (1996): 51–57.

35. Tiffany S. Lee, "If They Want Navajo to Be Learned, Then They Should Require It in All Schools: Navajo Teenagers' Experiences, Choices, and Demands Regarding Navajo Language," *Wicazo Sa Review* 22, no. 1 (2007): 7–33.

36. Ibid.
37. Such misrecognitions are aptly illustrated in this issue by Webster's analysis of Navajo English; see also Anthony K. Webster, "On Intimate Grammars with Examples from Navajo English, Navlish, and Navajo," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 66 (2010): 187–208. For discussions of the ideological implications of code switching and code mixing, as well as numerous examples, see also Charlotte C. Schaengold, "Bilingual Navajo: Mixed Codes, Bilingualism, and Language Maintenance" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2004); Klain and Peterson, "Broadcast Navajo."
38. See Field, "Changing Navajo"; Margaret C. Field, "Triadic Directives in Navajo Language Socialization," *Language in Society* 30 (2001): 249–63.
39. See Field, "Changing Navajo."
40. Webster, *Explorations in Navajo Poetry*. For a discussion of traditionalization as it is used here, see Richard Bauman, "Contextualization, Tradition, and the Dialogue of Genres: Icelandic Legends of the *Kraftaskáld*," in *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, ed. Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 125–46.
41. Anthony K. Webster, "Imagining Navajo in the Boarding School: Laura Tohe's *No Parole Today* and the Intimacy of Language Ideologies," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2010): 39–62.
42. Ibid., 40.
43. Asif Agha, "The Social Life of Cultural Value," *Language and Communication* 23, nos. 3–4 (2003): 255.
44. Sam Pack, "Watching Navajos Watch Themselves," *Wicazo Sa Review* 22, no. 2 (2007): 127n20.
45. Ibid., 123.
46. See, e.g., "Sunshine," <http://www.worldwidesunshine.com/emERCHANTpro/pc/Adam-Beach-c327.htm> (accessed November 10, 2009).
47. See also Pack, "Watching Navajos," 124.
48. Ibid., 123.
49. Jeff Spitz, *The Return of Navajo Boy* (USA: Berkeley Media, 2000). For further analysis of the significance of *The Return of Navajo Boy*, *Weaving Worlds*, and other recent Navajo films, see Lewis, "Navajo Cinema."
50. Bennie Klain and Leighton C. Peterson, "Collaboration, Representation, and the Return of *Navajo Boy*." Paper presented at 98th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, 2000.
51. Author interview with Jeff Spitz, 2000.
52. Ibid.
53. Pack, "Watching Navajos," 122.
54. After the comment, Klain wondered aloud if she had misrecognized him as not being Navajo, which may have influenced her rather stern rebuke. For this I have no answer.
55. Bennie Klain, *Weaving Worlds* (USA: VisionMaker, 2008).
56. See Beverly Singer, "Film Review: *Weaving Worlds*," *American Indian Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2010): 280–82; Heather A. Howard, "Review of *Weaving Worlds*," *Visual Anthropology Review* 26, no. 1 (2010): 48–50.
57. Author interview with Bennie Klain, 2010.
58. As Klain recounts about his first meeting with Blair, "I was surprised. I didn't know he could speak Navajo, but the night before shooting when we were having dinner at the Hopi Cultural Center he started talking to some people in Navajo, and that was surprising to me. I could have interviewed him in Navajo but the questions I had for him were more pointed so I chose to use English. I think he uses Navajo to forge kinship, and he's smart." Ibid.

On one level, Blair's sexual joking with elderly Navajo women is appropriate behavior for his kinship role and exhibits communicative competence. His joking also has been interpreted as representative of his entitled position and unequal gender and power relations; this observation has been made by film participant Nicole Horseherder and numerous audiences. As artists and filmmakers often do, Klain notes simply that the scenes speak for themselves.

59. Billy Luther, *Miss Navajo* (USA: The Cinema Guild, 2007).

60. The symbolic importance of Miss Navajo to Navajo national identity and gender roles cannot be overstated. See Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "Chairmen, Presidents, and Princesses: The Navajo Nation, Gender, and the Politics of Tradition," *Wicazo Sa Review* 21, no. 1 (2006): 9–28; Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "Representing Changing Woman: A Review Essay on Navajo Women," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 25, no. 3 (2001): 1–26.

61. Although audience reactions are never predictable, they are often insightful. Klain noted that "I was most surprised when it screened at NMAI in DC, and the woman who was leading the discussion, her first comment when she started the Q&A session was 'I call myself a fifth-generation weaver, but after seeing this film and growing up in Phoenix, I didn't realize people still live like that.'" Author interview with Klain.

62. Jennifer Nez Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

63. Ibid.

64. See, e.g., John H. Weakland, "Feature Films as Cultural Documents," in *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, ed. Paul Hockings (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), 45–67; Paula Rabinowitz, "Wreckage Upon Wreckage: History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory," *History and Theory* 32, no. 2 (1993): 119–37.

65. Webster, "Imagining Navajo," 55.

66. Bauman, "Contextualization," 125–45.

67. Nanobah Becker, *Conversion* (USA: Nanobah Becker, 2006); Larry Blackhorse Lowe, *Shimásání* (USA: Másání LLC, 2009).

68. Author interview with Larry Blackhorse Lowe, 2009.

69. The origins of indigenous purism among some Navajo speakers and community members is beyond the scope of this article; however, for a compelling discussion of diversity and loanwords among speakers, see Muriel Saville-Troike, "Diversity in Southwestern Athabaskan: A Historical Perspective," *Navajo Language Review* 1, no. 2 (1974): 67–84. For a classic discussion of language contact in the US Southwest, see Paul V. Kroskrity, "Language Contact and Linguistic Diffusion," in *Bilingualism and Language Contact: Spanish, English, and Native American Languages*, ed. Florence Barkin, Elizabeth A. Brandt, and Jacob Ornstein-Galicia (New York: Columbia University, 1982), 51–72.

70. Author interview with Nanobah Becker, 2009. Becker makes an important point: film can be expensive. These works were shot on 35 mm celluloid film stock, which is more expensive than digital technologies, and involved relatively large crews, including camera operators, sound technicians, and grips and gaffers to take care of cords and lighting. They involve expensive logistics and equipment rentals, especially when the location is remote, dusty, and windy, as both of these were. As one reviewer pointed out, however, these are social, not just economic, decisions.

71. Author interview with Lowe.

72. Ibid.

73. Author interview with Becker.

74. Author interview with Lowe.

75. Becker solicited the help of a University of New Mexico linguistics student to write her script in Navajo. This practice, although beyond the scope of this article, is noteworthy in a sociolinguistic



context in which literacy in Navajo is only beginning to gain ground. See Daniel McLaughlin, *When Literacy Empowers: Navajo Language in Print* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992); Anthony K. Webster, "Keeping the Word: On Orality and Literacy (with a Sideways Glance at Navajo)," *Oral Tradition* 21, no. 2 (2006): 295–324.

76. Author interview with Lowe. Reflecting the multifaceted nature of language socialization, Lowe observed that "the nice thing about having my mom in there is she's such a, not Nazi, but she's so set on everything sounding right. She loves the movies and the language much more than I do. . . . It kind gives me the impetus to push my actors that much harder." It should also be noted that Lowe's story is of his maternal grandmother, making the film a part of his mother's family history.

77. Author interview with Becker. A "boom operator" holds the long pole with a microphone attached above the heads of the actors. Torreon, NM, is considered a "remote" location in the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation.

78. Ibid.

79. Author interview with Lowe.

80. Agha, "Cultural Value," 255.

81. Larry Blackhorse Lowe, *b. Dreams* (Canada: Embargo Collective, 2009).

82. The film *b. Dreams* was produced as part of the imagineNATIVE Embargo Collective initiative. See <http://www.imagenative.org> (accessed February 15, 2011).

83. The film was in postproduction at the time of this writing. See <http://www.therainbowboy-movie.com> (accessed February 15, 2011).

84. Author interview with Norman Patrick Brown, 2010. It should be noted that Brown was well aware of the historical links that scholars—and creation stories—make between the origins of these closely related languages.

85. Kroskrity, "Embodying the Reversal," 192.

86. Ginsburg, "Screen Memories."

87. Lewis, "Navajo Cinema."

88. Kroskrity, "Embodying the Reversal."

89. Author interview with Klain.