Destabilizing the Archive:

Steven Yazzie, Lorna Simpson and the Counter-Archive

by

Lekha Hileman Waitoller

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Approved April 2011 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Amelia Malagamba-Ansótegui, Chair
Heather Sealy Lineberry
Ulrike Mesch

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2011

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways two contemporary artists engage the archive to challenge ideas calcified through visual culture. Steven Yazzie and Lorna Simpson respond to constructions of history through art making strategies and practices. Yazzie's photogravure *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* (2009) presents a carefully constructed image of a ceremony drawing on symbols of Indianness to provoke a critical dialogue that questions the role of the American Indian stereotype in the United States imaginary. Simpson's *Counting* (1991) is a multi-layered work that juxtaposes text and image to address the capriciousness of memory, power and other issues found at the intersection of race and gender. These photography-based works draw on the histories of ethnographic and criminal photography to deconstruct the same knowledge that photography helped to construct. Throughout the thesis I examine the relationship of the photographic archive to colonial histories by considering whose history is represented through photography. These thoughtful and challenging artworks contribute to a growing body of work that proposes new narratives drawing on embodied knowledge and experience to create a counter-archive.

To Federico, my biggest support, and to Galileo, who helped me to laugh.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to my committee, who contributed to my education in very different and complimentary ways. Heather Sealy Lineberry gave me the great opportunity to curate the exhibition, which was the basis of this thesis. Her mentorship helped me to translate my theoretical concepts into curatorial ideas that would be palatable for a general audience. Claudia Mesch provided especially helpful feedback on the role of photography with regards to the works I chose to analyze, which led me to several interesting and crucial discoveries. Finally, my chair, Amelia Malagamba has been an important figure in my educational development throughout my graduate studies. She helped me to find the language to articulate my perspectives and pushed me to better understand why I think the way I do.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES vii

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION 1

Photography and Art—Art Photography 4

Knowledge and Power 11

Memory and Master Narratives 14

Chapter Two 16

Chapter Three 19

Chapter Four 23

2 STAGING ETHNOGRAPHY: STEVEN YAZZIE AND THE FRACTURED IMAGE 25

Codes: Visual, Verbal and Conceptual 27

The Trouble with Truth 29

A Representation of People 30

Photography and the Archive 33

The Archive and the Repertoire 38

The Repertoire 43

Tsosido Sweep Dancer 45

Counter-Archives 47

Performing Ethnicity 50

CHAPTER Page

3 INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND GENDER IN THE WORK OF LORNA SIMPSON 55

Intersectionality 58

Intersectionality and Violence 61

Beauty and Desire 65

The Shifting Paradigm of the Photograph 68

Statistics, Stereotypes, Symbols 75

Representing Blackness: Black Hair, Black Beauty 81

4 THE COUNTER-ARCHIVE 89

Whose Stories? 90

Ambiguity and the Counter-Archive 93

REFERENCES 98

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. Jacques-Victor-Eugene Froment-Delormel, *Pawnee Indian Camp on Banks of Platte River*, n.d. 105

2. Edward S. Curtis, *The Apache*, 1906 105

3. Edward S. Curtis, *Renegade Type-Apache*, 1903 106

4. Steven Yazzie, *Tsosido Sweep Dancer*, 2009 107

5. Lorna Simpson, *Guarded Conditions*, 1989 108

6. Mickalene Thomas, *Something You Can Feel*, 2008 108

7. Alphonse Bertillon poster of physical features, Musée des Collections Historiques de la Prefecture de Police, late 19th c. 109

8. Photographer unknown. *0171*, Unidentified prisoner, 1975-79. 109

9. Lorna Simpson, *Counting*, 1991 110

10. Lorna Simpson, *Stereo Styles*, 1988 110

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis expands on an exhibition I curated in 2009 at the Arizona State University Art Museum called *I Never Saw So Clearly.* I began my curatorial process by thinking about the ruptures between normative ways of imagining pastness and the ways in which those people whose pasts are absent from official public memory think about their pasts. In many cases those were indigenous people who shared a history of being colonized. The relationship of cultural representation and historical consciousness was a major theme of the exhibition. A quotation by Lucy Lippard articulates the way I wanted the public to think about the exhibition: "One reason to know our own histories is so that we are not defined by others, so that we can resist other people's images of our pasts, and consequently, our futures."[1]

During the course of the exhibition I experienced the works in different ways through tours I gave and conversations I had, which forced me to explain the art in ways appropriate for different groups. The questions that were asked and the conversations generated by the exhibition challenged my understanding of the works and prompted me to think more deeply about my original curatorial questions. I continued to learn of and from the artists, several of whom I met or had conversations with because of the project.

After completing the curatorial processes, I further developed the question

[1] Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997), 85.

of how artists who have traditionally been marginalized by institutions of art, in addition to other institutions, challenge master narratives that shape normative conceptions of history in their photographic works. This analysis traces aspects of the history of photography in order to examine the relationship of the photographic archive to colonial histories as well as to the formation of historical knowledge. The two works I chose to analyze are *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* (2009) by Steven Yazzie and *Counting* (1991) by Lorna Simpson. Both quote from the traditions of photography such as ethnography and criminology and in considering these references I have come to question whose history is represented through photography, what narratives are staged by the photographic image, what was selected as memorable enough to be part of the archive, by whom and to what purpose?

Ethnography has a troubled past. The discipline has done much to record and document customs and traditions from around the world, but often from a paternalistic perspective of the western ethnographer acting as author in his observation of the world's indigenous or indigent populations. The photographic archives of ethnography and criminology—along with their cousin, anthropology's text-based documents—have played a major role in creating hegemonic meaning and knowledge used to create hierarchies of power. The use of photography by Yazzie and Simpson thus plays a particularly significant role as it is used to reclaim historical knowledge by dismantling the very knowledge that the medium was used to construct.

An archive is a selection of documents that have been assembled, sorted

out and categorized using systems of organization with underlying principles and hierarchies of structuring and arrangement—in other words, archives are not neutral."[2] The archive holds power imbalances in place due to the history of photographic production and de-contextualization through the processes of collecting and archiving.[3] Following these methodological paradigms, I will analyze the artworks within the context of each artist's body of work to demonstrate how *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* and *Counting* are acts of resistance and reclamation which question official public memory by drawing on aspects of the past that are often not part of official versions of history.

Gloria Anzaldúa wrote that strength lies in the capacity to shift perspectives and to see through that past that is superimposed on the present.[4] Yazzie and Simpson are intimately aware of the connection of the past and present and are employing what Anzaldúa called the "tools to change disabling images and memories, to replace them with self-affirming ones, to recreate the past and alter it—for the past is as malleable as the present."[5] Prior to photography, painting was the major vehicle for representation—in *I Never Saw*

---

[2] Kitty Zulmans, "Documentary Evidence and/in Artistic Practices," in *Right About Now: Art and Theory Since the 1990s* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007), 105.

[3] While I am writing here about photographic documents and archives, the same definition applies to any museum, library, government space or other collecting organization or institution.

[4] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul, Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), xxvii.

[5] Ibid.

So Clearly I considered the history of representation and relationship of the past and present by juxtaposing a historical painting with contemporary artworks. The painting, *Pawnee Indian Camp on Banks of Platte River* by Jacques-Victor-Eugene Froment-Delormel (1820-1900), was shown as an example of a long tradition of representing people by through generalized characteristics. (Fig. 1) During the nineteenth century many painters, like Froment-Delormel, relied on stories about the American West or drawings and paintings by those who had visited the United States for source material for their paintings. Froment-Delormel never visited the United States, but had contact with the work of George Catlin and other artists who had been to this country.[6] This underscores the importance of considering the role artworks plays in relaying ideas about history. If objects such as this painting are one of the major vehicles by which we understand history, then the ability to tell one's own story is of great importance. In this line of thought, the questions I will address in the following chapters are: whose history is represented through traditions of photography including ethnography and criminology? What narratives are staged by the photographic image? What was selected as memorable enough to be part of the archive, by whom and to what purpose? Might new ways of understanding the past affect our understanding of the present, and of the future?

Photography and Art—Art Photography

Visual culture has been a conduit for storytelling for thousands of years.

[6] Theresa Jensen Lacey, *The Pawnee* (New York City: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006), 89.

With advances in photography, questions about the construction of historical consciousness through visual culture have become increasingly complicated. The wide accessibility of the medium in terms of its availability to people today, the ability to create multiples and easy reproduction along with its implicit authority in creating a similitude opens the medium up to opportunities and problems different from those in painting. From its inception, photography has been used for many different purposes. Early art photographers, for example, emulated the subject matter and appearance of painting as a way to try to elevate the medium, while other photographers used the medium's capacity to replicate subject matter in such varied pursuits as science, journalism and exploration. Ethnographers also began to use photography in the early years following the invention as a means to collect data about people—the hierarchies that the medium contributed to constructing in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century are something that later photographers would re-visit.

Photography gained recognition as an art form in its own right as the twentieth century got underway—something early photographers such as the Pictorialists sought. As this shift occurred, so did the conditions for what the art photograph should strive for. Developments in technology and the increasing availability of the medium to a much wider audience triggered the preoccupation with levels of photographic expertise compelling so called art photographers to separate their work from that of commercial, journalistic, documentary and

amateur photography.[7] Modernist values of expression, originality, authorship, authenticity and the primacy of subjectivity became of utmost concern to art photographers of the early twentieth century as they attempted to define art photography against what they saw as quotidian uses of the medium.[8]

For many artists of the 1960s photography remained too comfortably rooted in modernism—it kept a distance from the intellectual drama of avant-gardism while claiming a place within it.[9] Conceptual art played a critical role in transforming the terms within which art photography defined itself as a modernist form through auto-critique of art identified with the avant-garde.[10] The dilemma was that unlike painting or sculpture, photography was by its very nature unable to distance itself from depiction. In order to participate in the reflexivity of modernist art, photography put into play its own necessary condition for creating depictions that constitute objects and in doing so, Conceptual art attempted to create a new space for photography beyond picture-making.[11] The critiques of art photography realized in Conceptual art can, as Jeff Wall notes, "be seen as both

---

[7] Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. "Art Photography and Postmodernism," in *The Photography Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 152-163.

[8] Ibid., 157.

[9] Jeff Wall. "Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography In, or As, Conceptual Art," from Elizabeth Janus and Marion Lambert, *Veronica's Revenge: Contemporary Perspectives on Photography* (Switzerland; New York: LAC; Zurich; Scalo; Distributed in North America by D.A.P, 1998), 73.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 74.

an overturning of academicized approaches and as an extrapolation of existing tensions inside that academicism, a new critical phase of academicism and not simply a renunciation of it."[12] The 1960s saw Conceptual art photography opening up new opportunities to address problems with documentary photography—some methods for this include the appropriation of photography—often from mass media—which was incorporated into works of art—notable examples are Robert Rauschenberg, John Baldessari, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince and Andy Warhol. Other methods include drawing on the ubiquity of existing images for Readymades or using photography to catalog or document events and happenings. In addition to drawing on existing imagery as source material, Conceptual photographers quoted from previous categories of photography using the medium in a critical manner. While Conceptual photographic practices gained importance at this time the increased academization of art photography—both in the sense of education and in the stylistic foundation set forth through modernist photographers such as Walker Evans and Alfred Stieglitz—remained a model in the 1960s for photographers in the U.S. specifically and in other parts of the world.[13] These dialectics continue today and are used for very different ends. Conceptual artists, in keeping with postmodern tendencies, have and continue to use photography as a tool for criticism drawing references from the world around them, including other photographic genres.

[12] Ibid., 82.

[13] Ibid., 159.

Yazzie and Simpson utilize Conceptual photographic strategies to confront ideas of race, ethnicity, gender and history that prevail today. Using loaded icons and symbols, they create meticulously staged tableaux that challenge knowledge constructed by early practitioners of ethnographic photography through hierarchies of types of people. Their method of using photography to reference ethnography deconstructs problematic ideas that are deeply embedded in the narratives that construct historical consciousness in the United States. Yazzie and Simpson are from communities that are traditionally understudied and underrepresented in museums, critical art writing, scholarly literature and in the history of art. They are from groups that have not historically been able to contribute to historical narratives in the same way that people from dominant culture have—their histories have been marginalized by governmental policies and institutions including, but not limited to, religious, educational and artistic institutions.

While myths can be used positively to make sense of the world, this thesis looks at those that function to establish and maintain hierarchies of power by certain groups of people over others. In the visual arts myths can surface in the form of symbols, icons and other coded representations that have been inscribed with meanings are instruments of knowledge.[14] In 1952 Romanian-born philosopher and historian of religion, Mircea Eliade wrote that the symbol, the myth and the image are "the very substance of spiritual life and they may become

[14] Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 9-10.

disguised, mutilated or degraded, but are never extirpated."[15] A study of the great nineteenth century myths, for example, would demonstrate how they were minimized and condemned to incessant change of form and yet survived thanks mainly to reproduction in literature writes Eliade.[16] Symbols carry multiple meanings and are used to express concepts. They must be understood as a bundle of meanings—to translate an image into a concrete terminology by restricting it to any one of its frames of reference "is to do worse than mutilate it—it is to annul it as an instrument of cognition."[17] Eliade notes a common example, which is nostalgia for a mythicised past.[18] Such a past is transformed into an archetype and signifies the regret for a vanished time, what could have been but was not—in short, it is a longing for something altogether different from the present.[19] Images of nostalgia express more than can be conveyed in words—they posses a power over language and are exceedingly potent in summing up feelings and bringing people together.[20] Symbols and icons are used to conjure other feelings such as desire, power, anger, etc. The study of symbols and icons is compelling and could easily go beyond the scope of this thesis. My focus on the topic is in thinking

---

[15] Ibid., 11.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 15.

[18] Ibid., 16.

[19] Ibid., 17.

[20] Ibid.

about what happens when the symbols for a culture are selected by outsiders. What interpretations of cultures come from imagery that reduces the understanding of people to categories which debase or ridicule?"[21] Yazzie and Simpson address these problems by taking coded archival documents as source material to articulate their own narratives against the grain of the archive. In doing so, they expose views of the past that continue to inform the how we understand the present.

Homi Bhabha writes about the act of articulating cultural difference as occurring in an "in-between" space. The liminal spaces written about by postcolonialists such as Bhabha, Emma Pérez and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak can be described as a place between a place in the temporal and material sense. In-between spaces are innovative and productive spaces where culture and knowledge collide producing articulations of individual and collective selfhood, articulations that contest normative views on cultural identity.[22] It is in these spaces that difference is used productively to affect change. Yazzie and Simpson work from this place using photography and its history to disrupt ideas about power.

Discourse about difference, be it cultural, racial, sexual or gender-based, has grown exponentially in past years yet art history remains a discipline in which

---

[21] My queries developed from those originally posed by curator Joanna Bedard. Deborah Doxtator, *Fluffs and Feathers: An Exhibition on the Symbols of Indianness* (Brantford, Ontario: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1988), 5.

[22] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1-2.

artists who work with issues or politics outside of dominant culture regularly remain underrepresented. The artists whose work I showed in my exhibition and whose works I discuss in this thesis deeply engage me. While there are numerous artists whom I think make work of value that justify the attention of curators and scholars my choices about which artists to spend time thinking and writing about are part of a visual politics. My decision to focus on underrepresented artists stems from my belief that their work adds to a more complete awareness of history in the U.S. Through thoughtful exhibitions and critical analysis such artwork contributes to a strengthening our understanding of gaps in historical consciousness and the construction of historical knowledge through the visual arts recognizing contemporary art as a space to contest and reclaim historical knowledge. Both Yazzie and Simpson use their artwork to assert new meanings through visual codes that are currently associated with different, problematic meanings. Only by examining their work within the context of the construction of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge is presented through visual language can we really comprehend the interventions taking place in these artworks.

Knowledge and Power

Visual codes such as symbols and icons are one of the ways in which myths manifest in the visual arts. In considering myths that are relevant to normative ways of imagining U.S. history we must consider the importance of history for individuals. Foucault's notion of the formation of knowledge through discursive practices leads to a concept that underscores the whole of this thesis:

knowledge is a form of power that can be used to regulate conduct, define what is abnormal or normal and ultimately shapes the way people conceptualize cultural identity. This concept is relevant to visual culture as it relates to the representation of people. Through representation meaning is produced and exchanged amongst people. It symbolizes what is not there and reflects that which is. It shapes the way we imagine ourselves, others, the present, future and the past.

History is a subjective chronicle of past events shared by a large group of people in which heroes and villains are identified. It is one way by which people come to understand themselves. Awareness of history informs our understanding of people and how we are shaped by tradition, religion, language and land. Historical consciousness is the way in which a normative understanding of past events is produced leading to historical knowledge.[23] Through discursive practices normative history is produced by using historical knowledge that develops into systems of thought that govern our understanding of the past.[24] Discourse, as Foucault argues, defines and produces our knowledge as well as governing the way a topic can be talked and reasoned about.[25] Whenever characteristic ways of thinking about knowledge that refer to the same object appear across a range of texts, institutions, and as a form of conduct and in support of the same strategy,

---

[23] Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 7.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation" in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 44.

they are then said to belong to the same discursive formation.[26] According to Foucault, nothing that is meaningful exists outside of discourse.[27] As discourse governs the way people come to develop individual and cultural identities through their comprehension of the past, it is critical that normative knowledge be interrogated to see how the production of historical knowledge has been developed and how it has affected different groups of people.

As Foucault maintains, knowledge can be used through different discursive practices in institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others, thus, knowledge is always a form of power that can lead to regimes of truth, which has real consequences for people.[28] This is critical to my discussion on representation as it is through discursive formations that power can be wielded over objects of discourse through visual representations. The artists I discuss are agents of change as they seek to shift their position to authors of representation.[29] Their use of a new visual vocabulary contributes to a discourse that might re-imagine histories differently. How, for example, might new ways of understanding the past affect our understanding of the present, and of the future? Whose history is represented through photographic documents? What narratives emerge? These inquiries will

---

[26] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge; and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Dorset Press by arrangement with Pantheon Books, 1972), 38.

[27] Hall, "The Work of Representation", 44.

[28] Ibid., 46-51.

[29] Ibid., 55.

be addressed in chapters two and three.

Memory and Master Narratives

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) was one of the first to write about the social constructions of collective memory in his book *On Collective Memory* published in French in 1941. Halbwachs asserted that memory can only function within a collective context—memories are selective and are constructed by social groups. While individuals remember, it is a group that decides what is memorable.[30] By being located within a specific group context, people draw on that context to remember or recreate the past.[31] People identify with those things that hold importance for their social group and therefore have memories of many things they did not individually experience.[32] Official public memory refers to widely accepted historical narratives that develop over time eventually producing familiar notions of history. Yet it is only through the resources and power of a group that these ideas become public thereby promoting a particular past.[33] Such narratives are embodied in objects that are guarded and sustained in such places as libraries, churches and museums. While core aspects of narratives are not easily or quickly changed, the narratives themselves are

[30] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22.

[31] Ibid., 22.

[32] Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 113-114.

[33] Paul A. Shackel, "Public Memory and the Search for Power in American Historical Archaeology," *American Anthropologist*, (2001): 655.

dynamic and constantly being re-told in slightly new ways.

Master narratives can be described as hidden ideologies, systems and assumptions that operate within a society to control knowledge and experience.[34] As this thesis is based in the context of the United States, the metanarratives challenged by the Yazzie and Simpson are generally informed by the Enlightenment, Christianity, capitalism, patriarchy and racial hierarchies. The artists I focus on are from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds from those of dominant culture who may share the collective memories of the mainstream, but whose experiences have been different from those of the mainstream. In the act of reconceptualizing histories, they draw from the memories specific to their communities. It is through their pasts that they reclaim their histories, and as Foucault wrote, "reconstitute another discourse, rediscover the silent murmuring, the inexhaustible speech that animates from within the voice that one hears, re-establish the tiny, invisible text that runs between and sometimes collides with them."[35]

My contribution to the conversation on historical knowledge and the reclaiming of memory as well as the reconceptualization of identity is indebted to the work of scholars who work in a number of disciplines outside of the history of art. Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) has been particularly

---

[34] John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Garland, 1998), 3.

[35] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 27.

instructive to my understanding of the third space and the process through which works of resistance dislocate power and create different centers. Edward Said and Frantz Fanon have expanded my understanding of knowledge as a system of subjugation and Eric Hobsbawm has enriched my understanding of the way symbols and icons can be used to fabricate tradition and nationalist imaginings. Stuart Hall's *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* from 1997 provided a paradigm through which my understanding of the delicate business of representation has been complicated and furthered.

Chapter Two

In the next chapter I will deal with the way symbols are used to interrupt authoritative historical narratives by examining the relationship of Steven Yazzie's photogravure, *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* from 2009 to ethnographic photography. Yazzie works in a range of media and beginning in 2007 he came to a turning point in his career as he started making work based on a concept derived from his personal history. The idea came from the nickname of his biological father, also named Steven (Lemuel) Yazzie, who he never really knew.[36] Yazzie has since taken the name using it as a point of reference for exploration into personal mythologies with multiple meanings, concepts and symbols. The name also functions for Yazzie as a link to his father and to his own tribal connection.

In *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* Yazzie draws on the tradition of ethnographic

[36] Yazzie senior was given the name Lemuel at birth, but changed his name as an adult, before Steven was born. All biographical information about Steven was gathered in interviews with the artist between 2009-2011.

photography recognizing the potential for photographs as archives for public memory. Photography can be used to capture unmediated images as well as preconceived narratives; one can approach the medium with either objective or subjective intentions. Yazzie uses the camera in a decidedly subjective manner to investigate what may seem to be reality in an attempt to re-envision the notion of truth. Photography is endowed with the idea of the photograph as a truthful and accurate record, an analogue of fact due to its indisputable record of its subject. Yet the relationship of photography to reality is muddied by the decisions on the part of the photographer that go into taking a photograph—whether intentional or not. As a means of record, writes John Tagg, the camera "arrives on the scene vested with a particular authority to arrest, picture and transform daily life; a power to see and record; a power of surveillance that effects a complete reversal of the political axis of representation."[37] The power is not in photography's ability to reproduce, but in the authority of photographic documents to stand as evidence of truth.[38] The photogravure underscores a distinction between two kinds knowledge: one is the archive, comprised of enduring materials such as texts, documents, buildings and bones whereas the repertoire can be described as embodied knowledge, which emerges through spoken language, dance, ritual,

---

[37] John Tagg, "Evidence, Truth and Order: Photographic Records and the Growth of the State in Liz Wells ed., *The Photography Reader,* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 259.

[38] Ibid., 259-260.

gestures, etc.[39]

Yazzie's *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* challenges myths about Native Americans through his staged photograph of an imagined American Indian ceremony. The visible stage, the photogravure process and the color tone used by the artist intentionally refer to the work of Edward S. Curtis, the late nineteenth-early twentieth century ethnographic photographer of the American West, who worked prolifically to document Native American peoples and lifestyles with the aim to visually preserve traditional indigenous ways of life. He used the camera to create portraits, some of which locate indigenous people in their daily routines and surroundings, in soft-focus, sepia-toned photographs. The resulting images have shaped popular ideas of who Natives were and how they lived and has greatly influenced representations of indigenous people in popular culture and perpetuated the concept of the Indian at one with nature and insulated from change.

The visual analysis begins by looking at the tradition of Curtis' work as a context from which to make sense of Yazzie's strategy. I further contextualize the photogravure by locating it within Yazzie's exploration of the Tsosido concept, the development of which involves a connection between the performance of ethnicity, photography and memory. Yazzie works from the perspective of an urban Native American who negotiates a multi-ethnic identity and through *Tsosido Sweep Dancer,* challenges, even derides the notions of authenticity and

---

[39] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

truth set forth through the tradition of ethnographic photography. Yazzie's work displaces the histories that have marginalized Natives and through the process of cultural hybridity creates something different, "a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation."[40] *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* deconstructs myths about indigenous peoples and symbols of Indianness complicating notions of cultural totality and homogeneity.

Through my visual analysis I discuss the role of photography in cultural representations as used to sustain historical knowledge by focusing on contemporary artists who work to contest and reclaim historical knowledge. In Yazzie's work I discuss myths about indigenous peoples that manifest through prevalent symbols of Indianness set forth through ethnographic photography. In the analysis I rely on Philip Deloria's 1998 book, *Playing Indian*, Joe Baker and Gerald McMaster's exhibition catalog, *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World* from their 2007 exhibition by the same name, first held at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. Finally, the catalog accompanying the 1998 exhibition, *Fluffs and Feathers: An Exhibit on the Symbols of Indianness* at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario has been very useful to my research and thinking.

Chapter Three

The following chapter is an analysis of Lorna Simpson's photograph,

---

[40] Homi Bhabha in conversation with Jonathan Rutherford in Rutherford, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha," from *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211.

Counting from 1991 as the basis for a discussion on the re-conceptualization of race and gender-based identity. Simpson is a mid-career artist, who, by the time she emerged from graduate school in 1985, was already receiving recognition for her Conceptual art photography. She sought to re-examine and re-define photographic practice for contemporary relevance and so began making photos that challenge the viewer's engagement with the work by creating images that at once seem to make immediate sense, but that produce open-ended meaning.[41]

While Simpson works in a range of media, like Yazzie, she explores the authority with which ethnographic photography is endowed. Recognizing the iconic treatment of photographs as chronicles of public memory, Simpson quotes from documentary and criminal photography defamiliarizing the image in what Okwui Enwezor calls a "deconstructive mode" wherein photography is staged and performed in order to incite a response to the spectacle of the racial self and the gendered body.[42] Simpson's oeuvre uses the black body to draw attention to what Enwezor has named the "racial sublime" in the United States.[43] Her persistent use of the motif points to the absence of African American females in the art historical canon and distinguishes the black female experience from the black male experience. The majority of her work is large-scale photograph-and-text works that confront and challenge narrow, conventional views of gender, race,

---

[41] Thelma Golden in conversation with Lorna Simpson, *Lorna Simpson*, 6-25.

[42] Enwezor, "Repetition and Differentiation—Lorna Simpson's Inconography of the Racial Sublime," in *Lorna Simpson*, 109, 113.

[43] Ibid., 102-131.

politics, culture, history and memory. Simpson makes her photographs in a studio and then carefully combines different photos to create visual disjunctions or connections. The strategy of combining photography and text locates her within a tradition of Conceptual photographers such as Barbara Kruger and Carrie Mae Weems, who isolate and re-situate images with textual juxtapositions.[44]

Counting combines three seemingly disparate photographs into one vertical composition: the first is a cropped portion of a woman's body followed by a picture of a South Carolina smokehouse and on the bottom is a coil of braided hair.[45] Each photo is accompanied by text that can be characterized as some kind of counting: the number of twists in a bun, the number of bricks in a structure, etc. Like many of Simpson's photographs, *Counting* uses familiar symbols relevant to African American history to blur lines between past and present recalling a difficult past while alluding to present-day structures of oppression. The cropped image of the black female body and that of long strands of hair braided and twisted in a bun refer to exclusionary ideals of beauty and relationships of the personal and political, specifically in terms of hair, that marginalize blacks—persistent themes in Simpson's work. The symbol of black hair refers to the intersection of the personal and political for the African American female wherein one's hair style is not merely a personal decision but locates one within a larger racial politic. This topic has been explored by many

[44] Laura Cottingham, "Re-framing the Subject: Feminism and Photography" in *Veronica's Revenge: Contemporary Perspectives on Photography*, 67.

scholars and writers whom I reference including Ingrid Banks, bell hooks, Gloria Wade-Gayles and Regina Spellers. I also analyze another photo-based work by Simpson called *Stereo Styles* from 1988 that also deals with politics of hair to further the discussion and to situate *Counting* within Simpson's body of work. All of the work in this section will be considered in conversation with the traditions of ethnography and criminology, which are imperative to understanding the artist's work. Simpson's work refers to these histories and their legacies articulating new ways of understanding the past and therefore the present.

While it may be argued that as Simpson's work has been included in art history surveys and shown extensively in museums throughout the country thereby crossing a threshold into the mainstream, Simpson remains in a space where the personal and political cannot be separated. Language, dress and hair are symbols of association or disassociation with larger political systems including blackness and whiteness; this discussion therefore explores another sort of intervention in the relationship of symbols and icons and the resulting sense of cultural meaning.

The composition of *Counting*, a vertical arrangement of the three images, disrupts the viewer's relationship to the work by interrupting the possibility for a linear narrative. The organization resembles the grid format used in scientific inquiry of the Enlightenment furthering Simpson's argument about the objectification of the black female body through photography. The use of the grid composition is another recurring motif in Simpson's oeuvre used to interrogate the legacies of a colonial past through contemporary photography. In my analysis

of Simpson's work I will rely on the writings of bell hooks, Okwui Enwezor, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Neal A. Lester to deepen my understand of the complex themes at work in Simpson's photographs.

Chapter Four

The concluding chapter will be a discussion about the methods and strategies employed by Simpson and Yazzie to confront and reclaim historical knowledge. By referencing photographic traditions of ethnography and criminology, the works address knowledge constructed with the help of photography disrupting old narratives and proposing new ones. The artists draw on categories of photography such as ethnography and criminology from which to construct their own ethnographic works. In this chapter I talk about how the artists employ photography to challenge the medium itself as well as the ways in which the medium has been used to construct the problems of historical knowledge. I will discuss the strategies used by the artists and how they relate to the memory. And finally, I will address how these works expose the ambiguity of cultural authority.

By rethinking the past, we can, as Foucault wrote, reconstitute another discourse of pastness that is inclusive of difference that moves beyond the limitations enforced through colonial systems.[46] My intention with this thesis is to point to a number of ways that contemporary artists use art as a site to reclaim silenced histories and interrogate the narratives that construct historical consciousness. This brings me back to the words of Gloria Anzaldúa who speaks

[46] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 27.

to the intentions of these artists: "*Encrucijadas*, haunted by voices and images that violates us, bearing the pains of the past, we are slowly acquiring the tools to change disabling images and memories, to replace them with self-affirming ones, to recreate the past and alter it—for the past is as malleable as the present."[47]

[47] Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul, Haciendo Caras*, xxvii.

Chapter 2

STAGING ETHNOGRAPHY: STEVEN YAZZIE AND THE FRACTURED IMAGE

"Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past."
-George Orwell[48]

This chapter discusses the work of Steven Yazzie, whose 2009 photogravure, *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* responds to ideas about American Indians, past and present, challenging ways of seeing with the objective of deconstructing programmed responses to visual culture. Throughout the discussion I question the relationship of the photographic archive to colonial histories including the process of production, whose history is represented through ethnographic photography, who is doing the looking, what narratives are staged by the photographic image, what was selected as memorable enough to be part of the archive, by whom and to what purpose?

These questions will elucidate some ways in which artists from traditionally marginalized communities challenge master narratives that shape conceptions of history. Master narratives are hidden ideologies, systems and assumptions that operate within a society to order knowledge and experience.[49]

---

[48] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949), 35.

[49] John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Garland, 1998), 3.

They reinforce ideas about people that function as a form of power to regulate conduct, define what is abnormal or normal and ultimately shape the way people conceptualize cultural identity. My focus is on how Yazzie uses photography to question and undermine the ideas maintained by hegemonic power structures constructed through photography.

The archive has been a source of critique and a site of appropriation for modern and contemporary artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Alexander Rodchenko, John Heartfield, Juan Downey, Tacita Dean, Sherrie Levine, Anri Sala, James Luna and countless others. The mnemonic strategies put to use in a range of media through their investigations and uses of the archive underscores the resilience of the archive as form and concept. Steven Yazzie looks to the archive as a site for official public memory and yet one has privileged particular narratives as the expense of others. *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* quotes from ethnographic photography to assert new meaning through references to historical work. He seeks to achieve this by deconstructing the ethnographic image through a staged performance to incite a response to the spectacle of the racial self. “Photography,” writes bell hooks, “has been, and is, central to that aspect of decolonization that calls us back to the past and offers a way to reclaim and renew life-affirming bonds. Using images, we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye.”[50]

---

[50] hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 42.

Codes: Visual, Verbal and Conceptual

Representation is at the heart of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged amongst people. It symbolizes and serves as a stand-in for what is not there and reflects that which is. It is the link between the concepts in our minds and the language, which allows us to refer to people, things, events, etc.; through language (in the broadest sense of the word) representation produces the meaning of concepts.[51] Meaning therefore, is not the person, object or event that is referred to but is *constructed* through the system of representation and *fixed* through a code which sets up the correlation between our conceptual system and language system. For instance, the visual sign for dog, be it a taxidermy, a dog in a painting or a photograph, is a visual sign or icon representing the concept of the animal that we call *dog*. Similarly the series of letters *d-o-g* are the code by which English speakers make sense of the concept for a dog through written and verbal language. We fix *meaning* to the concept through language and after a time, the relationship begins to seem natural, inevitable and inseparable.[52] The codes (written and verbal language, visual, onomatopoeia, etc.) not only fix the relationship between concept and sign but also stabilize meaning within languages and cultures.[53] Just as language and culture are dynamic, so too are the meanings

[51] Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 17.

[52] Ibid., 21.

[53] Ibid.

that result from them. Language and visual signs are never ultimately fixed.

History is a subjective chronicle of past events shared by a large group of people. Methods of writing history vary and it is undeniable that the perspective of the chronicler affects the way the past is described. One method for writing history strives to include every detail while another seeks to emphasize the connections between events and people. A useful definition of history is "the study of human societies or cultures which places an emphasis on the differences between them and also on the changes which have taken place in each one over time."[54] History is one way that people come to understand themselves. Awareness of history, thus, informs our understanding of people and how we are shaped by tradition, religion, language and land. Historical consciousness is the way in which a normative understanding of past events is produced leading to historical knowledge.[55]

I use the broad term *knowledge* in the manner described by Foucault. Not only is knowledge that of which one can speak in a discursive practice or of the objects dealt with within one's discipline (these forms of knowledge are endorsed by institutions or factual evidence), "knowledge is also the field of coordination and subordination of statements in which concepts appear and are defined, applied and transformed and is defined by the possibilities of use and appropriation

---

[54] Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 2.

[55] Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, 7.

offered by discourse."[56] Knowledge does not exist without a particular discursive practice and conversely, any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms.[57] As discourse governs the way people come to develop individual and cultural identities through their comprehension of the past, it is critical that historical knowledge be interrogated in terms of its production and its effect on different groups of people. Knowledge is an important concept because of its link to power. It assumes the authority of truth and has the power to make itself true.[58] Knowledge is used to regulate conduct, control, organize and subjugate.

The Trouble with Truth

Photography is a natural bedfellow of representation, meaning, history and knowledge. It is also a bastion for the notion of truth, which can be used to construct ideas and memories. The camera is capable of being instituted as an apparatus of knowledge, evidence and record, and as John Tagg notes, can be constituted as a specific object of knowledge and meaning, a discourse machine.[59] One view on photography, particularly documentary and ethnographic photography, is that the camera reflects reality, much like a mirror. This belief is upheld by the fact that photography requires a combination of physical and chemical technology thus leading to the idea that photography is objective.

---

[56] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 182-183.

[57] Ibid., 183.

[58] Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices,* 49.

[59] John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 14, 17.

Similarly, the sensation conveyed through documentary and ethnographic photography of witnessing what has been photographed creates a sense of truth or authenticity. Despite a general awareness that photographs are not synonymous with truth, they continue to be a major source for understanding the world—especially as photography becomes more ubiquitous.

The reproductive capability of the camera also engenders in photography a claim to truth, as being able to produce visual facts, surveillance, records and documents. Truth and meaning however, are easily confused twins. While a photograph may purport to provide truth, what it actually provides is a meaning through representational legitimacy.[60] Meaning, as we will recall, is part of a dynamic process of change based on the contexts of culture and language. Within the context of ethnography and documentary photography, which claim a level of objectivity, meaning is not only fixed, but is substantiated through knowledge. Knowledge of having been there and having seen, in addition to the empirical knowledge awarded academic disciplines. Indeed photography's relation to knowledge of the world and the past is tightly bound. The formation of history is inseparable, writes Tagg, "from the development and institutionalization of a regime of evidence, a technology of truth and an apparatus of documentation, with its case studies, records, files and archives."[61]

---

[60] Peter Hamilton, "Representing the Social: France and Frenchness in Post-War Humanist Photography in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices,* 87.

[61] Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning,* xxxiv.

A Representation of People

The etymology of the word *ethnography* gives insight into just how wide-reaching the discipline of ethnography is. Broken down, *ethno* means a people, or an ethnic group; g*raphe*, means a writing, a drawing or a representation. Together the words mean *a representation of people*, a definition yielding endless results and variations.[62] Broad as the term is, as Eliot Weinberger notes, nearly a hundred years of practice have considerably narrowed the range of subjects and the forms of representation within the discipline.[63] Specifically, it is rarely white urbanites that are the subject of ethnographic studies, but rather non-Westerners and white communities not part of the dominant group. The history of the discipline demonstrates that ethnographers have trailed adventurers, settlers, missionaries and other travelers in an effort to salvage or preserve human behavior, especially that not equated with modernity and mainstream culture. Ethnographic representations are generally focused on a single aspect of a culture, such as a ritual, ceremony, traditions of hunting, etc.

The issue of representation through the material work by anthropologists is complex and always requires the question of whose story is being told. In the early 1970s ethnographers began to examine the dominance of the unchallenged voice of the author in ethnographic work and began to incorporate the voice of the

---

[62] Eliot Weinberger, "The Camera People," in Lucien Taylor ed., *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R. 1990-1994* (New York; London: Routledge, 1994), 4.

[63] Ibid.

subject. This shift in practice has been met with a new set of issues such as whether such voices (usually indigenous) remain subjugated by the objective of the anthropologist/ethnographer as author of the project. Anthropologists such as Annette Weiner, George Marcus and Eliot Weinberger have sought to find ways in which ethnography would embody or enact rather that simply report on other people with the underlying principle of collapsing "us" versus "them" perspectives.[64]

Ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall has recounted an experience in making a film about an Aboriginal group in northern Australia working to resettle on their traditional clan land. The group's prospects for a successful resettlement seemed to depend upon the strength and survival of one person—a thirteen-year-old boy who inevitably became the primary subject of the film. Upon finishing filming, the boy died of an illness. MacDougall writes that the film, he felt, died with the boy—that it seemed like a physical piece of his life and was bound up with him. He completed the film only because the boy's parents requested that MacDougall do so in memory of the boy. This example of the relationship between the ethnographer and subject is significant because in this instance, the ethnographer's work was in a sense reclaimed by the life of the boy who engendered it. The point of the story is to highlight a question critical to ethnography: whose story is it? The ethnographer's, or the boy's? How can one determine whether the structures inscribed in ethnographic works derive from the

---

[64] Ibid., xiii.

ethnographer or from the people and events they record? Though his perspective was occasioned by the boy's death, MacDougall felt the film belonged to the boy, because it seemed like a physical piece of his life. MacDougall came to think of this filmmaking scenario as a compound work representing a crossing of cultural perspectives—the potential for a film to generate more complex statements depends, according to MacDougall, upon the filmmaker's ability to go beyond reporting and embody the cultural encounter.[65] In the context of ethnographic photography whose perspective frames the shot? Whose story is being told? As John Tagg wrote, "the camera is never neutral. The representations it produces are highly coded and the power it wields is never its own."[66]

Photography and the Archive

The concept of the archive is complex. It is not a single static repository of visual records and objects but rather a dynamic discursive system. The archive is comprised of material objects such as documents, maps, buildings, yet it is also ideal in that such material objects have been shaped by their participation in the interactions in which they were used in the past and in which they mediate the present.[67] The archive is and has been used by vast peoples and institutions for as many purposes—it is drawn on by powerful entities to regulate knowledge and is a source for appropriation by artists to challenge knowledge. As Kitty Zulmans

---

[65] Douglas MacDougall, "Whose Story Is It?" in Ibid., 35.

[66] Tagg, "Evidence, Truth and Order," 259.

[67] Michael Cole, *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline* (Cambridge; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 117.

writes: "An archive represents a selection; its documents are assembled, sorted out and categorized, and these systems of organization, with their underlying principles and hierarchies of structuring and arrangement, are hardly neutral."[68] Photography has a long been used as a tool to record, classify and study indigenous and non-western cultures and as a result, the relationship between photography and communities that have not traditionally been in places of power is a difficult one. Despite the numerous mediations that are innate to the making of a photograph, viewers are more apt to accept a photograph as reality than they would a painting. As previously discussed, there is a conviction that what appears to be a documentary photograph is truthful.

Photography's capacity to document and create an analogue of fact, proof of existence separates it from other media. Its mechanical capacity for recording the existence of the subject creates a relationship between photography and the archive. The document is a visual testimony of its subject or event. It was the development of mechanical reproduction that initiated the archival formation, which would overtake all relations to the photograph including systems of production and distribution and, more recently, digital archives.[69] The reference to digital archives introduces a question of permanence that doesn't pertain to "hard" archives with as much immediacy if we regard such sites as Facebook, You Tube,

---

[68] Zulmans, "Documentary Evidence and/in Artistic Practices," 105.

[69] Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever—Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York, N.Y.; Gottingen: International Center of Photography; Steidl Publishers, 2008), 12.

Google, etc. The mere consideration of such sites as archives is exciting as it overturns the notion of archives as musty and decaying documents located in museums and library storage rooms.

Photography's status as a technology for recording varies with the power relations which invest in it—the practice is dependent on the agents that define it, making photographs meaningful and legible only within the particular currencies they have.[70] This necessitates a study of the contexts from which photographs come rather than photography as such.[71] One genre of documentary photography connected to a more regulative, bureaucratic and institutional order that exercises control over bodies and identities is criminal police photography with two of its most formative practitioners Alphonse Bertillon, a Paris police official, and the English statistician and founder of eugenics, Francis Galton.[72] In their hands, photography was an indexical tool that promised to reduce nature to its geometrical essence. They created a system in which accused criminals were thoroughly photographed in a consistent manner in order to identify and index common physical characteristics of criminals. The product of their work was hoped to be a visual dictionary that would provide physiognomic gauge of the criminal and to assign the criminal body a position within society.[73] As Allan

---

[70] Tagg, "Evidence, Truth and Order," 259.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Enwezor, *Archive Fever—Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, 13. Also, Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," in *The Contest of Meaning*, 353.

[73] Ibid., 352.

Sekula writes in his seminal work on this history, "the capacity of the archive to reduce all possible sights to a single code of equivalence was grounded in the metrical accuracy of the camera."[74] The tactic of setting out to define and regulate deviance based on physical features was, of course, frustrated yet the propensity to use the camera to classify and index people continued.

The birth of photography took place in Europe at the height of the British Empire. Some of the camera's earliest subjects were colonized people.[75] The fervor for scientific studies of classification was not limited to the criminal. Inquiries about racial and cultural "types" drew on photography to help corroborate scientific ideas such as theories of physiognomy, phrenology and craniology. Those people who were the subject of the colonizer's gaze were often thought of as representatives of a "type" and were usually photographed so as to embody the particular cultural symbols of their racial or social group.[76] Colonial subjects were photographed as exotic others, as an opposite of the white settlers. The presupposition of studying people involves a certain level of control, a position of power, into the work; it was they who held the position of the onlooker as the images were eventually taken home to be circulated. The relationship of the colonizer and the colonized, as suggested by the term "other," is a diametrical one with the colonizer defining itself against the colonized. As Peter Quartermaine

---

[74] Ibid.

[75] Derrick Price, "Surveyors and Surveyed: Photography Out and About," in *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 82.

[76] Ibid., 83.

writes, "Photography is here no mere handmaid of empire, but a shaping dimension of it: formal imperial power structures institutionalized the attitudes and assumptions necessarily entailed in viewing another individual as a subject for photography."[77] One of the fundamental issues with the photographing of colonial subjects is that the images were consumed as though the photographs were unmediated records, free of ideology.

In the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries much of the documentary photography associated with reportage is focused on victims of various sorts—natural disasters, accidents, war and poverty.[78] Visual records have shown viewers places they will never go, and maybe also don't want to; their images capture subjects—knowingly or not—for viewers to consume from a safe distance. With the rise in the availability of cameras, the lens has also increasingly focused on the vernacular—birthdays, graduations, weddings and pets—which reveals another aspect of the desire to document. The family photo album is a repository of memory that contains a wealth of ethnographic information. In this sense, the photograph is the ultimate analogue of identity, memory and history, connecting past and present, giving the photograph "the aura of an anthropological artifact and the authority of a social instrument."[79] The archive—

---

[77] Peter Quartermaine, "Johannes Lindt: Photographer of Australia and New Guinea," in *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous Peoples,* 85.

[78] Martha Rosler, "In, Around and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)," in *The Contest of Meaning*, 303.

[79] Enwezor, *Archive Fever—Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, 12.

comprised of objects that are vessels of memory—then is a fundamental site through which we remember, on both an individual and collective basis. It is a means by which we come to know and understand the past. Viewed in this way, photography bears a heavy responsibility through its representational capacity and its association with truth. As a device for remembering and connecting past and present, an important question regarding the ethnographic photograph is whose history is being represented? In the case of settlers from the British Empire documenting people in the colonies, who decided who should be photographed? What does that decision say about a particular historical moment? What narratives are staged through the photographic image?

The Archive and the Repertoire

A specific example of ethnographic photography to this study is the work of Edward Sheriff Curtis (1868-1952), who dedicated his career to documenting Native peoples and lifestyles in North America. Curtis' quest was to record the last living North American Indian traditions.[80] He believed the Native American was a dying race that modernity would wipe out and that history would forget. Curtis' antidote to the threat of historical amnesia was a twenty-volume encyclopedia issued in limited edition from 1907-1930 entitled *The North American Indian*, with a forward written by Theodore Roosevelt, dedicated to the visual and written documentation of over eighty different Native American tribes. The project was underwritten by J.P. Morgan and was available only through

[80] Hans Christian Adam, "Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indians," in *The North American Indian* (New York: Taschen, 1997), 6.

subscription basis fetching large sums from the likes of Andrew Carnegie, Solomon R. Guggenheim, Alexander Graham Bell and the kings of England and Belgium.[81] According to anthropologist Mick Gidley, Curtis' work almost certainly constitutes the largest anthropological enterprise ever undertaken.[82] The collection of ethnological data includes thousands of musical recordings, oral data such as myths and folklore and photographs focusing on tribes living west of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers who, as Curtis wrote, "still retained to a considerable degree their primitive customs and traditions."[83] The project was achieved through the work of a changing team of field ethnologists, Native American assistants and photographic technicians.[84] Certain established scientists also gave their support and intellectual credence to the project.[85] Curtis worked tirelessly and was very sympathetic to the cruel treatment of Natives by the United States government.

Each volume of photographs is classified by a tribe and comprised of the common activities and individual portraits that typify each group. The portraits

---

[81] Rosler, "In Around, and Afterthoughts," 336-337.

[82] Mick Gidley, "Pictorialist Elements in Edward S. Curtis's Photographic Representation of American Indians," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 24 (1994): 180.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Three such supporters include the Smithsonian's Charles Doolittle Walcott, Harvard's F.W. Putnam and George Bird Grinnell, editor of the journal *Forest and Streams.* Ibid., 181.

generally capture different “types” within a tribe including physical characteristics, documented through frontal and profile photos. People are treated as specimens as they are shown getting water, story-telling and scouting from atop a hill. The colonial gaze surfaces through Curtis’ titles and lengthy captions as the photographer assumes the role of translator breaking down the complexities of the North American Indian into digestible types. It is in the pairing of Curtis’ text and photographs that the myth of the primitive Native surfaces and the power relationship of the photographer and subject is most clearly seen.

The Apache from 1906 is a picture of a man taken from behind on the bank a river, the following caption accompanies the image: “This picture might be titled ‘Life Primeval.’ It is the Apache as we would mentally picture him in the time of the Stone Age.”[86] (Fig. 2) This caption demonstrates the notion of the Native as part of the flora and fauna, the un-changing type set in a binary opposition to modernity. Another similar caption furthers what Curtis was communicating in the above: “In the early morning this boy, as if springing from the earth itself, came to the author’s desert camp. Indeed, he seemed a part of the very desert. His eyes bespeak all the curiosity, all the wonders of his primitive mind striving to grasp the meaning of the strange things about him.”[87]

Another plate from the Apache volume provides one such example: *Renegade Type—Apache* from 1903 is a photograph of an older man, the first in a

---

[86] Curtis, *The North American Indian*, 42.

[87] Ibid., 55.

series of four "types" of Apaches laid out in the prototypical grid style of the Enlightenment. (Fig. 3) The caption under the photo states: "No picture could better show the old renegade type of the Apache than this one of Genitoa. He is the type of Indian who has yielded to the inevitable and lives in peace—not because he prefers it, but because he must."[88] This summation of the "Renegade Type" carries a more obviously harmful consequence, which hints at an unpredictability and certain danger lurking about in the North American Indian. This highlights an underlying problem present in Curtis' work whereby he classifies a large group of people spanning an entire continent ultimately creating caricatures through his categories.

These examples move beyond a *type*, that is, any simple, vivid, memorable easily grasped and widely recognized characterization in which a few traits are foregrounded and change is kept to a minimum, into *stereotype*, which shares the definition of type except that *stereotype* also reduces everything about the person to a few traits and exaggerates and simplifies and fixes them.[89] Stereotyping also involves power inequities which define ideas of normalcy and otherness not to mention countless other binaries. However, the complexity of the problem with Curtis' work is neither simple nor clear cut. A walk through the gift shop at the Heard Museum—Phoenix's major American Indian art and culture museum—provides ample opportunity to buy beautiful, oversized coffee books of

---

[88] Ibid., 48.

[89] Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices,* 258.

Curtis' work as well as reproductions of his photographs in the form of calendars and bookmarks. For some Native Americans the work of Curtis might be viewed as a treasure for the indigenous community precisely because the work documents the traditions and customs of native people in a more thorough and in depth manner than perhaps any other photographer has.

At the turn of the twentieth century work such as Curtis' was assumed to represent objectively collected scientific knowledge about people. Today, however, these photos can be positioned as documents that represent a colonial perspective on reality revealing the ethnocentric, racist and oppressive ramifications of such photographs. Re-situated the images represent a critique of the environment and framework of beliefs in which they were produced.[90] By revealing the meaning given to historical photographs, new meaning can be created through new discourse.

Diana Taylor addresses the relation of the archive and memory stating that the archive—comprised of those materials that are supposedly enduring such as texts, and documents—and memory/knowledge is central to Western epistemology and that it can be seen as a governing model or cognitive archetype.[91] The model is set up at the expense of embodied knowledge, or what Taylor calls "the repertoire" which is what I have referred to as unofficial

---

[90] Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research* (London: Sage, 2007), 68.

[91] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003), 24.

knowledge. The repertoire is ephemeral; it can be described as spoken—as opposed to written—language, dance, myths, knowledge. The repertoire is performative and is the enactment of embodied memory through gestures, movement, dance, song—acts considered non-reproducible knowledge.[92] As performances function as vital acts of transmitting knowledge, memory and a sense of identity—the archive and the repertoire each function as essential sources of information, both exceeding the limitations of the other.[93] Yet a binary exists between the archive and the repertoire—official knowledge and unofficial knowledge—with the archive, or the official, being privileged as the basis for normative historical knowledge.

The Repertoire

Steven Yazzie is an emerging artist who lives and works in Phoenix. While he is of mixed cultural heritage, Yazzie identifies with his American Indian roots and is a registered Navajo. He grew up mainly in Arizona and spent some of his youth on the Navajo Reservation in Black Mesa, in Northern Arizona. He has been in the Valley since his sophomore year of high school and is very active in the Phoenix art scene working both as a solo artist and in various collectives and collaborative projects. He has done residencies and had his work shown nationally and internationally. Yazzie took some classes at Phoenix College and did a

[92] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 20.

[93] An useful example of the archive and the repertoire working in tandem can be seen in weddings, which require the performative utterance of "I do" along with a legal contract. Ibid., 2, 20-21.

residency at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. He currently teaches painting at Phoenix College.[94]

Yazzie works in a range of media and beginning in 2007 he started making work based on a concept derived from his personal history. The idea came from the nickname of his biological father, Steven (Lemuel) Yazzie who he never really knew. While his aunts and uncles remember the name, Tsosido, none of them remember how he got the nickname or what it means. Yazzie has since taken the name using it as a point of reference for exploration into personal mythologies with multiple meanings, concepts and symbols. The name also functions for Yazzie as a link to his father and to his own tribal connection.

Yazzie's first works based on the concept of Tsosido are from his 2008 *Born Again* guitar series in which he restored broken and abandoned guitars giving them new life. His statement about the series' relationship to the concept of Tsosido is as follows:

> Tsosido functions as a point of reference for exploration into personal mythologies with multiple meanings, concepts and personal symbols. The Tsosido is the ironic perpetual outsider, the beautiful song of nature and the violent inherent beast. Tsosido is where I live and take shelter. Tsosido is the destruction and the transformation. Tsosido is a migration. It is a symbol of negation as well as affirmation. Tsosido is a personal monolith seeking to find continuity.[95]

In 2007 Yazzie attended a workshop in Tucson with performance artist Guillermo

---

[94] All biographical information was gathered from the author's interviews with Yazzie between 2009-2011.

[95] This statement can be found on the artist's web site: http://www.stevenyazzie.com/yazzie/2008/Pages/Tsosido_2008.html

Gómez-Peña in which he used Tsosido as the character for the performance he created. In this on-going personal exploration, Yazzie performed a faux ceremony that was informed by a You Tube video he saw of illegal border crossers. In the video the group of crossers follow one another through the desert carefully stepping in the footprints of the person before him. The last to cross dragged shrubbery behind him in order to sweep away all traces of the crossers' footprints. The performance was loosely based on the video wherein the Tsosido character pretended to sweep away his own footsteps leaving no trace of his existence. The performance was the basis for the idea that would eventually develop into *Tsosido Sweep Dancer.*

Tsosido Sweep Dancer

In 2009 Yazzie created *Tsosido Sweep Dancer*, a photogravure, through a collaborative project at Arizona State University organized by Joe Baker, Mary Hood, Future Arts Research, the School of Art, (Herberger Institue for Design and the Arts) and King Galleries. For the project, five indigenous artists from the U.S. and Canada were invited to work with ASU graduate printmaking students over the course of one week to produce a limited edition portfolio. The content of the prints explore indigenous identity, place, popular cultural reference, personal or community histories.

Tsosido Sweep Dancer is an image of a man performing what seems at first glance to be a ceremony. The suggestion of a landscape has been painted on the wall behind the man and a prop resembling wild grasses placed right in front of the painting. A taxidermied coyote attached to a form meant to emulate a rock

with an affixed copy of a prickly pear cactus shares the stage with Tsosido, the figure “performing” the sweep dance. Tsosido wears a mask on his head and is topless save for a long beaded necklace. He wears what looks like a sarong with an indigenous stylized pattern and holds an object in his hands, which, if his posture is any indication, he seems to be working. The image is sepia-toned giving it the appearance of being from another time. The title, *Tsosido Sweep Dancer*, suggests that the man is part of a ritual or ceremony. Perhaps the designated sweep-dancer for his people. (Fig. 4)

The ethnographic photograph carries tremendous potential for describing and determining; its history has molded and shaped popular ideas about American Indians far beyond the borders of the United States. While *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* refers to ethnography, it is completely fabricated. The loose composition of the photograph not only reveals the stage, but also that the picture was taken in a studio, as seen through the unfinished ceiling and the floating wall that was only partly painted to render a sky. Closer examination exposes that the man wears a plastic donkey mask on his head rather than a traditional mask or headdress. The mask has been spray-painted black and positioned on the top and back of the man’s head and is deceptive if not carefully examined.[96] What seems to be a sarong made of native fabric is actually a cheap blanket and is paired with black socks and black tennis shoes. The object in his hands is a common red, plastic broom.

---

[96] Information about the Tsosido print came from an interview with the artist in May, 2009.

Tsosido Sweep Dancer is at once humorous and earnest. It makes light of the way American Indian customs and traditions have been a source of mystery for outsiders. The enigma of what the man might be wearing and doing is demystified through the fake grass, stuffed coyote, cheap blanket, donkey mask and red plastic broom, which also reveal the irony of the title. The image transcends humor and acutely calls into question ideas about Indianness: What do Indians look like? What customs and traditions do urban Indians practice? What is contemporary Indian art? Ultimately the print undermines the expectation of the viewer to provoke a critical dialogue that questions the role of the American Indian stereotype in the United States imaginary and consequently beyond in that of the rest of the world. It plays on the tensions between image and title, knowledge and ignorance, desire and expectation and recalls Fanon's observation that the colonial subject is always over-determined from without.

While the model's brown skin is obscured by the sepia tone, the visual tropes make the viewer aware that this man is different. The symbols of Indianness thus also function to signal that the man is other, exotic. He is defined by his ethnicity and bound by these visual tropes. This layer is complicated through the stage, which symbolizes the construction of the image, the lack of objectivity and myth of authenticity. The carefully constructed photograph with vulgar stand-ins for Indianness signaling the other is played out on a stage through a performance of ethnicity. The man is playing Indian even while he is Indian.

Counter-Archives

Yazzie's image quotes formally from the work of Edward S. Curtis in several ways, including the use of photogravure, the demure size of the print and the nostalgic air surrounding the solitary figure at work, preserved in sepia for posterity. Conceptually, *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* responds to Curtis' photography specifically, but also to the archive in general by questioning whose narratives are staged through ethnography. It is now common knowledge that Curtis staged many of his photographs in his attempt to capture what he understood to be "traditional" amongst the tribes he documented. Curtis retouched some photographs in order to remove modern objects, such as clocks, and traveled with a trunk of wigs for those with shorn hair and costumes for those who did not have them.[97] What Curtis asked of his sitters was a performance of ethnicity—that they look and act the part of the Indian as he understood it. Yazzie looks to Curtis' tremendous body of work as a site for official public memory that has privileged particular narratives at the expense of others.

The question about whose narratives are staged through ethnographic photography is what the artist is responding to through this print. Yazzie counters the tendency for outsiders to mythologize Natives as primitives through his humorous inclusion of anachronisms such as the sneakers, socks, contemporary broom, and industrially produced mask. Use of the props and stage propel the critique of the authority and neutrality of ethnography demonstrating that there is always another photograph that could have been possible in place of the one that

---

[97] Gidley, "Pictorialist Elements in Edward S. Curtis's Photographic Representation of American Indians," 182.

was preserved.[98] Just as the Tsosido character draws on stereotypes and symbols of Indianness to perform an idea of ethnicity, the print can be read in another way. The performance of ethnicity could be directed towards the Native community, a subtext in Native American and First Nations art since at least the 1980s that I will return to shortly.

Tsosido Sweep Dancer responds to the large amount of work that constitutes the archive by adding to a growing body of work that proposes a new narrative drawing on embodied, or unofficial, knowledge and experience. Its presence helps to re-position those photographs that represent a colonial perspective critiquing the oppressive, colonialist framework in which they were produced. The counter-archive problematizes particular images and memories by replacing them with self-affirming ones to question the past and alter it. Yazzie's print removes any doubt about the authority or authenticity of this picture and offers a critique on ethnography by carefully crafting his image after the work of Curtis. Questions about how Curtis may have staged his photographs are provoked, and what follows is the need to question the symbols of Indianness that have come to define what being Indian is.

This work reveals a split in the structure of meaning of cultural representation through the appropriation of cultural symbols and icons to undermine their totalizing effects. The effect is an intervention in the meaning communicated through the work. That is to say that the intervention disrupts the

[98] Sophie Berrebi, "Documentary and the Dialectical Document in Contemporary Art," in *Right About Now: Art and Theory Since the 1990s,* 114.

relationship of the coded visual language and the resulting sense of (fixed) cultural meaning that a tradition of photography like Curtis' has played a role in constructing. It is through this process that Yazzie constructs a discourse about his own cultural representation.

Performing Ethnicity

In the 2007 exhibition *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World*, at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, co-curator Joe Baker posed three very important questions that I argue Yazzie's work responds to: "Why are indigenous artists not allowed to celebrate the present as other artists do? Why do we require of Native artists a myth or fantasy, an iconography? What became of the celebrated ideal of multiculturalism, a world composed of ever-changing blends and mixtures?"[99] These questions expose some of the issues that American Indian artists continue to deal with today, issues that have been at hand for decades. Ideas of what contemporary Indian art is and what Native art should look like and similarities and differences between rural and urban Indians are problems that artists such as Yazzie are thinking about. By interrupting the authority of the documentary photograph and highlighting the myth of ethnographic neutrality, work like this reconceptualizes who an American Indian is and what art about Indians looks like. The work proposes an encounter with the reflective history of

---

[99] Joe Baker, "Interventions: Making a New Space for Indigenous Art," in *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World* (Washington, D.C.; Phoenix, AZ: National Museum of the American Indian; Heard Museum, 2007), 15.

photography: looking back while looking forward, continuing to dissolve ideas of photographic truth and cultural identity as essential and unchanging through photographic practices that are innovative, self-reflexive and critical. This work "renders visible and alien the shared fantasies that determine the image of privilege in which white subjects make both history and themselves."[100]

Returning to the possibility that the performative aspect of *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* could also be directed inward, towards the Native community, what might the work be communicating? The 1999 exhibition catalogue *Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* explores the difficulties for the indigenous artist in the art market in terms of the demands for and expectations for "Native" art. Perhaps this photograph is a critique on the economy of art, on what Native artists must do to get shown. Have those symbols and icons of Indianness constructed by outsiders then been used by indigenous artists who see them as a (or *the*) means to an end?

Baker's questions are especially relevant to this discussion. Are indigenous artists trapped by their relationship to U.S. history? In 1988, curator Robert Houle stated Baker's question slightly differently: "Somehow we are not allowed to come into the twentieth century. We are not allowed to interpret our own reality, the way our communities respond to everyday life."[101] These

---

[100] John P. Bowles, "Blinded by the White: Art and History at the Limits of Whiteness," *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (2001): 40.

[101] The quotation, which I have abbreviated, was used in the 1999 exhibition catalogue *Trickster Shift*, which deals with similar issues in art by First Nations artists. Allan J. Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary*

questions have been the subject of exhibitions for at least the last three decades (*Fluff and Feathers,* 1988*, Reservation X*, 1998; *Trickster Shift,* 1999; *Native Universe,* 2004; *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World,* 2007); what are the lingering ideological structures that allow these problems to remain relevant? What strategies are being adopted to overcome them?

One strategy that has been invoked by artists to overcome ideological barriers is to turn to media/projects that operate outside of the market and art institutions.[102] Postcommodity, a Phoenix-based interdisciplinary American Indian arts collective, of which Yazzie was a part until this year, seek, through their work to move indigenous discourse into issues of how the global market is operating as a mechanism for contemporary colonialism. As such, the collective, rather than adhering to specific aesthetic principles, makes works that are "nimble, opportunistic, situationalist and unpredictable." The collective's work is expressed through happenings, interventions, performance, installation, video, sound, light, new media, prints, publications, etc.[103] Postcommodity is perhaps indicative of how indigenous artists will move forth in the twenty-first century. Their commitment of forging new metaphors that speak to the indigenous

---

Native Art (Vancouver, BC; Seattle: UBC Press; University of Washington Press, 1999), 14.

[102] I want to acknowledge that this strategy is not new—while the reasons driving artists to turn away from art establishments have varied throughout history, early examples of such projects or movements include Dada, Conceptual Art, Fluxus and graffiti to name a few.

[103] Information about Postcommodity can be found on their collective's website at http://www.postcommodity.com/about.html

experience rather than adhering to a common aesthetic is something that other contemporary artists working against dominant ideologies.

Another artist whose work provides an example of a different strategy of discussing identity politics through conceptual art practice is Ruben Ochoa, an interdisciplinary artist from Los Angeles. Ochoa's work includes site-responsive installations, photography, sculpture and drawing. In his work Ochoa draws from the urbanity of L.A., tensions between socio-economic classes and the geographical borders determined by the city's infrastructure, themes that he grounds in his experience as a young Mexican-American man from California. In 2007 Ochoa made a suite of six chromogenic prints, which catalog Ficus trees around different neighborhoods in L.A. The photographs present a metaphor through the relationship of the tree roots and the concrete on top of them—the roots in the pictures have defiantly broken through the concrete constraints of the city's sidewalks. Ochoa sees the strength of the root systems as a symbol of the city's minority communities' survival in the face of difficult situations.[104] In *Fwy Wall Extraction* (2006–2007) Ochoa applied wallpaper to a section of concrete wall along a section of Interstate 10, a location chosen because it surrounds, separates, and disrupts culturally diverse populations. The wallpaper depicted a photo-realistic cross section of the landscape that might exist behind the

---

[104] Information about Ochoa's work was gathered from a discussion with the artist in Phoenix in November, 2010.

cement.[105] These interventions are powerful metaphors for the tensions between immigrant or indigenous communities that struggle for survival amidst the dominant structures—visible and not—around them.

I have discussed the way a few contemporary artists are using their artistic practices to construct an archival realignment. Interventions like *Tsosido Sweep Dancer,* which draws on the history of ethnography to activate more complex reflections on photography, are fundamental to destabilizing the existing archive and creating one that articulates a collective memory. The work of Yazzie is, as Gloria Anzaldúa wrote, helping to create another culture, "a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet."[106] The subversion of racist cultural symbols challenges reductionist ideas of people allowing for fresh and complex possibilities in which identity is not fixed to a past that perhaps never even existed. Through exciting conceptual practices, artists are complicating an ineffective and inaccurate archive and creating new meanings about their histories.

[105] This work was included in the *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* exhibition that traveled around the United States and Mexico. It was at Phoenix Art Museum in summer-fall 2008.

[106] Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 187.

Chapter 3

INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND GENDER IN THE WORK OF LORNA SIMPSON

Since the dawn of time people have understood the relationship between visual culture and power. Egypt's pyramids, the Taj Mahal, Sistine Chapel and Dubai's Burj Al Arab hotel stand as example of the dedication of huge sums of money and energy to satisfy the drive for iconic monuments and architectural feats that tell stories of wealth, power and of progress. Similarly, portraiture through sculpture and painting and—more recently—photography and graphic design have captures the likenesses of great leaders allowing the faces of Napoleon, Mao Tse-tung, Che Guevara and Barack Obama to be circulated and recognized around the world. Empires, nations, religious groups, political parties and corporations have invested huge sums in order to forge iconic images to tout their power and become recognizable symbols. Such iconic images are compelling in their abilities to conjure an experience, create desire or engender a sense of security or unity.

Photography today is a major contributor to visual culture because of its accessibility and immediacy. Its claim to truth makes it an enticing tool for bearing witness and telling a story. If a picture is worth a thousands words, what are the consequences for people who have little say about how they are pictured; for how their stories are told? The medium is vested with the authority to

capture—a power to see and record.[107] As such, photographs come to symbolize in our collective minds the image of a nation, a region, a community or a race. Yet, the power is not actually in photography's ability to reproduce, but rather in those places of power that guarantee the authority of photographic documents to stand as evidentiary.[108] In her book, *Black Looks*, bell hooks discusses this important historical relationship between power, representation and truth: "Long before white supremacists ever reached the shores of what we now call the United States, they constructed images of blackness and black people to uphold and affirm their notions of racial superiority, their political imperialism, their will to dominate and enslave. From slavery on, white supremacists have recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination."[109] This quotation underscores the interplay of representation and power and how the two can be used to construct ways of seeing and thinking. bell hooks favors the term "white supremacy" when describing issues of power born and upheld by traditionally European-derived values and peoples. I will use this term when quoting or paraphrasing hooks' thoughts, however, I prefer the term whiteness, which I find to be both less specific and less loaded. Whiteness does not refer to all whites or only whites—it is an ideology with the cunning appearance of no racial markers. It does not describe a lack of racial signification

---

[107] Tagg, "Evidence, Truth and Order," 259.

[108] Ibid., 259-260.

[109] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 2.

but rather the ways in which those racial signifiers have been marked as privileged and normative.[110] The opposite of whiteness then—blackness or Indianness, perhaps—is by definition different, other, exotic. Whiteness is the model by which the West considers culture, productivity, morals, ethics, beauty, etc. And, as the norm it possesses the privilege of passing without need for remark or description; it is assumed while otherness is pronounced.[111]

In the previous chapter I discussed the way ethnographic photography has contributed to the construction of a system of racial domination. Images are a mode of communication and through them values and ideals are constructed and communicated. This chapter will continue the conversation about ways in which photography's powerful role in the construction of historical knowledge is subverted through the same medium "by nominating the photographic apparatus as both agent and double agent."[112] Where Steven Yazzie's photogravure responds to ethnography's claim to authenticity through blatant fabrication and

---

[110] Regina E. Spellers and Kimberly R. Moffit eds., *Blackberries and Redbones: Critical Articulations of Black Hair/Body Politics in Africana Communities* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 2010), 270-271.

[111] Bowles, "Blinded by the White: Art and History at the Limits of Whiteness," 39. Toni Morrison's example of the way Whiteness goes unremarked while Otherness is pronounced in the literature of Hemmingway are poignant even 19 years after the book's publication. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 70-73.

[112] Okwui Enwezor et al., *Lorna Simpson,* (New York: Abrams, in association with the American Federation of Arts, 2006), 118.

humor, I now turn to Lorna Simpson whose deeply moving photography and text-based works respond to the racialized and gendered body.

Simpson is of a generation of black artists that grew up in the wake of the civil rights movement. Born in 1960, Simpson came of age during the politically vibrant years of the Women's Movement when feminist voices were diversifying and beginning to better represent the diversity of women in this country. Activism for women of all colors and social strata was taking place with feminist icons such as Gloria Steinem, Florynce Kennedy, Margaret Sloan and Dorothy Pitman Hughes at the helm organizing and fighting for equal employment opportunities, free childcare and reproductive rights. Informed by these politics, Simpson emerged in the 1980s as a photo installation artist taking up many of these issues in her work and eventually becoming recognized as a major figure in the late twentieth century photography of the United States. Her early photo works from the late 1980s and early 1990s, which will be looked at in this chapter, are born of the political climate of the time—they explore the complex relationships of language and imagery as they define and determine race, gender, power, beauty, violence and memory. Her work evaluates the ambiguities between word and meaning from a racialized and gendered perspective underscoring the interstices in which women of color find themselves. Such meaning is teased out through the combination of the performative image, text and title illuminating the problematic or violent undertones in otherwise innocuous words and phrases. She addresses these issues through absence, restricting the viewer's access to the face and body, erasing traces of the exotic that would be expected by one informed only by the

ethnographic archive. Simpson's oeuvre spans photography, painting, video and installation art and through her work she incites a response to the African American body—sometimes the male body, but most often the female. Many of her works refer to hair as a site of identity and self-expression. Hair plays an important role in the signification of race as Simpson's work recognizes by employing the symbol to challenge hierarchies of power and ideals of beauty. I will examine these layers in Simpson's work through *Counting,* a photogravure and silkscreen from 1991, in addition to other photographic works by Simpson from the same period that seek to articulate a politic of resistance on the black female body.

Intersectionality

For the majority of Simpson's career the subject of her work has been the deeply coded black female body in relation to power, violence, beauty and memory. To begin to understand Simpson's work with the female body of color it is useful to turn to paradigm of domination outlined in 1978 by Edward Said in *Orientalism* between the Western subject and the other. Said pointed to the attitudes and assumptions by the West about the Middle East, both negative and overly romantic, as the foundation for using knowledge about the other to dominate, restructure and have authority over the other.[113] Orientalism applies to hierarchies of power in regards to race in the U.S. and is discussed in another, less common way by Okwui Enwezor who writes about a parallel issue specific to the U.S. African Americanism considers the construction of a non-white African-like

113

presence or persona and the imaginative uses this fabricated presence has served.[114] Enwezor writes that Africanism is a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability—it provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear.[115] To refer to the black body as coded is to refer to Enwezor's use of African Americanism. Simpson's response to this reality is to discuss race and gender through absence. Most of her works restrict access by the view to the face and female body and in doing so erase traces of the exotic. Her intense investigations deal with an identity politic specific to women of color exploring the fissures and silences where this group is neglected, even by feminism and antiracism. The intersection of race and gender leave women of color with unique vulnerabilities in the systems of domination that surround them. The dilemma of intersectionality has been described by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw as the consequence of antiracism's having essentialized blackness and feminism's having essentialized womanhood.[116] The term identifies the relationships between race and gender that generally articulate the interaction of racism and patriarchy and the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and

---

[114] Ibid., 115.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 376.

antiracism.[117]

Intersectionality and Violence

Some academic disciplines use statistics to study this subject and by turning to such research our understanding of these problems can be strengthened. Statistics can contribute to one-dimensional ways of understanding, yet Crenshaw's work looks at how the racialized and gendered experiences of women of color define and confine them in ways not experienced by white women and men of color—a problem Simpson's work deals with.[118] As Crenshaw notes, the issue isn't simply that antiracist and feminist discourses fail women of color by not acknowledging race or patriarchy, but rather that the discourses are often inadequate even to the task of articulating the full dimension of racism and sexism.[119] Such a failure is illustrated in Crenshaw's effort in the early 1990s to gather statistics on the number of domestic violence interventions by the Los Angeles Police Department for her research. The LAPD refused to release the requested information explaining that domestic violence activists—both in and outside LAPD—and community representatives feared that the exceptionally high

---

[117] Ibid., 367.

[118] The research I cite in this discuss was conducted by Crenshaw in the late 1980s-early 1990s, which are contemporaneous to the works I discuss by Simpson. Crenshaw is part of a think tank called African American Policy Forum, which has produced a huge amount of research on intersections of racism, sexism, sexuality, colonialism, ableism and classism. See the group's web site for much more information: http://aapf.org/learn_the_issues/intersectionality/

[119] Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," 360.

number of domestic violence cases would be wrongly interpreted and publicized in ways that would undermine long-term efforts to work with the communities. They also feared that the information would perpetuate stereotypes of black and brown men being unusually violent—an especially serious problem for black men who bear the stereotype of being exceptionally violent—and justify oppressive police tactics and other discriminatory practices.[120] Though prudence with the statistics was intended to protect against racist stereotypes, the unintended consequence perpetuates the silences of the battered women. Though Crenshaw's research was conducted in the early 1990s, it echoes the sentiment expressed in Gloria Steinem's 1969 article, "After Black Power, Women's Liberation." The article provides an account of the changing dynamics of the Feminist Movement—then called the Women's Liberation Movement—recounting that women of color began using the Black Power Movement as a model as they recognized their second-class status within the Women's Movement.[121] Earlier feminist voices such as Simone de Beauvoir appealed to the problems of white, educated suburban homemakers yet made almost no reference to women of color.[122] By the late 1960s women of color began to realize they shared more in common with other women of color of varying socio-economic classes than they

---

[120] Ibid., 361.

[121] Gloria Steinem, "After Black Power, Women's Liberation," New York Magazine, April 4, 1969, http://nymag.com/news/politics/46802/

[122] Gloria Steinem, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), 5.

did with men of color of their own classes.[123] Over twenty years after Steinem's reporting on the changing nuances of feminism Simpson began making work that explored these sustained distinctions.

Crenshaw's research on domestic violence demonstrates how people of color (amongst other disenfranchised groups) must weigh their interests in avoiding issues that might reinforce distorted public perceptions of the community against the need to acknowledge and address intracommunity problems.[124] According to Crenshaw, issues such as the domestic violence problem are routinely concealed in a misguided attempt to preempt racial stereotyping. This strategy forefronts the problematic perception that men of color are unusually violent, a problem recognized by Frantz Fanon—whose work I will add also overlooks the intersectionality experienced by women of color. This protection of men, however, comes at the expense of women. Indeed the problem is not in the exposure of the violence that exists within communities of color, but rather in the absence of other narratives that provide a fuller and more accurate picture of the black or brown experience.[125]

Simpson's work embodies both the silent spaces born of and perpetuated by intersectionality and the violence against women of color that result from it. By fragmenting the body through her compositions and creating anonymity

---

[123] Steinem, "After Black Power, Women's Liberation."

[124] Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,* 360-61.

[125] Ibid., 362.

through the absence of the face, the photographs reference the silences of these women as illustrated by Crenshaw's inability to draw statistical information on this population. The texts in Simpson's work, which are paired with the photographs both hint at a narrative and accentuate the silences of women of color by refusing to provide a comprehensible linear story. *Guarded Conditions* from 1989, comprised of eighteen Polaroids and twenty-one engraved plastic plaques with plastic letters exemplifies this point. (Fig. 5) The work is a series of six nearly identical photographs of a woman, each showing one third of her body pictured from the back arranged in a horizontal row. Just as the woman's image is repeated so are the words "skin attacks" and "sex attacks". At the top of the composition are the words that comprise the title. The woman in the pictures wears a white cotton smock with a scoop neck that exposes the skin of her upper back. She stands with her bare arms folded behind her back and wears unremarkable black shoes. Even without the text prompting the viewer to consider the images with the repeated phrases, the way in which the woman is photographed, isolated and removed from any environmental context, draws attention to the heavily coded black female body. The woman is generalized and can only be read through her race and her gender making her an archetype, which the seriality serves to emphasize. The repetition of the images and the angle at which they were taken mimic a police lineup even though taken from behind. The words "sex attacks", "skin attacks" reiterate the reference to a lineup as the text underscores the history of violence resulting from the intersection of color and

gender—an undertone that lurks in so many of Simpson's photographs.[126] The attacks against this woman are not only because of her sex, but also because of her interstitial location as a black woman. With a theoretical basis in intersectionality, Simpson's work highlights the failure of feminism for women of color, which is made apparent in the work's observation of such violence.

Beauty and Desire

The twin issues of beauty and desire are crucial aspects of Simpson's photography-based works from the 1990s and both rest on how we assign value to the body. By again turning to Crenshaw's research we gain an understanding of how race is valued in the U.S. legal system. Much of Crenshaw's research focuses on racism and sexism in dominant conceptions of rape. Her studies look at differing responses within the U.S. legal system, media and the public to rape cases as they occur within different racial groups. Included in the scholar's vast research on the subject is a study on rape depositions in Dallas showing that the average prison term for a man convicted of raping a black woman was two years as compared with five years for a Latina woman and ten for the rape of a white woman.[127] The study points to a hierarchy that holds certain female bodies in higher regard than others. Rape law, despite some advances, continues to weigh the credibility of women against "narrow normative standards of female

---

[126] Other overt examples of Simpson's exploration into violence against the black female body include *Completing the Analogy* (1987), *Untitled (2 Necklines)* 1989, *Double Negative* (1990).

[127] Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,* 368.

behavior," examining, for example, a woman's sexual history at trial.[128] This tactic is used to distinguish moral character and to separate those who 'got what they deserved' from true victims. Crenshaw, along with hooks, cites as a major issue the way that certain gender expectations for women intersect with sexualized notions of race in images of black women reaching back to Europeans' first contact with Africans.[129] Blacks have long been portrayed as more sexual than whites, a subject of art that is being responded to in exceedingly fresh and confrontational ways by contemporary artists such as Mickalene Thomas, Wangechi Mutu, Xaviera Simmons and Renee Cox. Their blatant interventions call attention to the problematic history of objectifying the black female body and are thus adding to a body of powerful work that draws attention to the history of representation of black females and to the persisting intersections of race and gender.

Mickalene Thomas' 2008 painting *Something You Can Feel* addresses issues of black femininity by drawing on imagery from Blaxploitation and 19th century painting to challenge ideas about beauty and power (Fig. 6). Where

---

[128] Ibid., 369.

[129] A well-documented example of the over-sexualization of black women is "The Hottentot Venus", or Saartje Baartman, a South African woman taken to England in 1819 and exhibited and studied for her protruding buttocks and enlargement of the labia. She became something of a freak show as can be seen in the caricatures and other drawing and sculpture of her figure. Her difference was, as Stuart Hall notes, pathologized with curiosity in her lasting well into the twentieth century. Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 264-265. It wasn't until 2002 that South Africa finally succeeded in returning her remains for burial in her homeland. Kerseboom, Simone. "Burying Sara Baartman" in *Commemoration, Memory and Historica Ethics*, 2007.

Simpson uses absence as a strategy removing traces of the exotic in order to challenge the viewer's reaction to the black female body, Thomas fills her canvases with iconic exotica such as the nude female of color and animal prints. Yet Thomas' women are physically and psychologically strong. They stare out at the viewer daring one to make eye contact with them in a powerful reversal of the male gaze. *Something You Can Feel* presents a portrait of a confident woman in a domestic setting replete with a shock of gaudy patterns and colors covering everything from the couch on which the woman sits to the walls behind her to the soles of her stilettos. Thomas employs the stereotype of blacks as untamed and unpredictable through a visual overload of bright paint and flashy rhinestones. Highly sexualized poses and titles as in this painting are signatures of Thomas' work, which again reference the history of women of color in visual culture as highly sexualized objects. In 1992 bell hooks wrote that blacks have made fewer revolutionary interventions in representation than they have in areas such as employment and education.[130] According to her, the possibilities for such interventions lie in moving away from defining the black self in reaction to racism and imagery determined by whiteness. The work of Mickalene Thomas and Lorna Simpson is, I think, what hooks elsewhere refers to as gestures of defiance, which push up against the boundaries of the image to find ways to see when looking

[130] bell hooks, *Art on my Mind: Visual Politics,* (New York: New Press; Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1995), 58.

against the grain.[131]

The Shifting Paradigm of the Photograph

Simpson received her BFA in Photography from the School of Visual Arts, New York in 1983 and her MFA from the University of California, San Diego in 1985. While her photographic interest was originally in journalistic-style documentary photography, Simpson quickly became apathetic with the practice. She wanted to investigate and deconstruct the world around her rather than simply document it.[132] Recognizing the potential for images to be informants of historical knowledge and to become part of the social imaginary, she was drawn to using photography in a different way pursuing aspects of performance. During the time she spent in her Master's Degree at UCSD learning under experimental artists Allan Kaprow and Eleanor Antin, Simpson became influenced by performance art—a popular practice in California at that time making the artistic environment, she has noted, completely different from what was happening on the east coast.[133] By turning to Conceptual art, Simpson had the opportunity to take a subjective stance on photography that includes performative characteristics yet is still photography based.

---

[131] hooks uses this language in reference to the essays representing her political struggles complied in *Black Looks.* hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation,* 4.

[132] Enwezor et al., *Lorna Simpson,* 109.

[133] Ibid., 108-109. Other UC San Diego alumni include Carrie Mae Weems 1984; Erika Suderburg 1984; Martha Rosler 1974. See http://visarts.ucsd.edu/students/mfa-alumni

Documentary photography has come to represent the social conscience of liberal sensibility—as a genre it is tied to the ideological climate of developing state liberalism and the reform movements post World War II.[134] As I have previously touched upon, documentary photography has traditionally taken as its subject the downtrodden and those in places of misfortune. Artists living in the wake of the major social changes of the 1950s-1960s saw new opportunities for documentary imagery and thus sought to transform the journalistic photograph; no better example of this exists as in the work of Andy Warhol. Warhol recognized that potential of mass media to burn images in the collective imagination and the iconic power that images held. In works such as *Red Race Riot* from 1963, Warhol culled imagery from the media and used seriality as a method to defamiliarize the image from its referent.[135] How else could a horrific series of pictures become art? Jeff Wall writes about the shift in photography at this time as experimenting with the "anaesthetic," with the look of non-art.[136] Duchamp had charted this territory prior to 1920 and was influential in the anaesthetic in the Readymade and the "commodity in all its guises, forms and traces."[137] This transition indicates a different photographic paradigm, one that turned from the photojournalistic tendency to the more iconic treatment of photo images as

---

[134] Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)*,* 261.

[135] Enwezor, *Lorna Simpson,* 107.

[136] Wall. "Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography In, or As, Conceptual Art," 85.

[137] Ibid.

archives of public memory.[138] Photography was increasingly combined with other forms of art and visual culture as opposed to simply depicting what was in front of the lens.

That Warhol and other artists were exploring new methodologies for photography does not mean that all photographers were pursuing new directions. In 1955 the Museum of Modern Art mounted a landmark exhibition curated by Edward Steichen called *Family of Man* which included 503 photographs made in the decade following World War II that served as expressions of humanism.[139] The exhibition traveled for eight years stopping in thirty-seven countries on six continents and has been on permanent view at the Clervaux Museum in Clervaux, Luxembourg since 1964 when the U.S. government gifted the exhibition to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.[140] *Family of Man*, which is organized thematically intends to appeal to people of any culture as it documents important times and experiences such as birth, love, war, illness and death. Steichen's curatorial goal was to demonstrate the universality of human experience and the documentarian's ability to capture it through photography. This category of photography claims objectivity by employing the camera to serve as witness to events. What Warhol recognized in forging a new paradigm for the medium is that photography itself is

---

[138] Enwezor, *Lorna Simpson,* 107.

[139] http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives_highlights_06_1955 (accessed February 14, 2011).

[140] http://www.luxembourg.co.uk/clervaux.html (accessed February 14, 2011).

a way of seeing rendered as strategy rather than goal.[141] By appropriating images from mass media and re-positioning them as art, Warhol and other artists such as Gerhard Richter and John Baldessari began using photography in a fundamentally subjective way.

It was in graduate school in the early 1980s in southern California that Simpson realized documentary photography could not be the method for her investigations of race and gender. Artists that were combining photography and performance had critical influence on Simpson—whether performing the body or examining the socio-economic, racial and sexual codes that surround it, the camera (as well as video and film) functioned as a different kind of documentary tool, one that opened up the opportunity for a subjective approach to photography.[142] This domain of drawing on the camera to record events of the self—real or imagined—is central to the work of Cindy Sherman, Adrian Piper, Bruce Nauman, Ana Mendieta and Eleanor Antin amongst others. Ana Mendieta, for instance, was one of the first artists to address brutality against women in her chilling performance, *Untitled* (Rape Scene) from 1973. Using her own body as a symbol of the female, Mendieta acted out the violent details of rape against

---

[141] Neville Wakefield, "Second-hand Daylight: An Aesthetics of Disappointment" from Janus and Lambert, *Veronica's Revenge: Contemporary Perspectives on Photography,* 244.

[142] Enwezor et al., *Lorna Simpson,* 112.

Iowa's first homicide victim.[143] Throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s before her untimely death, Mendieta created an extraordinary body of work that shares several important characteristics with the work of Simpson. Mendieta performed her sculptural tableaux and actions in nature and almost exclusively in private.[144] She would document these performance-based works through photography and would then share the photographic documentation with audiences. Mendieta's body-centered, performance-based works derive in part from her experience as a Cuban woman who experienced exile at a young age. She used archetypal symbols for the female body as seen in her extensive *Silueta* series, which is grounded in female identity and uses the strategy of absence to explore the issues she was thinking about. By performing the body, Mendieta rebuked traditional ideas about the relationship of the body of color to socially constructed hierarchies. Like Simpson's work, the repeated use of the female silhouette is the defining formal motif and gesture, subject and object in the artist's oeuvre.[145]

So it was that Simpson developed a photography-based style that at once refers to the socially embedded tradition of documentary but employs the studio to create carefully styled performative images in which the female body of color is front and center. While Simpson's predecessors such as Mendieta pursued

---

[143] Olga M. Viso, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985,* 1sted. (Washington, D.C.; Ostfildern-Ruit: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution; Hatje Cantz, 2004), 152, 155.

[144] Olga M. Viso, *Unseen Mendieta: The Unpublished Works of Ana Mendieta,* (Munich; New York: Prestel, 2008), 8.

[145] Viso, *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985,* 22.

performances and actions, which the camera served to document, Simpson pursues the photographic document first and foremost. Photography here plays a formative role rather than a documentary one as the performance is staged only for the camera with the resulting images as autonomous works of art. By inserting language into the compositions new narrative possibilities were created while simultaneously distancing the work from that of documentary photography, which relies on captions to elucidate the photograph.[146] The combination of stylized performative photography with provocative text recalls film stills and the work of the postmodernist artists before Simpson such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. Simpson's work can be distinguished from those artists as it is always located in the interstice of race and gender. The black body is used in Simpson's work to deconstruct the codes written upon it.

Simpson's earliest works use a black or white background rendering stark images devoid of emotion that might have been for medical or scientific purposes. The isolation from any context or reference opens them up for endless interpretation. Many of the works recall the intrusive photography of Alphonse Bertillon and Francis Galton in Simpson's denial of her sitters' identities photographed in a generalized institutional style and in the seriality of the image. (Fig. 7) Simpson withholds the viewers' access to a returned gaze by cropping bodies, showing them obliquely or simply from the back. The reference to a photography used for examination of the body and surveillance comments on the

[146] Enwezor, *Lorna Simpson,* 109.

Enlightenment obsession for organizing types in order to build an authoritative body of knowledge. Fascist leaders and regimes such as the Nazis and the Khmer Rouge have also used invasive and systematic forms of photography to document horrific attempts to control populations. The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide in Phnom Penh, Cambodia holds 6,000 of the estimated 30,000 mug shots of prisoners from one of Pol Pot's prisons, S-21, that were left by the Khmer Rouge leaders who fled the country in early 1979.[147] (Fig. 10) Before killing the prisoners, the Khmer Rouge photographed, tortured and extracted written confessions from their victims.[148] Today these photographs stand as a haunting reminder of genocide in public memorial of a dark time in Cambodia's recent history. Under another oppressive regime a bit further back in history, a body of photography of African slaves was constructed in the United States. The obsession with documentation as control is traceable in the work of Simpson. As previously discussed in *Guarded Conditions*, many of Simpson's works contain a palatable violence in the performed line-ups of the models and relating texts. Photographs such as *Proof Reading* from 1989 source the mug shot as a reference through tightly composed frontal photographs of a woman. The subject's face is obscured by letter ranges by letter ranges reminding one of how an institution might group people by surnames or identification numbers. The seriality of the

---

[147] Accessed February 21, 2011 http://www.tuolsleng.com/history.php

[148] Seth Mydans, "Out From Behind a Camera at a Khmer Torture House," The New York Times, October 26, 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/26/world/asia/27cambo.html?_r=1 (accessed February 21, 2011).

images reinforces the reference to eugenics, criminology and phrenology as each photograph becomes even further de-personalized through repetition. This formal device creates a grid that gives weight to Simpson's reference to the push to classify and organize people into types with the camera acting as an instrument of surveillance and truth. Yet truth is obscured in Simpson's work by the constant denial of access to the subject of the photograph. The only truth is that the subjects remain anonymous, allowed only to be read through gender and race.

Statistics, Stereotypes, Symbols

Counting (1991) departs from the method of seriality presenting a more ambiguous work. The photogravure and screen print combine three different photographs arranged in one vertical composition. The top image is a cropped portion of a woman's body followed by a picture of a brick smokehouse and on the bottom is a coil of braided hair. As with most of Simpson's early work, each photograph is set against a black background and is accompanied by text, also encompassed in black, that can be characterized as some kind of counting: the hours that comprise a schedule, the number of bricks in a structure, the number of twists in a bun, etc. (Fig. 9) Typical of Simpson's style, each image is pared down and void of emotion as objects of the anthropological gaze that might be beheld in a case under glass. Isolating the subject of each photograph from its context Simpson depersonalizes each of the images. The woman, for example, is stripped of her identity and can only be identified as a woman through the hint of cleavage barely exposed by the dipping neckline of her garment. With so little visual information about her, she is read only through the racial markers of her skin and

full lips. Likewise, the braided coil of hair bears a racial marker through its color and texture though it cannot be linked to any one person, having been disconnected from the body. Perhaps it is an object of curiosity or exotica. The structure has been emptied of identifying information and the picture is over-exposed making it difficult to decipher detail and the composition reveals nothing of its location. The isolation of the three images against a black background and from their referents recalls the traditions of ethnography and criminal and eugenic photography and a difficult history with statistics—being stereotyped because of them or overlooked altogether. Furthering this point, the braided coil mimics the appearance of a digital thumbprint with the rhythmic pattern of the braid circulating much like the indentations embedded in the skin on the thumb. No symbol is better tied to criminology than the thumbprint.

Counting uses familiar symbols relevant to African American history to blur lines between past and present recalling a difficult past while alluding to present-day structures of oppression. The work's composition acts as something of a riddle. It disrupts the viewer's relationship to it by interrupting the possibility for a linear narrative and yet invites the viewer to make sense of the images and texts by reading them in conjunction with one another. The three images neither correlate in an overly obvious way nor are they to be read independently of one another as indicated through the arrangement of the composition and frame making it one singular work. However, there is a tension in the combination of the different components through the image and text juxtaposition. For instance, a careful look at the first text, which at first seems to be a schedule, presumably

belonging to the woman in the photograph left of the text, does not correspond to a conventional work schedule as the hour ranges fluctuate from four to sixteen hour time blocks. Similarly, the number of bricks in the anonymous structure makes sense, however, 310 years from 1991 (when the work was made) was 1681. Is that when the structure was built? Why is that year significant? Finally, how do the number of twists, braids and locks correspond to the coil of hair? Twists, braids and locks are all hairstyles—twists and locks specifically refer to black hairstyles. Yet the texts don't seem to correspond to the hair in the image, which is braided. Indeed the photograph is not easily deciphered by relying on the text to image relationship, which in effect furthers this conceptual photograph from its documentary referent.

While it is tempting to conclude—as many have—from the racial markers of skin and hair that this photograph refers to the difficult history of slavery for African Americans, that interpretation is wrought with limitations. Each image must be read with regard to the other two in order to make meaning of the work. More than one U.S. museum with *Counting* in their permanent collection have written that the smokehouse is a slave hut from South Carolina, yet my research has not found this information to be substantiated.[149] Pictures of very similar

[149] Reference to the smokehouse being a former slave hut came from the Brooklyn Museum and Albright-Knox Art Gallery and Washington University where this photograph is part of the permanent collection of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum. None of these sites reference where the information originates.
http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/163661/Counting
http://www.albrightknox.org/collection/collection-highlights/piece:simpson-counting/

smokehouses located on South Carolina and Virginia plantations still have what were at one time slave huts. Has Simpson selected a picture of a historic structure merely to refer to the past, or is this picture referring to something more specific? Clearly by using the photograph of the smokehouse Simpson references the photographic archive, which creates other meaning when read in tandem with the other two photographs. By using the archive as source material and pairing it with her own photographs, Simpson creates a realignment by inserting her own voice—that of a black female—into a body of work referencing her history and memory.

One of Simpson's most discussed works, which unequivocally underscores the fissures Simpson seeks to reveal in power and memory is *Waterbearer* (1986). In the photograph a young woman standing with her back to the viewer, pours water from an old metal pitcher with one hand and from a plastic container with the other. Beneath her are the words: "She saw him disappear by the river, they asked her to tell what happened, only to discount her memory." The work, at nearly six and a half feet wide, is arresting and presents a number of contrasts through the photograph and the suggestive fragments of text: black/white; metal/plastic; vulnerability/defiance; memory/power. While the posture of the figure calls to mind the scales of justice, the text reveals the treachery of language as the woman is asked for her testimony, which is subsequently dismissed. The woman's voice has no bearing on the situation—her

---

http://artsci.wustl.edu/~wartists/Contemporary/Simpson/1992.22_desc.html (all accessed on January 3, 2011).

memory and experience do not matter. *Waterbearer* causes the viewer to think about violence and justice in relationship to race and gender and confronts the relationship of memory and power—power decides which memories to acknowledge, record and validate, and which to dismiss.

Counting speaks about memory in more subtle ways, which demand a certain amount of work on the part of the viewer. While the smokehouse, perhaps from a southern plantation, and the textual reference to a year when slavery existed in the U.S. provokes one to make sense of the photograph as a reference to slavery, one might ask if 1681 could refer to something else. Section 1681 of the Education Amendment of 1972 declares: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."[150] Certainly this law relates to the photograph yet the purpose of the work is not to provide clear-cut answers for the viewer. Simpson has said of her work: "I want to avoid works that are just two-dimensional or easily read in the sense that as you're watching you think you get all the details and that's the end of the story. I prefer gaps and contradictions so that not all the viewer's questions are answered."[151] What is certain is that *Counting* relies on the viewer's relation to it, to the viewer working to discover its many layers. Assumptions about race, gender and history turn back on the viewer

[150] http://www.dol.gov/oasam/regs/statutes/titleix.htm (accessed January 14, 2011).

[151] Quoted from a conversation with Okwui Enwezor in, *Lorna Simpson,* 138.

as expectations are thrown into question by the text. The juxtapositions of text and image undoubtedly speak to the idea of memory and pastness yet the work as a whole is disarming. By confusing examples of counting and tracking, she underscores the fickleness of memory even as it is constructed through images and texts. The ambiguous pairings of written language and image highlight the treachery of language, specifically in the meaning constructed through texts in the documentary traditions to which she refers. Just as Edward Curtis positioned himself as a translator for those he photographed, Simpson critiques such exploitation by obscuring the written text. The title, *Counting,* also evokes the history of criminology, eugenics, phrenology and the many other pseudo scientific studies that have relied on statistics as a deterministic approach to organize, classify and ultimately to differentiate. Statistics, measurements, empirical data—they all rely on modes of counting. Crenshaw's research about how minority groups prioritize public perception of the group at the expense of the women in the group underscores this point. Who counts?

One symbol in *Counting* that is not obscure and is frequently invoked in Simpson's works is that of black hair. The coiled braid of hair is a symbol of exclusionary ideals of beauty and relationships of the personal and political, specifically in terms of hair, that marginalize blacks—persistent themes in Simpson's work. The symbol refers to a history of the intersection of the personal and the political for the African American female wherein one's hair style is not merely a personal decision but locates one within a larger racial politic.

Representing Blackness: Black Hair, Black Beauty

The notion of the converging dynamics of the personal and political is based on the fact that through the outward markers of hairstyle, dress, fingernails, material belongings, etc. individuals create visual cues about how they identify themselves—they assert their identity. As Kobena Mercer has written: "the question of style can be seen as a medium for expressing the aspirations of black people historically excluded from access to official social institutions of representation and legitimation."[152] Just as style can be used as a vehicle for expression, some social, sexual, political and religious identifications bear heavier burdens of representation and consequences than others. An example is the Afro. Made popular in the 1960s by blacks rejecting hairstyles that could be construed as influenced by white culture, the Afro embraced natural hair texture and became symbolic of the Black Nationalist Movement. Angela Davis is one of the figures best known for popularizing the style. The Afro denoted black pride, synonymous with activism and political consciousness and thus demonstrates the intersection of the personal and the political. The decision to engage the body politic by wearing an Afro politicized the hair and articulated a politic of resistance on the body. This style has been transformed by the winds of time and today is a fashion statement rather than a political statement.

Hair is in many ways the point of convergence for the intersection of the personal and the political and as such has been a point of contention, pain and

---

[152] Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 100.

differentiation since Africans were brought to the U.S. In their chapter *Black Hair in Bondage: 1400-1899*, Byrd and Tharps write: "When slaves arrived in the Americas hair became a racial marker—African hair was referred to as wool likening people to animals.[153] Slaves recognized that lighter-skinned less kinky-haired slaves were rewarded with better work and so concocted ways to straighten hair or to try to loosen curls.[154] Straight hair enabled individuals to have better economic opportunities and social advantages. Different methods amongst slaves with no access to commercial products were concocted to loosen curls and attempt to straighten hair—wagon-wheel axel grease or even dirty dishwater would make hair slicker and straighter.[155] Women would put butter, bacon fat or goose grease on hair and then heat a butter knife over a fire and use it as a curling iron.[156] Worst of all was a mixture of lye and potatoes that was smeared on hair to straighten it, but could also eat the skin off one's head.[157] Byrd and Tharps write that the quest for straight hair was often a torturous obsession for slaves as straight hair translated to social opportunities and economic advantage—even if

---

[153] Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York City: St. Martin's, 2001), 14.

[154] Neal Lester, "Of Wigs and Waves, Locks and Fades," in Spellers and Moffit, *Blackberries and Redbones: Critical Articulations of Black Hair/Body Politics in Africana Communities,* 134.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Byrd and Tharps, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America,* 17.

[157] Ibid.

one's skin was light, if the hair was kinky, the person was deemed black.[158] Neal Lester observes that the rhetoric of hair makes it clear that black hair in its natural state is undesirable and needs to be *tamed* "as if blackness were animalistic and whiteness were civilized."[159] Recognizing the legacy of straight hair as a symbol of social and economic opportunity and kinky hair as a symbol of oppression is paramount to understanding the formation of hierarchies of beauty. Once constructed, as hooks wrote, the representations of such ideals were repeated through imagery to reinforce such hierarchies as a constant reminder of what is desirable.

In her 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison touches on the ramifications of beauty ideals on young black girls. In an exemplary scene, the protagonist, Claudia, and sister, Frieda have an altercation with their white classmate, Maureen, which ends in a storm of hurtful insults. Maureen, defending herself, says that she is cute and that her black counterparts—Claudia and Freida—are ugly, "black and ugly."[160] The scene concludes with a painfully insightful passage describing how the girls begin to sink under the "wisdom, accuracy and relevance" of Maureen's last words.[161] Claudia muses about the binary reality of her world: if white, rich, well-dressed Maureen is cute, then

---

[158] Ibid., 17-18.

[159] Lester, "Of Wigs and Waves, Locks and Fades," 137.

[160] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Plume Book, 1970), 73.

[161] Ibid., 74.

Claudia—opposite of Maureen in every way—is ugly. Maureen's approval from classmates, teachers and parents is juxtaposed with the disapproval Claudia meets from everyone around her. The chapter ends with Claudia's acute realization that the enemy is not really Maureen: "The *thing* to fear was the *thing* that made her beautiful and not us."[162] The *thing* that Morrison writes about is at the heart of Simpson's work. It manifests through the symbol of hair. The *thing* refers to a construct that draws on biological characteristics to subordinate some people and elevate others.

In the same passage of *The Bluest Eye* a fourth character is also present during the argument on the street. The girl is Pecola, by far the most wounded and tragic figure in the novel. As the girls begin to split after the fight Claudia observes: "Pecola stood a little apart from us, her eyes hinged in the direction in which Maureen had fled. She seemed to fold into herself, like a wing. Her pain antagonized me. I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets. But she held it in where it could lap up into her eyes."[163] Beauty, value and desire are constructs reinforced through representation and are what drive Simpson to re-examine visual mores specific to the racial markers of skin and hair. Though constructs, beauty, value and desire that have power over individuals and are held in place by powerful structures including representation.

---

[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid., 73-74.

Hair straightening remains a highly contested issue and is a major theme in popular culture discourse.[164] The heart of the issue is whether straightening is an act of emulating whiteness, the perpetuation of self-hatred, or simply a personal choice. Madame CJ Walker (1867-1919), the first African American self-made millionaire and pioneer of female straightening products claimed that she was providing a means for women to be hygienic, look glamorous and have higher self-esteem by straightening their hair. What Walker understood was that women who did straighten their hair and adapt to this originally Eurocentric hair styling tradition were more able to transcend social barriers and were afforded access to better opportunities. She did have to defend herself against accusations that she was perpetuating Eurocentric ideals of beauty, which illuminates another dimension of intersectionality; women of color can be both victims and agents of self-determination and cultural domination. "Hair," wrote Lester, "continues to weave seamlessly the personal and political, the private and the public, the individual and the communal and the past and present in the lives of African Americans."[165]

The relentless subject of hair as a racial marker and symbol of beauty, desire and socio-economic power is one of the subjects that Simpson has

---

[164] Over the past year as I have educated myself on this subject I have been reminded of the pervasiveness of this subject as it came up in regards to Michelle Obama and her daughters during the 2008 Presidential election, on a Larry King interview with Tyra Banks on September 22, 2009; "School Daze" from 1988 and "Bamboozled" from 2000, both films by Spike Lee and in a recent, Chris Rock's documentary, "Good Hair" (2009).

[165] Lester, "Of Wigs and Waves, Locks and Fades,"140.

confronted repeatedly from her earliest works to those she is making today. *Stereo Styles* from 1988, for instance, is a monumental installation of ten Polaroid prints and ten engraved plastic plaques. (Fig. 10) The images and texts play off the title, which simultaneously alludes to the words "stereotypes" and "hair styles". The ten pictures are taken from the back and again mimic mug shots in their composition. The only thing that changes from one picture to the next is the hairstyles of the model, which range from casual to elegant to the absurd. Running through the middle of the overall composition of the installation is a series of words that could describe hairstyles such as severe, long and silky, country fresh and sweet. By again using the heavily coded black female as a model and focusing specifically on her hair, the text and images refer to the identity of African American women as they follow or rebel against standards of beauty sustained by whiteness.

A vast amount of scholarly literature is dedicated to personal accounts of African Americans taking part in hair rituals and the struggles—for both men and women—with beauty ideals surrounding hair texture, length and style. Feminist literary scholar Gloria Wade-Gayles' 1993 book *Pushed Back to Strength* describes the ways that her family taught her racial pride that eventually found expression in an Afro.[166] The author recounts a story from her youth in the 1940s-50s of a weekly ritual in which the author's mother would wash and straighten her hair and that of her sister. The straightening process was done with a fine-tooth

[166] Gloria Jean Wade Gayles, *Pushed Back to Strength: A Black Woman's Journey Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 139.

metal comb which was heated in the oven and run through each girls' hair until straight often searing the scalp or ears, yet Wade-Gayles writes, "I welcomed the suffering because I wanted to be 'beautiful' and that required straightened hair."[167] Although Wade-Gayles' family ritual took place well before Lorna Simpson was born, such stories remain relevant to African American women who continue to battle notions of beauty. Just as Wade-Gayles and Morrison describe the despair of young girls dealing with hierarchies of beauty, Simpson's work addresses it through a conceptual sophistication, continuing the conversation about this politicized symbol that feminists before her began. By engaging the very photographic archive that has been fundamental to constructing a sense of U.S. history, Simpson highlights the ambiguity of memory and the hierarchies of beauty and power through juxtapositions of texts and images of black women thus contributing to a counter-archive.

As demonstrated through an analysis of several works by Simpson from the late 1980s-1990s, the artist's investigations deal with an identity politic specific to women of color by exploring the gaps where this group is left behind by feminism and antiracism. Combining visually enticing photographs that are performed in the studio with disjunctive texts and titles, Simpson creates conceptual works that include layers of meaning, which challenge the viewer to making sense of visual and textual stereotypes that are emptied through their placement and fragmentation. By using the female body of color as the site for

[167] Ibid., 135.

these explorations, Simpson locates her discussions firmly and indisputably in the experiences of women of color addressing violence, memory, objectification, beauty, desire and value. In considering the role of photography in visual culture, the potential for critique precisely for those whose representational histories and practices it has contributed so forcefully in the past is great. The works at once refer to ethnography and invasive criminal photography while employing the studio to create carefully styled performative images that create open-ended meaning. Simpson's persistent use of the black figure is central and sensitively positioned at the heart of a black woman's reading of history and her country.[168] Her art is a location for self-determination that transcends the limits of the colonizing eye.

[168] Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 127.

Chapter 4

THE COUNTER-ARCHIVE

This thesis has explored the ways in which two contemporary artists engage with archival structures and materials in order to challenge ideas calcified through visual culture. I have traced aspects of photography's history in order to investigate the relationship of the photographic archive to colonial histories as well as to the formation of historical knowledge. Focusing on these relationships, I asked whose history is represented through ethnographic and criminal photographies, what narratives are staged through the photographic image, what has been selected as memorable enough to be part of the archive, by whom and to what purpose? How might new understandings the past affect our understandings of the present, and of the future? How do *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* (2009) and *Counting* (1991) function as acts of resistance and reclamation questioning official public memory? What common strategies emerge from this study? How do the strategies relate to the memories of the particular groups? And finally, how do these works expose the ambiguity of cultural authority?

Steven Yazzie and Lorna Simpson recognize knowledge as a form of power that can be used to regulate conduct and shape the way people conceptualize cultural identity. Their conceptual photo-based works quote from historical sources with the intent to re-conceptualize history and identity against the precision of photography. By positioning themselves as authors, they challenge master narratives that shape normative ideas about history allowing narratives specific to their experiences to emerge through their works. These

counter-narratives contribute to a dynamic discursive system that re-imagines representational traditions—this is the counter-archive. Of primary importance to this thesis is the role of photography as a force in shaping the ways we remember and our representational practices. Enwezor observes that the snapshot is has become the sovereign analogue of identity, memory and history, joining past and present, virtual and real, thus giving the photographic document the aura of an anthropological artifact and the authority of a social instrument.[169] Also discussed throughout this thesis are ways that photography has been used to exercise control and define normality. These various capacities and histories of photography have provided fertile ground for Yazzie and Simpson to deconstruct archival references in order to uncover new understandings of the past and present.

Whose Stories?

Photography, it has been pointed out, has the ability to reproduce with precision, yet the photographer makes decisions about what is to be represented and how. Photography is never free of bias and must therefore be understood as a subjective medium. The history of photography is a subject critical to the artistic strategies employed by Yazzie and Simpson. Two aspects of the categories of documentary, ethnography and criminology have been important to this thesis—one considers photography as a means for preserving memory and the other, its relationship with representation. Photography claims the authority of bearing witness while its incredible potential for subjectivity can go overlooked. As John

---

[169] Enwezor, *Archive Fever—Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, 13.

Tagg wrote, “the camera is never neutral. The representations it produces are highly coded and the power it wields is never its own.”[170] It is not only the photographer whose decisions affect each picture, but also the ideological frameworks within which photographs operate and determine how photographs are used and seen. That is, the histories and narratives represented in the photographic histories discussed here are those of the photographers and the cultural and ideological groups to which they belong—that is, representatives of dominant culture. The photographs selected as memorable enough to be part of the archive speak to the collective memories of dominant groups.

The second aspect of photography is its relationship to representation, which I have discussed in a range of ways, contexts and circumstances looking at ethnography, criminology and uses of photography by fascist groups to point to how the camera has been used to study, catalog and control people. In the case of the subjects of Curtis, Bertillon and Galton, the photographed are people in subordinate positions with no voice. The photograph is an analogue of identity and the past and is therefore also used to empower individuals and re-think representational traditions and unofficial histories as I have shown. Photography has been used to perform the self, as a medium for the repertoire—for unofficial knowledge and memory. This performative aspect of photography plays a significant role as it draws on the medium to dismantle the very knowledge that photography was used to help construct in a reclamation of historical knowledge.

[170] Tagg, “Evidence, Truth and Order,” 259.

As Tagg has noted, the camera is capable of being instituted as an apparatus of knowledge, evidence and record and can be constituted as a specific object of knowledge and meaning, a discourse machine.[171] Yazzie and Simpson recognize photography a powerful and accessible archive for memory. They evoke the characteristics of "truth" and representation inherent to photography as a strategy to counter-narratives that have emerged from historical photography. They position themselves as authors and create works that function as acts of resistance challenging official public memory and asserting their voices. They, in effect, create alternative narratives and contribute to a counter-archive.

Race and gender are critical to *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* and *Counting*. To discuss these subjects the artists share the strategy of staging and performing their works for the camera in order to incite a response to the spectacle of the racial self and the gendered body. While very different in subject matter, the works also share a strategy of generalizing the body of color so that the figure is read through race and become an archetype. Such strategies relate to the memories of the specific groups the artists are part of by drawing on symbols of Indianness and blackness to provoke a dialogue about the role of stereotypical imagery in the imagination of the US. Their works undermine the expectations of the viewer as the layers of meaning in each work are explored. Yazzie's strategy in doing this is to create a spectacle in which an Indian man performs a stereotypical Indian identity. Simpson uses absence as a strategy removing traces of the exotic in order

[171] Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning*, 14, 17.

to challenge the viewer's reaction to the black female body.

Ambiguity and the Counter-Archive

The structure of stereotypes, prejudice and racism—individual or institutional—is discussed less than are the existence or effects of these problems. Homi Bhabha describes this structure as the notion of cultural difference, which is created through the "enunciation of culture as knowledge*able*, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification," [his emphasis].[172] Cultural difference as he describes it is signified through assertions about culture that differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of reference, applicability and capacity.[173] This idea of cultural difference is exactly what bell hooks refers to when she described the use of racist representation of blacks created by whites with the intent to uphold hierarchies of power.[174] For American Indians difference has long been signified through the mostly nude body, feathers and animal skins worn as clothing as seen in Froment-Delormel's painting described in chapter one or Curtis' photographs described in chapter two. For blacks hair has been used as a distinguishing feature, one used to differentiate. These symbols of Indianness and blackness are the visual signals about culture that differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of reference.

---

[172] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 34.

[173] Ibid.

[174] hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 2.

The notion cultural difference is dependent on whiteness. On the normalizing of certain attitudes, values, physical characteristics, mannerisms, ways of speaking, walking, dressing and the styling of hair—allowing certain things to "pass" for normal while others simply do not. Salient examples of cultural differentiation abound in recent legislation in the state of Arizona. In early 2010, for example, Jan Brewer enacted a crackdown on public school teachers with "heavy" accents declaring them unfit to teach English classes.[175] The law, directed at non-native English speakers, validates particular ways of speaking English while declaring others unacceptable. Public reactions opposing the law underscore the ambiguity of cultural difference—someone with a pronounced Boston accent could teach English in Arizona while someone with the accent of a non-native English speaker may not. The issue is blurry and relies entirely on cultural authority defined, in this case, by Arizona lawmakers. The study of hair politics provides another equally noteworthy example as countless writers and scholars have written about the experience of wearing dreadlocks and the ensuing responses of their peers, colleagues and strangers. The contemporary Afro, dreadlocks are a symbol of resistance and an assertion of black solidarity and identity (though not only worn by blacks). As such, countless personal accounts exist about how the choice to wear dreadlocks has resulted in negative

[175] Miriam Jordan, "Arizona Grades Teachers on Fluency," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 30, 2010 2010, sec. Education, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703572504575213883276427528.html (accessed March 3, 2011).

reactions such as being fired from one's place of employment.[176] This illustration again demonstrates how cultural difference relies entirely on cultural authority to define what is normative.

The enunciation of cultural difference is the problem of how in signifying the present, something is repeated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily faithful to historical memory but rather is a "strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic."[177] In other words, cultural authority—normalcy—is legitimized through constructions of pastness that are repeated over and over. Edward Said writes in *Orientalism* that to reduce knowledge of people or regions to attitudes, trends and statistics is to emasculate and dehumanize.[178] Such trends, attitudes or stereotypes that rely on erroneous notions of the past as well as limited information take shape visually through icons and symbols that are legitimized through an array of institutionalized power structures such as the entertainment and advertising industries. The result is the production of misrepresentations of people and the homogenization of cultures.

In order to challenge such dehumanizing ways of seeing Yazzie and

---

[176] Spellers and Moffit, *Blackberries and Redbones: Critical Articulations of Black Hair/Body Politics in Africana Communities,* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 2010), 472. Regina E. Spellers, *Cornrows in Corporate America: Black Female Hair/Body Politics and Socialization Experiences in Dominant Culture Workplace Organizations,* 2000).

[177] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 35.

[178] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 291.

Simpson create works of resistance that contribute to a counter-archive based on their collective memories thereby countering the grand narratives that govern normative notions of history and reconceptualizing their own histories. Such interventions take place in the substitution of self-affirming cultural icons and symbols for those that are crippling and reductionist. The strategy of intervening in faulty cultural representations highlights the importance of visual representations of cultural myths that support a notion of pastness that is out of line with the collective memory of those who are being represented. This process creates an interruption in the structure of meaning of such icons and symbols that have come to stand for cultural representation as the codes are emptied of their stereotypical meaning and either assigned new meaning or placed in doubt. The result is that old narratives are displaced thus making space for new meaning.

By engaging the very photographic archive that has been fundamental to constructing U.S. history, Yazzie and Simpson hone in on the ambiguity of memory and the hierarchies of power thus contributing to a counter-archive. Photography has often rendered those who have been photographed into passive subjects rather than active agents in their own lives. However, as an analogue of identity and the past, photography is also used to empower individuals and challenge representational traditions. Yazzie and Simpson recognize photography as a powerful and accessible archive for memory. They evoke the characteristics of truth and representation as a strategy to challenge narratives that emerged from historical photography. Positioning themselves as authors, they and create works that function as acts of resistance challenging official public memory and

asserting their voices. *Tsosido Sweep Dancer* and *Counting* are rich with layers of cultural, historical and political references and do not provide easy answers, but require work on the part of the viewer to make meaning of them. They, in effect, create alternative narratives and contribute to a counter-archive that alters the way we see ethnography today.

REFERENCES

Anderson, Benedict R., and American Council of Learned Societies. *Imagined Communities.* London; New York: Verso, 2006.

———, ed. *Making Face, Making Soul, Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color.* San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza.* 3rd ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007.

Baker, Joe, and Gerald McMaster. *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World.* 1st ed. Washington, D.C.; Phoenix, Arizona: National Museum of the American Indian; Heard Museum, 2007.

Banks, Ingrid. *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness.* New York; London: New York University Press, 2000.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1994.

Bolton, Richard. *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989.

Bowles, John P., Olu Oguibe, Karen Stevenson, Maurice Berger, Ellen Fernandez-Sacco, and Adrian Piper. "Blinded by the White: Art and History at the Limits of Whiteness." *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (2001): pp. 38-67.

Burke, Peter. *History and Social Theory.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Byrd, Ayana D., and Lori L. Tharps. *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America.* New York: St. Martin's, 2001.

Candida Smith, Richard. *Art and the Performance of Memory: Sounds and Gestures of Recollection.* London; New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2002.

Cole, Michael. *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*. Cambridge; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241.

Curtis, Edward S. *The North American Indian: The Complete Portfolios.* New York: Taschen, 1997.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex.* Translated by H. M. Parshley. Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1952.

Deloria, Philip Joseph. *Playing Indian.* New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998.

Doxtator, Deborah. *Fluffs and Feathers: An Exhibition on the Symbols of Indianness.* Brantford, Ontario: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1988.

Eliade, Mircea. *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism.* Translated by Philip Mairet. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961.

Enwezor, Okwui. *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art.* 1st ed. New York; Gottingen: International Center of Photography; Steidl Publishers, 2008.

———, Helaine Posner, Hilton Als, and Thelma Golden. *Lorna Simpson.* New York: Abrams, in association with the American Federation of Arts, 2006.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Ferguson, Russell. *Discourses: Conversations in Postmodern Art and Culture.* New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990.

Ferguson, Russell, ed. *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures.* Cambridge; New York: MIT Press; New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990.

Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

———, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture.* New York: New Press; Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1998.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge; and the Discourse on Language.* New York: Dorset Press by arrangement with Pantheon Books, 1972.

Fried, Michael. *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never before.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Gayles, Gloria Jean Wade. *Pushed Back to Strength: A Black Woman's Journey Home.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

Gidley, Mick ed. *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous Peoples*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992.

———. "Pictorialist Elements in Edward S. Curtis's Photographic Representation of American Indians." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 24, no., Ethnicity and Representation in American Literature (1994): 180-192.

Golden, Thelma, Kellie Jones, and Chrissie Iles. *Lorna Simpson.* London; New York: Phaidon, 2002.

Gruzinski, Serge. *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization.* New York; London: Routledge, 2002.

Halbwachs, Maurice, and Lewis A. Coser. *On Collective Memory.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* London: Sage, 1997.

Hobsbawm, E. J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality.* Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

———, and T. O. Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation.* Boston: South End Press, 1992.

———. *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics.* New York: New Press; Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1995.

Janus, Elizabeth, and Marion Lambert. *Veronica's Revenge: Contemporary Perspectives on Photography.* 1st Scalo ed. Switzerland; New York; Zurich; Scalo; Distributed in North America by D.A.P, 1998.

Jordan, Miriam. “Arizona Grades Teachers on Fluency. 2010." *The Wall Street Journal*, April 30, 2010 http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703572504575213883276427528.html (accessed March 3, 2011.)

Lacey, Theresa Jensen. *The Pawnee.* New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006.

Lippard, Lucy R. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society.* New York: New Press, 1997.

Lyotard, Jean Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

McMaster, Gerald, and Canadian Museum of Civilization. *Reservation X.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998.

———, Clifford E. Trafzer, and National Museum of the American Indian (U.S.). *Native Universe: Voices of Indian America.* Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American India in association with National Geographic, 2004.

Mercer, Kobena. *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies.* New York: Routledge, 1994.

Minh-Ha, Trinh T. "Documentary Is/Not a Name." *October* 52, (1990): pp. 76-98.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews.* London; New York: Routledge, 2000.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye.* New York: Plume Book, 1970.

———. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Oguibe, Olu. *The Culture Game.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* Complete ed. London: Secker & Warburg, 1949.

Pérez, Emma. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Pink, Sarah. *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research.* 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2007.

Pinney, Christopher, and Nicolas Peterson, eds. *Photography's Other Histories.* Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003.

Postcommodity. http://www.postcommodity.com/

Rutherford, Jonathan. *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

Ryan, Allan J. *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art.* Vancouver; Seattle: UBC Press; University of Washington Press, 1999.

Sabau, Luminita, Iris Cramer, Petra Kirchberg, DG Bank, and Hara Bijutsukan, eds. *The Promise of Photography: The DG Bank Collection.* Munich; New York: Prestel, 1998.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Schavemaker, Margriet, and Mischa Rakier, eds. *Right about Now: Art and Theory since the 1990s.* Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007.

Shackel, Paul A. "Public Memory and the Search for Power in American Historical Archaeology." *American Anthropologist*, (2001): 655-670.

Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media.* London; New York: Routledge, 1994.

Simpson, Lorna, Sarah Rogers-Lafferty. *Lorna Simpson: Interior.* Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts/The Ohio State University, 1997.

Smith, Cherise. "Fragmented Documents: Works by Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, and Willie Robert Middlebrook at the Art Institute of Chicago." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 24, no. 2, African Americans in Art: Selections from The Art Institute of Chicago (1999): 245-272.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography.* New York: Farrar, Straus an Giroux, 1977.

———. *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays.* 1st Anchor Book ed. New York: Anchor Books, 1990.

———. *Regarding the Pain of Others.* 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

Spellers, Regina E., and Kimberly R. Moffit, eds. *Blackberries and Redbones: Critical Articulations of Black Hair/Body Politics in Africana Communities.* Cresskill: Hampton Press, Inc., 2010.

Steinem, Gloria. "After Black Power, Women's Liberation." *New York Magazine*, April 4, 1969. http://nymag.com/news/politics/46802/

———. *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983.

Stephens, John, and Robyn McCallum. *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature.* New York: Garland, 1998.

Sweeney, J. Gray. "Racism, Nationalism, and Nostalgia in Cowboy Art." *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no. 1, Manifest Destiny (1992): 67-80.

Tagg, John. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

———. *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Takaki, Ronald T., ed. *From Different Shores: Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America.* 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Taylor, Lucien, ed. *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R. 1990-1994.* New York; London: Routledge, 1994.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas.* Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003.

Viso, Olga M., Guy Brett, Julia P. Herzberg, Chrissie Iles, and Laura Roulet. *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985.* 1st ed. Washington, D.C.; Ostfildern-Ruit: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution; Hatje Cantz, 2004.

———. *Unseen Mendieta: The Unpublished Works of Ana Mendieta.* Munich; New York: Prestel, 2008.

Walker, Alice. *Living by the Word: Selected Writings, 1973-1987.* 1st ed. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.

Wallace, Michele. *Dark Designs and Visual Culture.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Warr, Tracey, and Amelia Jones. *The Artist's Body.* London: Phaidon, 2006.

Wells, Liz, ed. *Photography: A Critical Introduction.* New York, NY: Routledge, 2009.

———. *The Photography Reader.* New York, NY: Routledge, 2003.

West, Cornel. *Race Matters.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

White, Hayden V. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

———. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Willis, Deborah, and Carla Williams. *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.

Wright, Beryl J., Saidiya V. Hartman, and Lorna Simpson. *Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of the Viewer.* New York; Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992.

Yazzie, Steven. http://www.stevenyazzie.com/

Fig. 1. Jacques-Victor-Eugene Froment-Delormel,
Pawnee Indian Camp on Banks of Platte River, n.d.
Oil on canvas, 28 x 64”
Courtesy of Arizona State University Art Museum

Fig. 2. Edward S. Curtis, *The Apache*, 1906
Portfolio I, Plate # 7, 12 x 16”
Courtesy of Northwestern University Library, *Edward S. Curtis's 'The North American Indian': The Photographic Images*, 2001.

Fig. 3. Edward S. Curtis, *Renegade Type-Apache*, 1903
Portfolio I, Plate #12, 15 x 11”
Courtesy of Northwestern University Library, *Edward S. Curtis's 'The North American Indian': The Photographic Images*, 2001.

Fig. 4. Steven Yazzie, *Tsosido Sweep Dancer*, 2009
Photogravure, letterpress, 9 ½ x 7”
Courtesy of Arizona State University Art Museum

Fig. 5. Lorna Simpson, *Guarded Condition*, 1989,
18 color Polaroids, plastic letters, 21 engraved plastic plaques, 91 x 131"
Courtesy of Salon 94

Fig. 6. Mickalene Thomas, *Something You Can Feel,* 2008,
Rhinestone, acrylic, and enamel on panel, 96 x 120"
Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

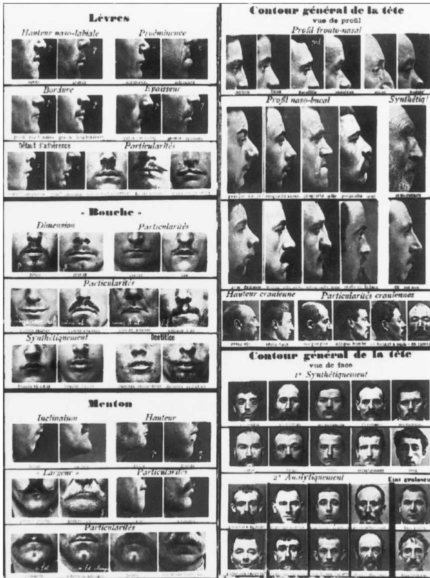

Fig. 7. Bertillon poster of physical features from the Musée des Collections Historiques de la Prefecture de Police, late 19th century.
Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine

Fig. 8. Photographer unknown. *0171*, Unidentified prisoner, from 1975-79
Courtesy of Tuol Sleng Prison Confessions and Photographs, #4883. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

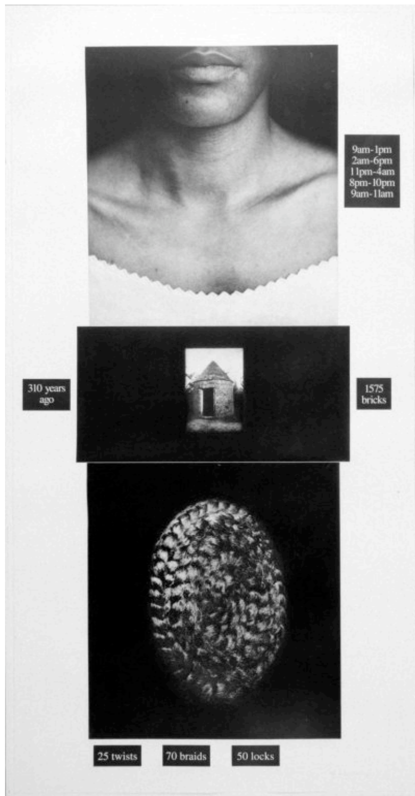

Fig. 9. Lorna Simpson, *Counting*, 1991,
Photogravure and silkscreen, 68 x 34 ½"
Courtesy of Arizona State University Art Museum

Fig. 10. Lorna Simpson, *Stereo Styles*, 1988,
10 Polaroid prints, 10 engraved plastic plaques. Photographs 35 x 31" each,
plaques 3 x 6" each, 66 x 116" overall.
Courtesy of Salon 94