Aboriginal Cultural Capital Creation and Radio Production in Urban Ontario

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Abstract: This paper addresses the production of local subjects through radio production, challenging the common assumption of a straightforward conceptual link between de-traditionalization and media globalization. It examines the directions several urban Aboriginal cultural producers in Canada are pursuing to confer meaning on their futures, questioning whether Native modernities are necessarily replacing traditions. Focusing on several First Nations radio shows issuing from university radio station facilities in London and Toronto, Ontario, the paper offers insights into the ways Native radio producers are culturally mediating neo-traditional (new-old) versions of Aboriginality over the airwaves. The article highlights the interdependence of Aboriginal public spheres, radio mediation, and popular sovereignty.

Résumé : Cet article s’adresse aux rapports entre le processus de localisation, l’imperialisme culturelle et à la déclin de tradition. Je suggère que bien que ce dernier soient invoqués habituellement dans le discours de la globalization des médias, la combinaison n’est pas inévitable. Cet essai s’interroge les manifestations de la modernité et de la tradionalisme uniques qu’on se trouve chez les peuples autochtones. On se régle la mise au point sur les radiodiffuseurs Première Nations qui diffusent leurs émissions par l’intermédiaire des stations universitaires à London et Toronto, Ontario. Étudier ces modes de modernité situées offrent à parvenir à comprendre comment une sous-culture des autochtones s’interposent les identités neo-traditionnelles en émettant de la programmation qui s’élève la solidarité parmi les communautés indigènes urbaines. L’article souligne l’interdépendance entre la sphère publique des peuples Première Nations, la médiation radiophonique, et la souveraineté populaire.

Keywords: Media anthropology; Aboriginality; Cultural production; Radio; Modernity

An anthropologically informed ethnography of Aboriginal media calls for more than the mere study of Aboriginal media programs, interviews with media producers, or other discursive texts. It demands that one attempt to associate the production of specific cultural frames of meaning with particular aesthetic

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dispositions and specific agents. This approach points to the ways people’s everyday experiences of media are socioculturally embedded, conceived, and enacted in specific locales. It also requires that we then attend to more expansive series of connections, by situating these sorts of patterned relationships within larger historical configurations of power.

For our immediate purposes, this involves tempering notions of what media practice and products mean in the context of the daily experiences, remembered histories, and projected futures of their producers and consumers, with research into the political economy of Aboriginal cultural production. Engaging actual Aboriginal peoples—rather than merely filmic, radio, or written texts—in discussions about Native media, this article addresses the production and expression of ideas about cultural difference in a specific field of Aboriginal cultural production. In the most general terms possible, the sets of practices that constitute this field have as their goal the structuring of relationships between a variety of culture groups. In restoring the connections that colonial projects disrupted—the communications corridors—between Aboriginal individuals, communities, and nations, Aboriginal media activists are labouring to create a new social order. It is one in which local working groups are cross-hatched with international Indigenous polities in relations of productive alliance.

This discussion addresses the culture of production governing the creation of radio programming in several off-reserve settings where Aboriginal media activists are mounting campaigns for Aboriginally authored media. I suggest that the provisional engagements Native social activists are making in radio ought to be read as important examples of cultural action, rather than as “representations” that can be abstracted and analyzed apart from their authors. The strategies media makers engage moreover, are not necessarily either historically or contextually consistent. They draw from and speak to the specific cultural competencies of the targeted recipients of the Aboriginally mediated messages, under particular discursive and material circumstances.

There is, in other words, no trans-historical “Aboriginal aesthetic.” Instead, differently interested members of Aboriginal subcultures will bring particular experiences or encodings to media practices and products that derive from their understandings of the shifting circumstances and changing environments in which they find themselves today. Where their audiences might be assumed to hold more reified versions of Aboriginality, media activists may tactically appeal to the vulnerability of Aboriginal languages and to an “inevitable” imperializing effect of mainstream media. In other instances selective cultural mixing may be viewed as desirable. Where this ideology is operative, people may talk about communications technologies as affording a means of resignifying Aboriginality—as a means of decolonizing the Indianscape—the traffic in images which reference and index Nativeness.

I want to stress that analytic models in which resistance and accommodation are invoked as conceptually distinct either/or responses to “foreign” influences do not adequately account for the complex processes through which Aboriginal sub-
jects negotiate or culturally configure technologies of cultural production. Nor, for that matter, does the literature on cultural hybridity make a particularly useful contribution to our understanding of what is at work in the Aboriginal invention of a "mediascape." Rather than taking these concepts at base, therefore, I elaborate on the ways in which ever-changing Aboriginal intercultural fields are created and re-created. This occurs partly in the Indigenizing of ideas, practices, and materials that have been selectively appropriated from an environment that extends beyond the immediacy of Aboriginal locales.

Media scholars normally attempt to apprehend “Other” texts by locating their answers within them, or by relating them to other texts. I wish to demonstrate that this analytic tactic brackets the very arena wherein Aboriginal media is construed as a distinct cultural field. Because radio producers emphasize the significance of the preparations involved in radio production over and above the actual radio programs, it is the social circumstances—the field of productive practices, not the products (the films, radio programs, and newspapers)—that provide the critical context for distinguishing Aboriginal from Other media undertakings.

In order to build on the idea that there is no intrinsic meaning to any media product, I will now turn to the ways in which the practices surrounding Aboriginal media production function to inculcate among social agents the cognitive and affective skills with which to culturally confer meaning on their surroundings. I take it as axiomatic that media products are important elements of all contemporary Aboriginal environments. And, although the actual practices vary within each Nation and from one to another, the principle of kinship continues to offer an important means for organizing Aboriginal experience. Native insiders are taught to make sense of their unique environs by recognizing their place, or situating themselves, within particular sets of social relations that involve cultural “natives” or insiders and outsiders, as well as with elements of the “natural” and made environments.

“Place” also continues to have critical import in Aboriginal identity formation. The high rates of mobility in the Aboriginal population and the prevalence of space-altering media in Aboriginal contexts should not be necessarily interpreted, however, as contributing to a diminished sense of place among Aboriginal peoples. Although they may occupy materially “de-territorialized” zones, Native peoples may make sense of their urban existences, for example, by anchoring themselves with reference to more abstract, but no less powerful, symbolic materials.

To initiate a discussion as to how this might occur, I take from Appadurai’s construction of “the production of locality” the idea that the creation of group solidarity within and across the increasingly complex social terrains of the world’s cities is very much conditional upon a group’s ability to produce and reproduce “local subjects.” This means a people must produce actors who properly belong within a situated network of relationships, which together span the continuum from kin to enemy (1996). One of the critical techniques of incorporation in this field of activity is the cultivation among said actors of “cultural capital.” I borrow
this concept from Bourdieu (1984). Cultural capital, as it is employed here, refers not to the realm of “restricted production” that is “high art,” as is denoted in his *Distinction*, but rather to forms of low, but still selectively shared, “grass roots” competencies and dispositions that flow from a cultural knowledge that is of the people, but that is not for all people.

Cultural capital is valued partly because of the exclusive community of shared meanings it denotes. Aboriginal radio, an integral component of this process, inscribes several significant spheres of meaning-generating activity. Native radio practice provides an apt forum for the drafting and transmission of a culturalist discourse—an important component of which is the terminology with which to address cultural issues. Aboriginal media figure in the articulation of a distinct form of modernity. Too often, however, this mode of relating to the present, this vision for the future, is mis-recognized in the academe as an automatic effect of “cultural imperialism.”

Aboriginal culturalist narratives are not framed exclusively as if in binary opposition to “White ways,” and the adoption and interpolation of extraneous elements may well be apperceived as a defining feature of Aboriginal “tradition.” Far from representing a straightforward index or expression simply of “massification,” or for that matter, of radical cultural difference, therefore, something more conceptually complex is at work in the spaces of social action encoded through Aboriginal media activity.

**Indigenous media in communications studies, anthropology, and Aboriginal media community discourses**

Until recently, Native mediators have been ethnographically invisible, owing to what for some anthropologists is their disconcerting unwillingness to fill an analytical “savage slot” (Trouillot, 1991) and because in pursuing non land-based, contemporary, even capitalistic pursuits slip, they fail to carry their semiotic load and to symbolize the idyllic past—an image called up to transport imaginers out of a problematic past. Aboriginal mediators may appear discursively indistinguishable from their non-Native counterparts, lacking the clear marks or practices of distinction from the masses that theoreticians of culture have come to expect of their Others (Ferguson, 2002). Anthropologists have historically required more conventional forms of cultural difference to construct analytical tools and to establish their critiques of “Western” modernism, and they have not been alone in their expectations.

Although posing very different questions from culture theorists, communications scholars in Canada have lent considerable attention to Aboriginal media. Despite the different units of analysis, and the fact that mass-communications analyses represent socially embedded cultural products themselves, few studies of Native communications achieve a sufficiently nuanced concept of Aboriginal alterity. Some would curiously blame the mere presence of media for language and culture loss, ignoring three centuries of government policy that sought at different historical moments to isolate and to integrate Native communities. Efforts in the nineteenth century to create public organs with which to combat govern-
ment-authored constraints on Aboriginal peoples’ access to information, mobility, and self-determination show power over media, not the tools of communication themselves, to be the contentious issue according to the politicized Aboriginal avant-garde (Buddle, 2002a, 2002b). Access to electronic media for many Native people in Canada would arrive in the remotest regions of Canada no later than the 1970s, still before talk about residential schools was common and the contemporary cultural-healing movement was under way. Tragically, several generations of Native people were socialized to associate extreme shame with Aboriginality prior to the infiltration of Canadian radio and television programming into their midst.

Native people have also been known to invoke the theme of “media as potent neo-colonial force” as a tactical device. In the 1960s, for instance, the discourse of media hegemony within Aboriginal circles made sense as part of a larger pattern of diffusing potentially fissive forces by placing the cause for social malaise outside the community. This allowed healing to be focused internally (see Preston, 2002). Media imperialism in Aboriginal social agents’ talk is context-sensitive and called up for select, usually outsider, audiences. We might understand its use as functioning to structure relationships between First Nations and outsiders (cf. O’Nell, 1994). Contemporary talk about media hegemony continues to function as a boundary-defining technology. In contemporary Native media discourse, the forcefulness of the idea of media hegemony appears to have given way to discussions about more palpable agents of forced cultural reform, such as those mentioned above. In mixed audiences, when Western media is invoked as a culture-killing weapon by Aboriginal peoples today, it tends to be some strategic, semiotic function. Media imperialism has situational relevance within particular Aboriginal discourses, as opposed to the rigid positivism with which it is commonly attributed. Different cultural and political identities are mobilized, on the other hand, when Native speakers stress the relative ease with which radio and television have been incorporated into existing Native communication structures. It is therefore critical to examine the semiotic function of these discourses, rather than to assume the fixed nature of their referents.

Contemporary media anthropologists’ reception studies reinforce this idea that theorists ought not automatically to assume that the messages in and of so-called “foreign” media will bring about a replacement of traditional values with Middle North American ones (see Askew & Wilk, 2002; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, & Larkin, 2002). Scholars, including Elizabeth Hahn (1994), suggest that we consider what local cultural members bring to the media and therefore how they encode the media experience. In other words, media texts are meaningless until audiences work them into already-existing meaning sets, and until they impose on them a particular significance. Calling into question the “massness” of mass media, therefore, new anthropological studies are challenging the received notion that media content is necessarily decoded by Native audiences in the ways it was encoded by media producers. That Native people are not intelligent enough to incorporate the physical capital (tools) of media and the social capital (content,
ideas) into their lives selectively is a thesis wholly unsupported by oral and written historical evidence, and indeed, by contemporary Aboriginal mediators themselves.

In contrast to new ethnographically informed approaches to Native media, contemporary mainstream journalistic discourse on Aboriginality continues to uphold a view of cultural difference that is dependent on apparently normative features (or dominant tropes) of Aboriginal “identity.” These include Aboriginal language “retention,” the psychic unity of all “oral cultures,” and the assumed congruence of the reserve (and on-reserve residence) with “traditionalism.” These qualities generally serve as the minimal qualifying traits of First Nations’ difference in mainstream news accounts of the Aboriginal media (see for example, Haslett Cuff, 1997). Indeed, the structure of Canadian Aboriginal broadcast policy itself, which favours Aboriginal media development in remote Northern and therefore “obviously Other” areas, would suggest that policymakers read difference as above and equate the funding of Northern media with the “preservation” of so-called “authentic” Aboriginal lifeways.7

Below, I draw attention to the discursive tactics Aboriginal mediators in urban areas are deploying in conventionally Aboriginal ways. This refers to selective borrowing and to the creative orchestration of discourses and media to say recognizably “Native” things about appropriate conduct, ways of relating to one’s environment, and the responsibilities that inhere (or that they feel ought to inhere) in the new forms of sociality that are emerging in particular urban settings. In the Canadian South, Aboriginal cultural mediators are engaging in culturally transformative practices such as media production so as to be able to protect their cultural distinctiveness. In so doing, Aboriginal media activists are not becoming more like the Canadian masses, but are attempting to mount effective challenges to the authority of non-Native institutions to author Aboriginal lives and to define Aboriginal difference. Aboriginal cultural producers are thus seeking to master or to re-signify the intervening forces of change, rather than be mastered by them. It is instructive to consider that diversity, as George Marcus suggests, “is generated not from the integrity and authenticity of the local community rooted tradition, resisting and accommodating a modern world system ever more powerful in its force, but paradoxically from the very conditions of globalizing change themselves” (1990, p. 5).

The following analysis will thus bear out that as people, goods, and information increasingly circulate beyond the limits of locales, the sense of the particularity of Aboriginal localities, as well as the impulse to re-situate Aboriginality in new forms of relationality, tend to sharpen. Although a hotly contested process, the making of cultural boundaries through media production points to important practices of urban Aboriginal self-authorship and community construction.8 Urban Aboriginal sovereignty is articulated (at particular moments) alongside, entangled with, and against a variety of mutable outsiders.

**Social-policy contexts of Aboriginal radio mediation**

Although invented in 1906, radio was not commonly available to Aboriginal peoples in Canada until the mid to late 1930s.9 Aboriginal involvement in print
mediation in Southern Ontario, on the other hand, dates back to the early nineteenth centuries. Structural constraints such as enfranchisement policies, bans on political organizing, and other communication-impeding elements of Indian legislation, however, would have the effect of forestalling Aboriginal electronic media development until Aboriginal people had achieved a number of civil liberties (Buddle, 2002a, 2002b, 2004; Smith, 1987). Consequently, while they could read dominant texts, conditions prohibited Native people throughout Ontario, with few exceptions, from effectively writing their own electronic texts until the early 1960s. As such, a Native radio discursive paradigm is only beginning to materialize, as the mostly Ojibwe (Anishinabe) and Iroquoian (Onkwehón:we) producers from this area attempt to develop their own forms of electronic literacy, to localize and Indigenize media technologies and practices, and to create radio texts and practices that will allow them to speak both to and beyond local politics.

At a hearing held to address Aboriginal broadcasting by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) in 1982, Rosemary Kuptana, who was then President of the Inuit Tapirisat, compared the effects of the uninvited, satellite-fed, southern programming that was consuming Inuit community air space with those produced by a neutron bomb. “Neutron bomb television,” she said, “is the kind of television that destroys the soul of a people but leaves the shell of a people walking around” (cited in Brisebois, 1983, p. 107). Gary Farmer, a Toronto-based Cayuga actor and media activist has described mainstream television broadcasting as “the modern assimilator, replacing the old methods of residential schools, churches, and governments, which were once the primary agents of socialization among indigenous people” (1994, p. 63).

It ought to be understood that Kuptana and Farmer are strong advocates of Aboriginal authored media—that is, media products that are produced by Aboriginal auteurs (but not necessarily exclusively for Aboriginal audiences), according to processes of production that resonate with already-existing Aboriginal forms of cultural production. Kuptana recently offered an intervention at the CRTC broadcast-licence application hearing for the national Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) by Television Northern Canada (TVNC). Aboriginal television, she proposes, has become a crucial form of Inuit cultural production:

Our Aboriginal communications societies are still young compared to this country and considering our history with Canada, but they proved to our elders that their ideas work. The technology may be new but the message is still very old, spoken down to us from our elders. We have produced programs that strengthen and revitalize our cultures, our languages, our history. They tell us who we are and to be proud of where we are going as a people. But it has not always been a happy journey. The generational breakdown between young and old was made worse by the arrival of television and radio. I find it ironic that those same technologies are pulling us back together. (Rosemary Kuptana, former President of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation and former President of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, Ottawa, ON, public address, November 13, 1998)
Farmer contends that creating alternative Native medias may serve to undermine the hegemony of mainstream media forms. He submits:

Whether we produce film, or whether we produce radio, or whether we produce stories that are being read in our daily newspapers, whether we do shows...for public access television; it’s all part of the same notion of taking control of our songs, of our images. And we determine what the audience will see and what they won’t see. And we’ve never had that kind of control before. And to me, I don’t understand how we can self-govern ourselves until we take control of our electronic media, until we take control of the images that reflect our reality. (Gary Farmer, Founder of Aboriginal Voices Magazine and Founder of Aboriginal Voices Radio Network, Edmonton, AB, personal communication, December 20, 1996)

Under the aegis of the Aboriginal Voices Radio Network (AVRN), Farmer and a group of committed individuals have been steadfastly applying for what are, in many cases, the few remaining radio-broadcast frequencies available in Canada’s larger urban markets, with the intent to eventually provide a national Aboriginal radio service.

In the 1998 CRTC hearing for the APTN television broadcast licence, and two years later at the licence hearing for the Aboriginal Voices Radio Network’s Toronto-based radio station, Farmer strategically highlighted Aboriginal cultural vulnerability to mass-mediated dominant imagery in order to stress the absolute necessity of an Aboriginally authored media. We might consider this tactic a strategic invocation of what Harold Prins (1997) refers to as the “primitivist discourse.” This involves deliberately deploying a particular discourse that puts to work a theme created by non-Natives, for Aboriginally defined purposes. Prins focuses on the selection of a “primitivist” trope and how this “strategic essentialization” is deployed as a counterhegemonic construct. Stressing the singularity of an “Aboriginal Perspective,” for example, plays on the colonially invented idea of a separate Aboriginal “race,” and on the racist dismissal of several hundred Aboriginal cultural groups as an undifferentiated horde. At the same time, it highlights the existence of a coherent pan-Aboriginal field of shared meaning, as contrasted with an outside, dominating mainstream. As romanticized fabrications of Aboriginal cultural inviolability continue to carry considerable currency among non-Natives, acknowledging their pervasiveness and invoking these pre-fabricated discursive constructs to achieve advantage can be politically expedient. Indeed, in struggles involving the tactical re-signification of the dialogic practices rather than the content of the category itself, success depends very much on the ability to manage this complex array of symbolic material, and on a well-honed understanding of which version of Aboriginality to employ in which setting. Anthropologists have long considered this set of practices—sans any sort of hardware—a sophisticated technology in and of itself.

Whether or not mainstream imagery actually possesses the power to homogenize audiences is doubtful. And, yet, in order to secure the tools they require to assert the continued importance of tradition in their lives, Indigenous people are pressed to defer to the popular narrative of neo-coloniality—one in which there is...
little room for Aboriginal resistance to dominant overtures. In representing themselves within the terms of a restrictive framework—in playing up their powerlessness and in pointing to the dissolution of their traditions and localities—Aboriginal activists are faced with the predicament of collusively reinforcing the fatalist notion of the inevitability of cultural assimilation into the mainstream. It is precisely this tendency to totalize Indigenousness that must be subverted before locally configured Aboriginal identifications—the logic of local fields—can be played out.

It is constructive to consider that, as Van Meijl and Van der Grijp contend, “when people are no longer forced to represent their cultures and traditions as principally static, their ability to control, create, reproduce, change or adopt social and cultural patterns for their own ends will also improve substantially” (1993, p. 642). In keeping with this thinking, in the following pages I suggest that, in practice, audiences annex only selected elements of the global trade in images to the local (Appadurai, 1996; Thompson, 1995). And, in contexts where a particular narrative of belongingness and certain forms of cultural capital are recognized, Aboriginal mediators may emphasize a greater variety of competencies without being perceived as “less Indian.”

Where a frame of reference is commonly acknowledged—as in the case where Aboriginal media is produced to educate an audience and bring this very context into being—strategic essentialization is tactically unnecessary. In conversations among the initiated, rather than simply glossing over differences in an undiscriminating valorization of pre-colonial and colonial strata of their past, Aboriginal mediators tend to be willing to accept both indigenous and exogenous elements as constituting their traditions. At an annual Aboriginal Elvis-impersonator event, for example, participants resolve the tension between commoditization (Westernization) and high or traditional art (art for the cultivated) by rejecting the Middle American encoding of Elvis as an “everyman” in favour of the assertion that Elvis was, in fact, “an Indian.” Pursuing a similar logic of Indigenization, media activity may be read as an appropriate field for the playing out of traditions of cultural creativity and dynamism. In sustaining rather than undermining traditions, radio activity is more likely to engender, rather than to stifle, cultural plurality and differentiation.16

Judging by their tireless efforts to create and maintain local Aboriginal television and radio outlets and translocal networks, it is evident that Aboriginal communicators such as Gary Farmer and Rosemary Kuptana implicitly reject the media-homogenization model. They are not convinced that there is something inherently transformative in media technologies, because they are encouraging Aboriginal people to chart their own paths of progress by appropriating, adapting, and re-deploying those technologies. The point of contention would appear to be that culture groups are differentially empowered to project their cultural products to a nascent world public (Shohat & Stam, 1996). Their solution, to reiterate, is Aboriginal authorship of the processes of cultural production.
Modernity and locality

There are numerous problems with the model of media imperialism, two of which I will discuss here. The first problem is the model’s relation to the local and its inability to account for lived experiences of cultural complexity. By local, I mean both the spatial materiality—the geographic locale—and the symbolic metaphor. The latter varies with the range of cultural responses to foreignness or globality, but is often associated with the idea of “home” and, when contrasted with universalistic claims of modernism, with “distinctiveness” and “tradition.” The local, for example, is often foregrounded in connection with social movements, such as the Aboriginal-sovereignty movement in Canada, which draws its force partly from a politics of geographic location.

Annual Aboriginal protests of Columbus Day in the United States and of Confederation celebrations in Canada offer a case in point. These mobilizations serve a dual purpose. Firstly, they reinforce the very relationship between the state, Indian peoples, and the territorial unit, by means of which Aboriginal peoples’ identity as the “Indigenous” population achieves meaning. Secondly, by drawing attention to Native peoples’ usually less-than-prosperous lot in the ongoing process of Western modernization, these contests challenge the assumed virtue of a course of developmental progress that has been able to occur largely at the expense of local forms of Aboriginal political sovereignty and has precluded forms of Aboriginal economic solubility that might have been premised on Indigenous land ownership. Protestors thus call into question the Euro-North American claims of liberty, democracy, and equality for all, by asserting their rights to forge not only unique relationships to North American soil, but to history, to ritual, and to all other elements in their natural and social environments. In general we might say, therefore, that Aboriginal assertions of locality generally seek to repudiate the meta-narrative of modernization.

Locating Aboriginal distinction in this way enables a shift in the terms of the debate on Aboriginality. The fact that Aboriginal and Canadian models of progress are generally incongruous, but also unexpectedly accord, would indicate that protestors are not simply “reacting” to dominant models. Rather, they are cultivating social practices that are adaptive within the environments in which they find themselves—environments in which non-Aboriginally produced symbolic materials are undeniably pervasive.

It has been convincingly argued that the local is already thoroughly global in its contradictory makeup (Dirlik, 1996; Featherstone 1990, 1996; Gaonkar, 1999; Robertson, 1990; Tomlinson, 1991). This notion can also be transposed within the national context. Canadian nationalists’ discourses, for example, have historically both incorporated Aboriginal themes and aesthetics as Canadian and defined Canadianness against a fictive Aboriginality. To be heard, Native people in Canada must often frame their discourses of dissent within the logic of the dominant system. Aboriginal polities pursue land claims in courts, debate the nature of their identities in the academe, and assume positions in the parliament to achieve their own political ends. Approximating the oppressors, or at least using their own
munitions against them so as to assert distinctiveness, is but one such contradic-
tion. Aboriginal political activists, moreover, have historically gone over the heads
of the Canadian nation-state, appealing to constituencies outside their own polit-
cal realm, via mediated communication, to acquire political support for their
localizing initiatives. As Garnham suggests, all political actors now play on a
world stage, and in spite of problems of translation, they employ “a world lan-
guage of symbols” (1993, p. 263).

If the very conditions of globalizing change are indeed generating cultural
distinctiveness, then media might be seen to be producing or enhancing the sense
of identification between members of smaller-scale communities. The intensity of
contact with other cultures wrought from migration and internationalized commu-
nications, for instance, can lead to culture clashes and heightened attempts to draw
boundaries between insider and outsider groups (Thompson, 1995). According to
Roth (2000), it was, in fact, the self-reflexive attempts to rediscover particularity,
localism, and difference that served as the impetus for the creation of the Inuit
television network, Television Northern Canada (TVNC), which has since
become the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network—a thoroughly plural discurs-
itive formation.

Indeed, many of the Aboriginal interveners at the CRTC hearing for the
Aboriginal Voices Radio Network (AVRN) Toronto broadcast licence in 2000
emphasized the potential educational capacity of the station, primarily with refer-
ence to bringing about the recrudescence of lost or buried traditions—the very
source of difference between Natives and newcomers, and the central materials
with which Aboriginal communality or locality-producing relationships are con-
structed. Stressing AVRN’s pedagogic potential, Maurice Switzer, then Director
of Communications for the Assembly of First Nations, insisted:

Mainstream media are pretty slow in dealing with our issues…. So if there
aren’t vehicles like Aboriginal Voices Radio…important stories aren’t going to
be told. And not just to mainstream Canadians or wider Canada…. It is very
important that Aboriginal/Native people talk amongst ourselves about what is
going on and hear our own voices…one of the things it can do is it can impart
hope…. If you grew up in an environment that is maybe not the most positive
environment because of all sorts of social issues and poverty issues, to know
that people are succeeding is extremely important, and Aboriginal media is
very important to carry those messages, those messages of hope. They are edu-
cation messages…. We have to have…that voice to tell people what we are
capable of doing, what we have done, what we plan on doing…. (Maurice
Switzer, Director of Communications, Assembly of First Nations, Toronto,
ON, public address, February 8, 2000)

The increasing contact between cultural groups brought on by migration and
the diffusion of mediated images and technologies, therefore, need not necessarily
lead to heightened tension and conflict. Deploying the media in the service of edu-
cation so as to promote increased mutual comprehension may promote respect,
rather than simply “tolerance,” for cultural boundaries around particular forms of
tradition. In addition, it might facilitate intercultural coalition-building and symbolic healing (cf. Flynn, 2004).

A second problem with the model of cultural imperialism through the media is that it makes reference to a singular formulation of modernity. In its most common usage, modernity is understood as a singular trajectory of social and technological progress that began and finished in Europe (Mitchell, 2000). This hegemonic notion of modernity is spelled out in Modernization Theory and in theories of “Development,” which take for granted a broad opposition between traditional and modern and assume that the transition from the former to the latter would be a one-way process of social change (Thompson, 1995). For non-First World peoples, Aboriginal “modernity” is commonly understood to entail an assimilation into the mainstream that is not completely successful.

Despite the multitudinous forms that Aboriginal performances of modernity take, mainstream media development continues to be held up as the yardstick against which Aboriginal communicative “progress” is measured, and accounts of Native media development attend generally to the introduction of European technologies of inscription—to alphabetic and electronic literacy. The presence or absence of a European-approved language and form of writing, of mechanized print instruments, and later of electronic signal transmitters, have been the main criteria employed in the external assessment of Native communications capacities.

In the anthropological literature, it is generally taken to be self-evident that the transition to modernity begins with different starting points in divergent cultural contexts and leads to necessarily varied outcomes. Some argue that modernity is perhaps better understood not as an epoch, but rather as “an attitude,” as well as a form of discourse that is interrogative of the present (Gaonkar, 1999). Aboriginal modernity, thus, might be seen to represent a reflexive mode of “relating to contemporary reality” (p. 12). And Aboriginal narratives of tradition, I would submit, are very much about modernity. As critical reflections on the past, they represent moral-political projects through which Native actors seek to master their presents and author their futures.

Therefore, whereas theorists subscribing to the idea of a “global village” generally envision a singular modernity—a universalizing democracy—issuing from the diffusion of media technologies, Aboriginal mediators, in marshalling media technologies principally to decolonize, rather than simply to democratize, offer a powerful refutation of this view. While there is enormous variation within the Aboriginal mediascape itself, there is an identifiably common imperative to create Aboriginal media practices and products that lend themselves to community reconstruction and to the inscription of contemporary relevance in traditional fare. In short, to neo-traditionalize is the preferred track to Aboriginal modernity.

Aboriginal peoples’ engagements with media represent experiments in cultural intermingling. Accounting for Aboriginal communications, thus, requires that one attend to the agentive and the adaptive rather than seek to authenticate the originary. This involves speaking to the conditions of complexity when discussing
the selective appropriation of some media technologies and practices, and the rejection of others, by Aboriginal cultural producers. This is not to say, however, that cultural complexity is a recent condition. Indeed, Aboriginal cultures have always been cross-bred and complex, traditionally adapting and incorporating selected outside elements and defying stifling essentialisms, while policing the porous boundaries of their cultures with the utmost vigilance.18

**Ontario Aboriginal university radio**

In Canadian cities, university community-access radio stations have become important vehicles for configuring emergent forms of Native cultural mediation. University stations are sites where Aboriginal individuals are able to experiment by dislodging new media of communication and re-embedding or re-inscribing the symbolic content of their traditions in them. Mostly peopled by volunteers, these community-access contexts provide the least expensive option to going on air for Aboriginal peoples. Native radio communicators must conform to the stated rules and regulations of these organizations. However, they usually have access to free equipment, a volunteer base, and in-house training programs, as well as relative freedom to pursue their own information agendas and a context in which to build a listenership while honing their media skills. Radio producers using public-access facilities are able to experiment with the format and content of a program from week to week, which frequently entails testing the limits of their own notions of Aboriginality.

Anishinabe radio activist Brian Wright-McLeod, for example, began hosting the show *Renegade Radio* in 1985 at CKLN, the Ryerson University radio station in Toronto. Wright-McLeod’s astute political commentaries are renowned. On one program, for instance, he featured a dominatrix making baloney sandwiches on white bread to convey the idea that Native peoples are “dominated, we’re being fed baloney and that everybody is being squished together into white bread” (Toronto, ON, personal communication, December 13, 1996). Wright-McLeod explains how the music he plays on *Renegade Radio* departs radically from mainstream norms and conventions for commercial radio. He uses his show, he explains, partly as a means of articulating Aboriginal history through music:

> People are documenting history as it happens in song. And this is an ongoing oral history. This is an extension into the twenty-first century of recording who we are, literally recording who we are, and our experiences, and our aspirations, and our fears, and our dreams, and all those things that make us human. You know, it’s no different than a round dance song, or a story song being passed down through a family line, or a clan line. And now it’s being passed down from musicians. It continues on. (Brian Wright-McLeod, host, *Renegade Radio*, Toronto, ON, personal communication, December 13, 1996).

Today his show is simultaneously broadcast over the Internet by the Aboriginally operated American Indian Radio On Satellite (AIROS)—a network that stretches from Alaska to New Mexico. For urban Indian peoples and those living on reserves in Southern Canada, this re-traditionalizing does not imply a retreat
northwards to the bush. Brian Wright-McLeod asserts that Native peoples in Southern Canada must use:

…these tools that we have, whether—if it’s the English language, or a computer, or radio, or magazine and book publishing—and use the best of our ability to tell the truth, whether they like it or not….This is what self-determination is. And we’ll use it by any means, whatever it is. (Brian Wright-McLeod, host, Renegade Radio, Toronto, ON, personal communication, December 13, 1996)

Aboriginal mediators are using Native newspapers, radio, videos, television, and the Internet to restore those inter- and intra-community connections that are disrupted not only by urban migration, but in assuming a “cosmopolitan” existence. The necessity of moving to and fro between cultures in the city, for example, necessitates new and flexible types of habitus. The Aboriginal-sovereignty movement, which is premised on strong local/territorial identifications, however, conflicts absolutely with a pure cosmopolitanism—hence the efforts to establish an urban Aboriginal locale and thereby to re-territorialize traditions in urban landscapes.

The circumstances of city life for Aboriginal urbanites, moreover, are not always conducive to the maintenance of tradition through ritualized re-enactment in a face-to-face context. Communications media, Thompson submits, offer to endow the symbolic content of tradition with some degree of temporal permanence, “providing a way of sustaining cultural continuity despite spatial dislocation, a way of renewing tradition in new and diverse contexts, through the appropriation of mediated symbolic forms” (1995, p. 203). Activities surrounding the production and consumption of Aboriginal radio have become a key context for Aboriginal cultural mediation in Canadian cities.

There are approximately 144 on-reserve Native radio stations throughout Canada. Every community in Nunavut and Nunavik has a community radio station. The first Native radio station to go on air in Southern Ontario was Akwesasne’s CKON, which began broadcasting in 1985 and is accessible in the off-reserve vicinity. CKRZ, formerly CFCN, began in pirate-radio form in 1990 and now reaches listeners in a 60 mile-radius, into rural off-reserve areas that include the cities of Brantford, Caledonia, Simcoe, Jarvis, Port Dover, and parts of Hamilton. Owing partly to Canadian Aboriginal-broadcast policies that heavily favour the North, there are currently only a handful of Native-owned and -operated urban stations, not all of which broadcast to urban audiences.\footnote{Aboriginal radio stations now exist on most reserves in Southern Canada, as well as on university stations in several urban centres throughout Southern Ontario (see Buddle, 1993, 2002a, 2002b; Fairchild, 1998).} Aboriginal radio stations now exist on most reserves in Southern Canada, as well as on university stations in several urban centres throughout Southern Ontario (see Buddle, 1993, 2002a, 2002b; Fairchild, 1998).

When Gary Farmer aided in the formation of the Six Nations-based Grand River Communication Society (later the Southern Onkwehon:we Nishinabe Indigenous Communications Society, or S.O.N.I.C.S.), his intention was to mobilize or “socialize” his fellow community members to engage in the process of re-learning Iroquoian languages and to rejuvenate the community movement to reshape Aboriginality along contemporary Onkwehon:we and Nishinabe, or neo-
traditional lines. His description of the process reflects the strategic selection and combination of practical traditional and extraneous elements, according to internal community imperatives, that has historically characterized the Native media movement to date:

Well, of course, the objective is to radioize every Native community in North America...’Course Six Nations was my own home, so that was the first step...to get my own people some radio...And we...formulated a constitution based on the old understanding, our old Iroquois Confederacy, took the best of what we could from that and of course made it available for the people...we had to resort to an electorate as opposed to a Clan Mother system.... And what I find is that...It's like planting seed, right. Because the first time you plant a seed you have to water it, and take care of it. And then the hardest thing, of course, is breaking through the earth. And then you kind of weed it and stuff. So that's been the process. It takes a while for a station, once you start it, to come fully of use or service to the community. (Gary Farmer, Founder, AVRNRadio, Edmonton, AB, personal communication, January 21, 1997)

Live radio, which began as a global form, has become one of the most local of mass media in reserve contexts. Yet, with the advent of audio streaming, or “webcasting,” radio now has the potential to pursue the obverse trajectory. In April 2001, the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta held a symposium for Aboriginal mediators on the topic of Webcasting Native radio programs. According to Marrie Mumford, then the Banff Centre’s Artistic Director for Aboriginal Arts, “the ultimate impact is to engender a network that will, in the long run, link Aboriginal artists and communities to national and international indigenous communities” (AIROS Press Release, April 5, 2001).

Christopher Spence (Cree), also known as “Chagoosh,” and Andre Morriseau (Ojibwe) co-hosted the weekly radio show Urbanative, which began broadcasting from the University of Toronto radio station CIUT, 89.5 FM. It was also later aired on Aboriginal Voices Radio CFIE, 106.5 FM and Webcast internationally by satellite. Spence, Aboriginal Voices’ Technical Director, also produced and web-hosted what he calls the “interactive convergent media initiative” (Christopher Spence, Technical Director, Aboriginal Voices Radio, Toronto, ON, personal communication, May 19, 2001). This involved using his Web page as a point of confluence to link the radio shows Urbanative and Native America Calling chat groups, a message board, an interactive photo album, and other features. A former bingo caller from Winnipeg, Spence, who calls himself a “digital warrior,” sees his mission as providing “a place on the radio dial, in cyber-space, and eventually all mediums, where you will find interactive Native North American content....”(Christopher Spence, Technical Director, Aboriginal Voices Radio, Toronto, ON, personal communication, May 19, 2001). He intends his manner of producing “convergent” media to serve as a prototype for other urban Native radio shows. Spence has a highly innovative approach to Internet radio—one, however, that builds on well-established forms of Aboriginal communication. It is, as Meadows submits, the “process of production which ensures indigenous media [projects] emerge from—and are thus part of—the social structure of
the community” (1995, p. 208). In 1999, Spence conducted a media experiment that involved building a temporary radio station on site for the Aboriginal Voices film, video, and music festival held in Toronto, Ontario. The desire to engender sociability though shared listening provided the motivation for the project. Spence and Morriseau co-hosted a live Webcast radio program throughout the six-day event. During the night, they linked up with and broadcast AIROS programming. At the time, AIROS was the first and only Aboriginal Internet broadcaster. According to Spence, the Aboriginal Voices experiment was the first effort in Canada ever to webstream in this way.

Spence also manned the computer display that invited festival attendees to enter the “CyberPowWow.” The CyberPowWow took the form of an interactive chat room in which one would assume an avatar and use it to wander from tipi to tipi, much as one would at a regular powwow, viewing the works of the artists and meeting people. Spence explains, “I wanted the powwow integrated with our radio programming...this would involve people who were listening online to our radio station from around the world. They can listen to the audio while chatting with people who are also listening to the same audio” (Christopher Spence, Technical Director, Aboriginal Voices Radio, Toronto, ON, personal communication, May 19, 2001).

Powwows represent a sort of sonic structuring of the community—people are drawn together to listen and dance to singing and drumming, to achieve “one mind” and to forge inter-national connections and social and political alliances in an appropriately public way. Powwows can be said to facilitate an appropriate consumption of public space insofar as they are the basis of achieved identifications with Aboriginality. Powwows, like Aboriginal radio, structure “acts of relationship” between people (cf. Clifford, 1997). These contexts may, then, orient a person’s relationship to peoplehood. That the connections in the instance of the CyberPowWow are electronic is incidental. It is the implicitly shared knowledge—the community consciousness and solidarity—informing and distinguishing this communicative act that makes this a uniquely Aboriginal application of the Internet. In addition to asserting an Aboriginal presence on the World Wide Web, the circulation of Aboriginaly valued knowledge creates and reinforces the very relevance of that knowledge. Moreover, much as a powwow might, the Internet radio show also provided a gathering place for a somewhat amorphous Toronto Aboriginal population, as well as serving as a site for coalition-building between Native peoples and political supporters from around the world. In Toronto, Aboriginal Voice Radio now broadcasts its own regular powwow music program, entitled “Right on Scone.” Scone, pronounced skawn, is an indigenization of the British biscuit. Scone and corn soup are the “traditional” local fare at Iroquoian-style powwows. Invoking the powwow theme while “inside” mainstream space tactically expresses and maintains Aboriginal identifications outside the mainstream, allowing Aboriginal peoples to live inside it, but with self-determined distinction.
Radio smoke signals and the production of urban Aboriginal locality

Smoke Signals, which first aired in 1990, is broadcast using the radio facilities at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario. Unlike several other Canadian cities, such as Vancouver, Regina, and Winnipeg, there is no areal enclave of Aboriginal residents in London, Ontario. Geographically, Aboriginal residents here lead intermingled lives with non-Natives, from whom they are not always necessarily physically distinguishable. N’Amerind, the local Friendship Centre, has been instrumental in creating a sense of local communality among the disbanded Aboriginal Londoners by providing a context for Aboriginal sociability.

The role of the radio show Smoke Signals is complementary to that of N’Amerind. The hosts, Dan Smoke, who is Seneca, and Mary Lou Smoke, who is Ojibwe, represent the two largest Native-language groups in the area—Iroquoian and Algonquian. Both employ English as their primary language of communication, as do the majority of their listeners on and off reserves. Smoke Signals announces and covers Friendship Centre events; it also educates potential participants as to the proper protocols they are required to practice during these affairs, thereby defining a domain of cultural capital.

Owing to the diversity of the audience, the hosts cannot assume that the messages they broadcast (and now Webcast to an international audience via the Internet) will necessarily be decoded in the ways they were encoded. For this reason, they inscribe decoding or reading clues within the broadcast texts themselves. On Smoke Signals, these interpretive directions take the form of “teachings”—the discursive preserve of elders. Elders are highly revered in Aboriginal societies, maintaining the moral authority to speak both to Aboriginal traditions and to the shaping of Native modernities. Dan and Mary Lou, who are considered elders in their own right, provide teachings they have recorded from other elders, as well as offerings from their own stores of cumulated wisdom.

Teachings, which serve as lessons for deciphering and achieving Aboriginal performative competency, also provide the discursive basis for the production practices by means of which Smoke Signals is created.

The extensive preparations for Smoke Signals seem to take on a greater import than the program itself. Indeed, the tendency among Aboriginal communicators, as Ginsburg instructs, is to accentuate the activities of production and reception—the social relations—as opposed to the dominant cultural model, which privileges the text (1993). It is in these ritualized production practices that the teachings find an application. Training others to perform the preparatory practices as Dan and Mary Lou do involves educating trainees into a particular vision of Aboriginality. Volunteers consequently undergo an amended form of Aboriginal socialization. From Dan and Mary Lou’s teachings, they learn that employing proper interviewing etiquette, for example, invokes the social communicatory system that regulates who may speak to whom, when, and about what. Because agreeing to impart information may induct the interviewer into a system of reciprocal exchange, and possibly into the kinship system itself, interviewees are often
more inclined to grant interviews to, and to confide in, those who are aware and accepting of these obligations.28

Immediately before each show, Dan, Mary Lou, and the invited guests smudge with sage, sweetgrass, or cedar. The protocols involved in, and the teachings related to, procuring these medicines are also featured on the show. According to Dan, a focus on such processes is significant:

When we hear about the cedar it's almost anticlimactic [compared] to what happened prior to it being here and now, because all this other stuff had to happen in order for it to be here. When someone talks about their artwork—what they had to do before to get to this work of art here and now—is a process [most people] don't really look at...teachings allow us to do that. Teachings look at the whole process. (Dan Smoke, co-host, Smoke Signals, London, ON, personal communication, March 30, 1993)

Like these teachings, Dan’s interviews reflect a strong interest in “how” guests have come to their stations in life. In general, Aboriginal radio demonstrates a hunger for life histories. Narratives of process provide listeners both with practical technical information and with proto-narratives for possible futures.

To acquire material for the program, as well as to fulfill their roles as elders in the London Native community, Mary Lou and Dan participate in a wide array of community activities. Having “been there” to experience a particular event validates one’s speaking about it on the radio. Owing to the high value placed on individual autonomy, narratives recounted in the first person, which provide personal or first-hand accounts, carry authority in Aboriginal discursive contexts (Scollon & Scollon, 1984). As a matter of positioning protocol, Aboriginal speakers preface their formal narratives with a self-introduction. This informs listeners as to the speaker’s clan, nation, and home region—conditional factors that shape one’s personal interpretive schemata. Taking this contextualizing information into consideration enables listeners to form their own meanings from the spoken text. This self-conscious positioning of one’s perspectival account of a story is part of the larger culturalist or decoding discourse, by means of which cultural insiders seek to articulate their cultural and subcultural distinctiveness.

Because it is closely allied with the social “healing” and sovereignty movements, Smoke Signals is ordinarily more concerned with facilitating the formation of relationships that foster a collective Aboriginal identity than with individual subjectivities. With a large-scale, mostly urban audience in mind, this ethno-nationalistic approach tends to elide tribal cultural differences and historical experiences. Dan and Mary Lou Smoke ground their own experiences in Onkwehon:we and Anishinabe ways, yet the culturalist discourse they put into play on the show tends to focus on a common trans-Native, intertribal, or pan-Aboriginal cultural competency.

How does this relate to the production of locality? Smoke Signals reaches a public that is composed of a wide multicultural mix. The program effectively uproots traditions from their so-called “authentic” places of origin and enables listeners to re-inscribe these practices in the practical contexts of their everyday
lives. This process sustains, as well as transforms, traditions, which become re-embedded in new supra-territorial units: websites, bandwidths, and chat rooms, as well as friendship centres and other urban organizations and events such as pow-wows, healing circles, and other gatherings. Using the radio to interact with Native and sympathetic non-Native people, the Smokes are undoing certain colonial prescriptions that sought to keep each of these publics in their own places, both literally and figuratively. Here, urban Native programming is engendering new “acts of relationship” or novel forms of interconnectivity—namely, communities predicated on shared interest and commensurate social competency, rather than simply shared locale.

Provided with insider information, Native and non-Native listeners are able to “imagine” a sense of their differences from and similarities to selected Aboriginal interest groups from within an Aboriginal scheme of categorization. In nurturing among non-Native and multi-First National listeners a sense of this ordering, Dan and Mary Lou Smoke are contributing to the formation of a “third culture” located in the interstices of intercultural Native and non-Native worlds, with transnational communication serving as its raison d’être.

In everyday practice, non-Native peoples are welcomed to such Aboriginal community events as feasts, art exhibits, conferences, and sometimes, sacred ceremonies—at the latter, however, they generally occupy the role of “supporter” or “guest.” Thus, the imaginary boundary of the urban Aboriginal community ought to be seen as flexible, expanding and contracting as circumstances and opportunities present themselves. The Aboriginal tradition of indigenizing the extraneous accounts in part for the acceptance of Native and selected newcomer ways as traditional. Indeed, it is perhaps the Aboriginal capacity to control the boundary itself, rather than the specific substantive content found within its borders, that marks the practice as traditionally Aboriginal.

This strategy clearly situates the non-initiated, rather than either the members of some mythical White enclave or other Aboriginal cultural groups, as Other and provides for highly co-ordinated mobilizing potential during times of crisis, as well as celebration. In this instance ethnic marking is not necessarily about racial marking (another colonial practice). Localism, moreover, which is always about selective inclusion and exclusion, may function as a means of drawing a boundary around a sphere of Aboriginal activity in which Aboriginal people themselves author the intimate ties of kinship, community, and residence. The urban locality, therefore, represents a uniquely modern Aboriginal social achievement.

Transmitting Aboriginal traditions via Native radio clearly serves in the negotiation of locally relevant Aboriginal relationships. The Smokes address listeners as “brother” and “sister,” thereby inducting them into a fictive kin system that also includes such elements of the natural environment as are spelled out in the Gathering of Nations teaching, which is played after the opening song on each show. This teaching, which identifies the appropriate relationships between human beings and other natural elements, creates a similar effect to the recitation of the Iroquoian Thanksgiving Address (Kanohonyok) orated at ceremonial, as well as
more mundane, Iroquois community gatherings; namely, it acknowledges the place of humans in the natural universe. Dan says that its intent is to join all in thought and sentiment, which enables and ensures the safe passage of messages. The radio show therefore affords listeners with an opportunity to negotiate relationships to history and ritual, and with a means of re-positioning themselves with respect to the land and other elements of their natural milieu, re-charging these environs with spiritual sentiment and a didactic directive.30 The program provides an impetus to sociability by engaging listeners in on-air conversations and by encouraging wider participation in Aboriginal community events.31

As with Renegade Radio and Urbanative, Smoke Signals disseminates particular forms of Aboriginally valued knowledge. This material is critical to the development of the sorts of competencies and dispositions—the cultural capital, or semiotic cache—with which Aboriginal listeners might adaptly decipher, re-signify, and perform intersubjective Aboriginal cultural relations. Although these texts are broadcasted, and listeners who are ethnically non-Native may also internalize such codes, very few non-Natives in fact achieve Aboriginality, as this is founded on a dialectic of “knowledge and recognition” (cf. Bourdieu’s “connais-sance” and “reconnaissace,” 1990). It is not enough to share some “structure of feeling” with Aboriginal communities. Individual identities must be validated by those communities. Listeners learn how to appreciate and comport themselves at community events as local subjects, but not all listeners will be invited to the sorts of events where highly valued (culturally distinguishing) ceremonial knowledge, for instance, is shared. The mediascape thus plays an important role in a larger process of cementing social relationships through the creation of a universe of belief—one with tremendous symbolic value that can be translated into real political power.

Countervailing forces continually challenge this work of poesis. In ongoing debates about Aboriginality that are played out in the Canadian courts, Aboriginal legal rights continue to be connected with a politics of location that ties identity with territory. In Canadian law, Aboriginality is evaluated with reference to a spatialized, continuous tradition of practice (see Povinelli, 1999). Aboriginality in the context of land-claims cases thus derives its meaning from the different use of space it connotes. And individuals who devote their energies to working the air-space, or who merely reside in areas not identified with land-based activities, are often misrecognized as somehow less a part of “real” Indian Country. This has immediate practical consequences, as those denied their Aboriginal identifications are also generally denied a voice in the policymaking processes that directly affect their abilities to pursue uniquely Aboriginal paths into the future.

On the subject of self-determination, Bourdieu offers that control or autonomy in a field of activity might be understood as the freedom to reject outside determinants and to embrace only the specific logic of the local field (1993). For Native cultural producers, the local field is that which is governed by Aboriginal forms of symbolic capital. I would stress that self-governing this field does not necessarily involve rejecting outside ideas or tools, however, nor does it
translate into a straightforward exclusion of outsiders from social and political in-
groups. Rather, applying Aboriginal cultural capital clearly denotes an appeal to
an altogether alternative evaluative frame.

Aboriginal individuals who choose to engage media technologies, inhabit
cities, and speak English, therefore, ought not to be recognized by outsiders as
“failed traditionalists,” for “having failed to preserve the traditions that once
defined their difference” (Povinelli, 1999, p. 37). City-based Aboriginal cultural-
production practices point to a distinct set of criteria for distinguishing who and
what is Aboriginal from who and what is not. Rather than counting up “traditional
traits,” for example, constructing a history or a personal genealogy, or “placing”
one’self within the cosmological order, may be the predominant praxis for pro-
ducing an Aboriginal identification.

Insofar as Aboriginal media practice seeks to realign relationships between
Aboriginal peoples and between peoples and their environments, the field of
Native media properly refers to an arena of restricted, not mass, production. The
programs that feature information about the cultural processes of their creation
serve a critical pedagogic function. They teach subjects how to be competently
local, but also how to become cultural producers themselves.

City-based cultural producers such as Brian Wright-McLeod, Dan and Mary
Lou Smoke, Christopher Spence, and Andre Morriseau are actively customizing
Aboriginal media-production practices. In so doing, they are appealing to dis-
courses that are centred in unique local conceptions and articulations of culture
and history. Weaving together local and non-local narrative and industrial prac-
tices with their own authorial visions, they are inventing media technologies that
serve not merely as a means of processing reality, but of structuring it, and of
cementing indigenous sovereignty.

Conclusion
Aboriginal media production in general has become a critical locus for intertex-
tual, cross-cultural, and translational struggles over meanings and collective iden-
tities. The creative adaptation of media-production practices, however, does not
represent simply adjusting the form or recoding the practice to alleviate the effects
of globalization; rather, it points to the multitudinous ways in which a people
might question the limits of their locales. Media production appears to represent a
site where Native, Metis, and Inuit peoples render themselves worldly, as opposed
to being globalized or assimilated by alien and impersonal forces. First Nations
media in Canada represents a place where individuals discern, import, and experi-
ment with culture-making materials. By idiosyncratically combining and trans-
forming these elements into something that is locally relevant, individuals
compose for themselves a vision of their destiny, while drawing and re-drawing
the boundaries around their locality.

Aboriginal radio promotes collectivizing activity among a culturally diverse
population by contributing to the creation of locally related action groups. Further
to this, radio links otherwise geographically alienated individuals through a
common interest in, and attention to, a pan-Aboriginal discourse on sovereignty.
First Nations radio also articulates with a wider public that coalesces around a shared concern to usher into being a more civil society by reconciling the relationship between Indigenous and newcomer polities. The hosts of Renegade Radio, Urbanative, and Smoke Signals deploy radio technologies along the lines of Aboriginally articulated cultural imperatives. Their programs provide a context for urban-based relationships of Indigeneity to take root. Urban First Nations media activism clearly articulates the critical attributes of community belonging, through which the sorts of relationships that distinguish Native from Other can be played out.

Notes

1. Some of the funds for the research conducted in and around London, Ontario in 1992 and 1993 were provided through the “Reserve English” and “Performing First Nations Identity through English Discourse: A Comparison of Algonquian and Iroquoian Language Use in Southwestern Ontario” SSHRC projects. I am grateful to Regna Darnell for reading an early version of this paper at that time and to Lindy-Lou Flynn who proofread the article in its most recent incarnation. Research from 1995 to 1998 was made possible by a SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, a Ashbaugh Scholarship, and Departmental grants from McMaster University. Migwetch and nia:weh to Mary Lou Smoke and Dan Smoke whose enthusiastic support and unwavering affection have provided the original impetus and ongoing motivation for this research. I am also grateful to all those who shared with me their keen insights into Aboriginality and media for this paper, especially to Dr. Bea Medicine, Andre Morriseau, Chris Spence, and Brian Wright-McLeod. Finally, nia:weh to Gary Farmer, boundary shifter extraordinaire, for shared adventures, friendship, and contributions to this research.

2. More anthropological attention has recently been devoted to questions surrounding “talk about” the place of various media in the lives of diverse audiences; see, for instance Abu-Lughod, 1993; Caldarola, 1994; Crawford, Hafsteinsson & Baldur, 1996; Kulick & Wilson, 1994; Leuthold, 1998; Mankekar, 1993, 1999; Martinez, 1992; Miller, 1992; Miller & Slater, 2000; Tacchi, 2002; Wilk, 1993. And yet, while anthropological methodologies in the field continue to change to accommodate global flows (Appadurai, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Marcus, 1995; Sanjek, 2000), the imbrication of Indigenous and ethnographic knowledges remains a central consideration in research activity. Ethical considerations are (or ought to be) at the forefront of media research among Native peoples. Engaged ethnography, or research that is mindful of its potential consequences for real Aboriginal people, therefore, requires at a minimum that the researcher be conversant in Aboriginally validated knowledges. Actively participating in Aboriginal peoples’ lives provides insights into Aboriginal histories and realities that archives and broadcast texts, or verbal accounts alone, cannot reveal.

3. Appadurai, who coined the term, defines the “mediascape” as comprising “the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios)...and to the images of the world created by these media” (1996, p. 4).

Hybridity, on the other hand, is a problematic concept insofar as it is predicated on the compartmentalization of the pre- and the post-colonial—the former denoting an idealized pristine past and the latter a degenerated mixed present. Similarly, the notion of mimesis or copying, as Michael Taussig (1993) insists, presumes a necessary distinction between “originating” and “simulating”—forces which are, in practice, inseparable. Conceived as such, hybridity and mimesis presuppose the existence of rigidified spatial entities—artificial assemblages of traits, relationships, and technologies, or “traditions,” and the continuity through time of apparently stable “objects” of selfhood and otherness. Further complicating matters, hybridity is typically read as a recent or “modern” condition, as if practices of intercultural borrowing began only with the colonial encounter. In Aboriginal settings where adaptive strategies are highly prioritized, however, and
where choices concerning the making of clear distinctions between the indigenous and the exogenous are weighed in terms of changing “pragmatic rationalities” (cf. Obeyesekere, 1992), the policing of porous cultural boundaries may rest upon an altogether different logic.

4. As modern and worldly urbanites, urban Aboriginal cultural producers’ unique forms of cosmopolitanism are often in tension with the “nativist” narratives of First Nationhood they encounter among the masses. Many members of Native and non-Native audiences to whom they cast their messages, therefore, lack the broad frame of reference with which to engage in the “postmodern” play of categories Native mass mediation incorporates. This might account for the sense of alienation media activists lament from time to time. Native audiences, which are typically more “rooted,” often expect from their “representatives” a somewhat more grounded rhetorical discourse of recognition—one that generally plays out the duplicitity of White and Native ways, one defined through a continuity of habitation, a natural connection to the land, and a more unified version of selfhood. Depending on the audience, models of “Indianness” might be construed in abject opposition to Whiteness, so that formulaic (though often very effective) comparisons of stereotypical or essentialist “ways” become operative (see Prins, 1997). This strategy is understandable, given that Aboriginal legal rights are tied to a politics of location, whereby indigeneity is defined with reference to a continuous tradition of practice (Povinelli, 1999).

5. At different historical junctures and unevenly across the country, the Canadian government pursued policies involving the relocation of Aboriginal communities into remote areas, forced enfranchisement, indigenous-language prohibition in residential schools, and incitements to enter the wage economy. Laws forbidding movement off reserves, anti-ceremonial legislation prohibiting the intercommunal free flow of information, Indian agents who censored all information transmitted to and from reserves, a legal-economic system that prioritized male-headed households and individual men’s work over community undertakings, new dwellings that reinforced the nuclear over the extended-family economic unit, and mass abductions of Native children are only some of the long-term agents of change in Native settings in Canada (see Carter, 1990; Kulchyski, 1988; Titley, 1986; Tobias, 1991; Preston & George, 1987).

6. Anthropologist Debra Spitulnik studied the ways media become inscribed in the routines of everyday life in Zambia (1998). She showed that the meanings people attribute to radio do not simply revolve around people’s interactions with media content. In Zambia, she argues, the consumption of radio includes the culturally specific ways that people attune themselves to the radio machine, its technology, its portability, its commodity status, and the fact that it produces unique sounds that can travel through communities. Spitulnik suggests, therefore, that there are culturally specific differences in the ways Middle North Americans and Zambians use radio. An issue raised by Terence Turner (1992) seems germane at this juncture. Focusing on Kayapo video in Brazil, Turner insists that the idea that indigenous peoples are not sophisticated enough to incorporate video technologies in ways that do not overwrite their own cultural, spatio-temporal power and/or agency categories is mere hubris. He argues that the Kayapo have incorporated video technologies, much as they have other exogenous influences, in culturally idiosyncratic ways.

7. This tendency is apparent in the literature constructing Aboriginal media theory in the West, with rare exceptions (e.g., Bredin, 2001; Leuthold, 1998; Prins, 1997; Roth, 2000; Valaskakis, 1998).

8. A word on “control” might be germane here. The political economy of contemporary Native media production can be described in terms of four broad categories: mainstream media, university and community-access media, First Nations-owned and -operated media, and Webcasting. Where Native media products are produced by Native people for the major networks, the mainstream organization may contribute a significant proportion of the funds, usually in conjunction with other public and private funders. The dominant Canadian public broadcasters include the CBC, BCE/CTV, and CanWest Global. The amount of Aboriginal control over these products varies considerably depending on the contract negotiated by the Aboriginal director. Where media products are completed before they are sold to networks, the amount of creative freedom tends to be greater; however, the financial remuneration is considerably lower, which presents constraints of another sort. Furthermore, Aboriginal media products that accommodate the generally unartic-
ulated dominant televisual, filmic, and radio aesthetics tend to be more successful in securing funding than those that explore explicitly Aboriginal or more experimental idioms. Where Aboriginal producers use community-access facilities, such as university radio stations or local cable-access channels, institutional regulations prevail, which may or may not affect content. Here too, CRTC-imposed regulations for a certain amount of Canadian content, or concerning the use of racist or sexist language, are the rule. While hosts are relatively free from such factors as maintaining the upkeep of equipment, they must read possibly objectionable or minimally disruptive public-service announcements. Few hosts, moreover, are able to choose their neighbours, so Aboriginal programs may precede or succeed hosts or programs that Native producers find disagreeable. Programs may be pre-empted to accommodate university affairs or community events, funding drives, strikes, protests, or other events over which Aboriginal hosts have no control. Finally, in university and community-access settings, most programs are funded by their hosts, and they may not realize what Native producers would create given greater means. Examples in this category would include those examples discussed in this article, as well as programs such as Kla How’ Ya and Metis Matters on Vancouver’s Co-op Radio, Aboriginal-reserved slots on CBC Radio in the North, and Aboriginal-access programming formerly broadcast on CKUA throughout Alberta.

The third context is the Native-owned and -operated media outlet. Examples of urban outlets include unofficial pirated signals, as well as the officially licensed stations such as the Aboriginal Voices Radio Network (AVRN, based in Toronto), Native Communications Inc. (NCI, based in Winnipeg), and the Aboriginal Multi-Media Society of Alberta (AMMSA, based in Edmonton). Most reserves in Canada also now operate their own versions of a community-radio service. Differences in creative freedom between urban and reserve settings are significant, with greater power over hiring, firing, and general content in urban areas. While still subject to CRTC regulations, the general structure of shows and what counts as content are determined by Aboriginal personnel and are negotiated within a federal policy structure that is increasingly amenable to Aboriginal interests. Here, content constraints are derived from community concerns and from advertisers’ interests. The latter can have a significant impact on content by withholding monies, which may jeopardize a station’s ability to meet the minimal requirements of licensing agreements. While Aboriginal concerns may prevail, hosts are not necessarily “free” to pursue their interests without restriction. Often rhetoric surrounding what is “traditional” (for instance, in terms of women’s roles) or “proper” (for instance, talk about anything of a sexual or secret nature) has a censoring function.

In short, there is not one context where Aboriginal producers enjoy absolute authorial control over their media productions. However, with Aboriginal ownership, local constraints are prioritized. Finally, with the Webcasting of radio broadcasts (which emit from outside institutional contexts), Aboriginal producers have possibly the greatest control over form, content, and to some extent, listenership. The Internet facilitates forms of expression that are limited mostly by a host’s imagination, but also by legal factors, and by the perceived listenership. Barriers to access, however, are significant and include the cost of owning a computer and access to service provision, especially in remote areas.

9. The Canadian federal government issued licences to radio stations in 1919, by which time Canadian National Railways was broadcasting nationally from major centres. By 1923, seventy stations were operating across the country. In general, Aboriginal peoples did not have access to the means of producing radio broadcasts at this time.

10. Communication-studies scholars concerned with Native communications have tended to focus on the modern era (Alia, 1999; Brisebois, 1983; Browne, 1996; Demay, 1991a, 1991b; Fairchild, 1998; Hudson, 1977; Keith, 1995; Mahtani, 2001; Madden, 1992; Mander, 1991; Riggins, 1983; Roth, 1993; Valaskakis, 1992). Some locate the impulse for Native media development in the allegedly unsolicited provisions made by the Canadian government to supply funds for Native political associations and communications societies (Demay, 1991a, 1991b; Raudsepp, 1984; Rupert, 1983; Smith & Brigham, 1992). Some have approached media technologies as imposed
on, and simply accommodated by, non-critical Aboriginal recipients (Coldevin, 1976; Coldevin & Wilson, 1985; Granzberg, 1982; Granzberg, Steinbring, & Hamer, 1977). In general, writings on Canadian Aboriginal media typically begin with reactions to the White Paper in 1969, or to some introduced technology, and play up the recentness of Native peoples’ engagement with electronic technologies.

11. Lacking sufficient space for a justification of the term “diaspora” here, I use “polity” instead to refer to a trans-First National network of dispersed political subjects. In addition to Aboriginal peoples from reserves and settlements across Canada, members of colonized minorities from other parts of the world normally represent the principal participants in urban indigenous nation-making activities—including cultural mediation through the media. Elsewhere (Buddle, 2003), I make the case that in Ontario, subcultures in the urban Aboriginal population do meet the minimal requirements of diaspora insofar as they are constituted by dispossession (not rootedness in the land) and displacement (not continuity of habitation). Particular urban Aboriginal subcultural groups, moreover, maintain, revive, or invent a connection with a previous home and derive an identity from this relationship. To what extent this demographic forms a “community” depends on the definition of “community” in use and its relationship and proximity to shared notions of “homeland.” The uneven application of historic Aboriginal legislation across the country has deep implications for interactions between First Nations within provincial territories. Regional differences in experience also have an impact on the patterns of Aboriginal migration to Canadian cities. In addition, cultural differences may lend shape to community formations, as well a community’s relative success or failure to mobilize a variety of urban Aboriginal organizations and events. Contemporary municipal, provincial, and federal policies profoundly effect urban Native people’s lives and abilities to participate in voluntary associations. The spread of the English language, pan-Aboriginal healing and social-justice movements, and important political connections forged in educational institutions have contributed to the diffusion of a “third,” some would say multi-First-Nationalist, public space. It is often from within this sphere, which is characterized by many overlapping alliances and multi-locale memberships, that the issue of what “styles” an urban solidarity of Native peoples is articulated and contested.

12. For analyses of Inuit radio and television, see Madden, 1992; Roth, 1994; and Valaskakis, 1992, 1998. In the Canadian North, Aboriginal media activists have successfully created a type of Native radio that reaches a regional public, so as to be able to promote a renewal of associations between culturally close, but often geographically distant, communities. In the southern urban centres, in contrast, Aboriginal radio is inscribed in the distinctly modern process of creating or fortifying community solidarity among the members of a culturally and experientially diverse urban Aboriginal polity. Countervailing forces continually challenge this work of poiesis, as Aboriginal individuals who choose to engage so-called “modern” technologies, inhabit cities, and speak English are routinely stigmatized as “failed traditionalists” and charged with “having failed to preserve the traditions that once defined their difference” (Povinelli, 1999, p. 37). Naive associations of Aboriginal media engagement with inevitable de-traditionalization and cultural disintegration are recent variations on an old “vanishing cultures” thesis—one that assumes Aboriginal assimilation to be a fait accompli.

Curiously, although the contemporary powwow is a relatively recent invention, it tends to be accepted by outsiders as an Aboriginal ethnic-marking activity with little controversy (see Buddle, 2004). It might be noted that one possible reason for the current popularity of pan-Aboriginal (or intertribal) collectivizing activities such as powwows is in the context they provide for a culturally appropriate consumption of public space. To powwow properly is to conduct oneself according to “Indian way.” A tremendously loaded term of cultural jargon, this refers most simply to conduct that demonstrates the sharing of an implicit social knowledge and an awareness of the ethical and conventional codes for its practice—to a cultural literacy or competency. Because public activity of this nature allows for the kind of socializing that is held to re-produce cultural competency, and because Aboriginal community members represent the central authors of powwow activity, powwows are generally held to provide appropriate contexts for the negotiation and performance of neo-traditional, pan-Aboriginal, sociocosmological beliefs and practices. In other words, com-
munity socials such as powwows are, and promote what is, appropriately public. Aboriginal radio programs extol the same principles—celebrating Aboriginality in such a way that the signs of “Nativeness” can be read, and identified with, by the local Aboriginal audience.

13. Kuptana was involved in the development of Television Northern Canada (TVNC), the Inuvialuit Communication Society, and general broadcasting policy in Canada.

14. Farmer founded magazines The Runner and Aboriginal Voices; in addition, he aided in the development of reserve radio in Southern Ontario and in the creation of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). He is also an actor, a filmmaker, a musician, and the creator and Executive Producer of the APTN’s top-rated television show, Buffalo Tracks.

15. When CKRZ began broadcasting in several of the Iroquoian languages, some Six Nations community members protested, insisting that the languages held little relevance for contemporary Indian peoples. Motivated by different concerns, the Aboriginal Multi-Media Society of Alberta (AMMSA), Missinipi Broadcasting Corp. in Saskatchewan, and Native Communications Inc. (NCI) in Manitoba offered negative interventions during AVRN’s bid for a broadcast licence in Calgary (Gary Farmer, AVRN Founder, Edmonton, AB, personal communication, November 27, 2002). This merely shows that Aboriginal cultures and media are neither unitary essences nor necessarily consensual constructs. They are, rather, sites of conflicting discourses and competing voices. I point this out to show the complexity of Aboriginal perspectives and their representation, and to establish that Aboriginal experience may be simultaneously unified beyond the level localities and fragmented within them.

16. Although invoked with the intention of protecting Aboriginal peoples from outside domination, the cultural-imperialism thesis paradoxically works to reinforce Western cultural influence by taking it as a given rather than by challenging it (see Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996). The cultural-imperialism model as it relates to the media generally entails an equation of the planetary circulation of media technologies with the extension of a Eurocentric “modernity,” to the detriment of “traditions.” By this I mean the increasing hegemony of particular central cultures—namely the diffusion of mainstream Canadian and American values, consumer goods, and lifestyles, and generally the destruction of, for the purposes of this paper, Aboriginal alterity. Thus, the social, political, and cultural homogenization that has been identified with this extending “civilization” or mode of “progress” is a condition that is purported to be inherently destructive of local traditions. While it cannot be denied that mainstream cultural products are everywhere to be found in Native contexts throughout Canada, the sheer ubiquity of mainstream media technologies and products in Native settings is not itself a self-evident fact. It requires some interpreting.

17. Along with education, interveners highlighted the “healing” potential of Aboriginal radio. Typically, Aboriginal healing involves restoring a sense of balance through the realignment of relationships between individuals and their social, physical, and cultural environments. Teyjah Dahnjijinge, representing the First Nations and Aboriginal Student Association of York University in Toronto, remarked:

Aboriginal Voices…will be able to provide role models and decrease the ignorance with information and education…to reduce the divisions that are within and outside our community, and increase self-esteem and understanding as well as healing—yes, healing—through the spoken word. (Teyjah Dahnjijinge, Student, First Nations and Aboriginal Student Association of York University, Toronto, ON, personal communication, February 8, 2000).

18. The process of configuring workable versions of Aboriginality that occurs through media production ought to be understood as dialectic, not as a navel-gazing exercise. Aboriginality and tradition are always defined by someone, somewhere, in a particular context, against something else, for a particular audience, and often to generate a particular effect. Understanding the meanings Aboriginal authors themselves attribute to these processes of cultural production requires that one seek to uncover the relationships between these conditional factors, rather than assuming that media projects involve community-wide participation or simply reflect abstract social processes or societal values. It is crucial to appreciate that while they are created in particular social and historical or cultural contexts, Aboriginal mass mediations are also informed by the attempts of positioned active individuals to make sense of the real-life situations in which they find themselves.
Indeed, the absence of a singular Aboriginal televised genre or one conventionalized system of organization for Native production crews suggests that Native communicators are capable of creating defiantly cross-hatched and idiosyncratic production processes and media products, often fusing selected features of local “tradition” with outside elements in unexpected ways. In other words, there is no singular “Native media” awaiting scholarly discovery anymore than there is a single “Native culture,” except as they are invoked in particular discourses to re-structure relations of power. There are, on the other hand, myriad Aboriginal cultural and subcultural collectivities, and there may well be a protean Aboriginal “mediascape” into and out of which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal media products, practices, and personnel come and go. An exhaustive review of “Aboriginal media” in Canada and the U.S., then, is not only beyond the scope of this paper, but is antithetical to an anthropological approach that seeks to contextualize, rather than to totalize, Aboriginal discursive formations.

19. AVRN’s network includes a station in Toronto and licences to broadcast in Ottawa, Kitchener-Waterloo, Montréal, Vancouver, Abbotsford, Calgary, and Edmonton. Of these, owing largely to funding constraints, only the Toronto station is currently broadcasting. Radio produced by the Aboriginal Multi-Media Society of Alberta, now based in St. Albert, and its radio signal, CFWE, reaches a variety of reserves throughout Alberta and northwestern Saskatchewan, as well as Bonnyville and St. Paul, but is not yet available in the Edmonton/St. Albert area. Missinipi Broadcasting in Saskatchewan is available online, but otherwise is restricted to reserve communities. Native Communications Inc. is based and broadcast in Winnipeg and covers much of the province of Manitoba. Communications societies such as SOCAN and Wawatay in Québec and Central Ontario are broadcast from and to reserve communities, but reach several communities off reserve as well.

20. Gary Farmer and Amos Key are also responsible for helping Cecil Isaac and other Walpole Island community members to set up a radio station on their reserve in southwestern Ontario. Isaac, who spoke at the Aboriginal Voices media conference in 1999, explained that the Ojibwe radio station was the first community project to be carried out without the band council’s explicit involvement. It continues to operate outside of band-council control. From its inception, Isaac and the others involved in the creation of the station insisted that reserve airwaves were “sovereign” and that the CRTC did not have the authority to interfere in reserve radio matters. In this sense, he says, the station represents the genuine “voice of the community.” (Cecil Isaac, Founder, CFRZ, Walpole Island’s community radio, personal communication, Toronto, June 17, 1999). The station, which went on air in 1994, was first located in a bedroom in Isaac’s house. It is now centrally located in the Walpole Island mall. It continues to amplify Aboriginal affairs without CRTC sanction.

21. Native America Calling is a call-in talk show that is Webcast by means of the American Indian Radio On Satellite (AIROS) network. Online listeners are invited each show to join the “electronic talking circle.”

22. To publicize Urbanative, which began broadcasting in the spring of 2001, Spence sent out e-mails to the more than two hundred Aboriginal people in his directory. He has since received over two thousand replies from new listeners. The show has no fixed format, but generally features news, interviews, and music. Spence augments the music stores for the show, which he funds himself, by downloading MP3 music files from the many Native websites he steadfastly unearths. He says this enables Native musicians to receive instant air-time and eliminates high production and shipping expenses, which have had a prohibitive effect on the dissemination of new Native music (Christopher Spence, Technical Director, Aboriginal Voices Radio, Toronto, ON, personal communication, May 19, 2001).

23. This computer application was the work of Skawennati Tricia Fragnito and a consortium of Native new-media artists.

24. Aligning oneself with an individual such as Gary Farmer, who has achieved the status of Aboriginal media mogul for Central Canada, and who repeatedly organizes a plethora of seasonal media projects, has become a successful tactic of survival in what can be an economically uncertain profession. Spence is also part of a relatively stable cadre of individuals who form the Aboriginal
Voices Radio production unit—the multimedia production crew headed by Farmer. Aboriginal media producers often suffer the predicament of balancing modest budgets with social pressures to “share the wealth.” It is therefore customary for Aboriginal media producers such as Farmer to forgo expensive production practices, such as crane shots in film, the use of “steady cams” in television, and up-to-the-minute national-news coverage in radio. To those who can identify them, these features are often what distinguish low-budget from high-end programs. Mainstream production values tend to be measured not only in terms of the actual filmic, televisual, or radio narrative, but against a standard of shots and effects, for which the rental or purchase of high-end equipment is required. Aboriginal media-production activities tend to be linked with wider social movements that are restorative of interpersonal relations and productive of community empowerment. As such, successful Aboriginal productions are those that are judged by the community not only to tell a good story and look or sound “professional.” Community-approved productions include practices that engage appropriate Aboriginal values—"sharing," for instance, which might be achieved by employing as many family and community members as is possible.

In Aboriginal production settings, in fact, Aboriginal executive producers, much like hunt leaders or chiefs, are responsible for feeding (or feasting) and, depending on the location, transporting and housing those from whom they command labour. Cultivating a “good” reputation in the media community requires that the EPs repeatedly achieve successful fundraising goals, have influence and connections among members of non-Native business and media communities, demonstrate copious generosity and an abundance of patience, and provide a product that meets the standards of Aboriginal community-measured value.

By involving the same small group of magazine, radio, and television people, as well as their spouses and, when possible, their children in each of his media projects, Farmer produced a pseudo extended-family environment. This work strategy closely resembles the traditional work unit found on Native farms, on tralines, and in hunting communities (see Carter, 1990; Francis & Morantz, 1983). The Aboriginal Voices production unit, which is composed of members who regularly engage in intimate production practices, thus itself represents an operative form of urban Aboriginal locality. The production team and their families represent a coterie of individuals for whom media activities provide a sense of belonging to a community and thus a sense of identification as an integral part of a broader collectivity of individuals who share a common belief in the importance of Aboriginal media. It should be noted, however, that several members of this ensemble are non-Native. Their incorporation into the socioeconomic unit represents a strategy by which urban Aboriginal peoples seek, as Shohat and Stam point out, to politically regroup, transforming the indigenous minority into the majority, moving beyond being “tolerated” to forming active intercommunal coalitions with individuals and organizations outside Aboriginal polities (1994).

25. In addition to their weekly radio show, the hosts and producers, Dan and Mary Lou Smoke, provide biweekly commentaries via the local television-news station and write numerous articles for regional and national Native newspapers. Smoke Signals is the only regular First Nations media service reporting to and for the London area. Owing to the high degree of interaction between the city and its surrounding reserve area, we might include the Muncey and Chippewa of the Thames reserves and the Onyota’a:ka (Oneida) settlement into the greater-London Aboriginal community.

26. Negotiations are consistently under way between Anishinabe peoples, on whose traditional lands the centre stands, and the Onyota’a:ka (formerly Oneidas)—the other largest Native population in the city—to conduct Iroquoian- or Ojibwe-style ceremonies and gatherings. In the interests of neutrality, it has become customary to alternate or combine these styles, thus configuring a pan-tribal strategy in the creation of London Aboriginal locality.

27. Conduct-oriented teachings, which provide advice related to such actions as speaking, moving, healing, and so forth, generally link concrete bodily practices with collective group identities. The teaching discourse on deportment thus engenders embodied experiences of group affinity.

28. Interviewing, for example, necessitates offerings of tobacco or a gift and requires that one defer to the elderly and listen without interrupting, among other things. It also requires that one uphold
proscriptions on asking questions and talking about certain issues; recording certain songs, stories, prayers, or ceremonies; and speaking to selected individuals in particular contexts or at various times of the year.

29. In the Medicine Wheel teaching to which Dan makes frequent reference, for instance, the “four tribes” of humankind (which are said to subsume all of the world’s cultural categories) have their own place, each being interconnected with the others.

30. Other factors clearly distinguish Smoke Signals programs from mainstream broadcast texts. For instance, sharing, which implies a relationship between equals, is the operative communicative principle on the show. Broadcasts are replete with references to prophecy narratives, which represent crucial modernizing projects. Interpreting such narratives requires that one adopt a critical orientation toward the present so as to be able to prepare for seven generations down the line.

31. Smoke Signals, moreover, is definitively future oriented—hence the emphasis on preparations. Structurally, the program loosely resembles an amended Long House ceremony, and it seeks, as do Iroquoian ceremonies, to bring about the “joining of the minds.” There is also a continuity to the stories discussed on the show from week to week, which is consistent with a conventionalized unwillingness in Anishinabe storytelling traditions to arrive at finalized meanings in the narratives, but rather to promote a continual renegotiation through renewed discussion.

References


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