“This Is Our Playground”

Skateboarding, DIY Aesthetics, and Apache Sovereignty in Dustinn Craig’s 4wheelwarpony

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In his 2008 experimental film 4wheelwarpony filmmaker Dustinn Craig (Apache/Navajo) combines the punk and do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetics of skateboarding with family and tribal history to assert an expressive politics of Apache resilience. Using archival images, still and motion picture photography, animation, reenactments, and graphic art, Craig documents his own immersion in youth skateboarding culture in the Whiteriver community of the Fort Apache Reservation in Arizona and links several generations of Apache skateboarders with their nineteenth-century ancestors. In addition to the film’s documentary work recording successive cohorts of skaters, Craig also develops the symbolic potential of skateboards to serve as vehicles for performative and graphic historical storytelling. 4wheelwarpony intervenes in the larger mediascape as well as its off-screen community by supporting the construction of skate parks at Whiteriver; creating ceremony for young men through costumed reenactment and skate contests; and, ultimately, envisioning skateboarding as a means for reestablishing social systems of Apache masculinity, coming of age, and intergenerational nurture. The film and its production perform these many kinds of self-determination by bringing together the DIY ethic of punk and skateboarding, independent film production practices, and Apache cultural and political knowledge.

While 4wheelwarpony’s brevity (eight minutes) and its focus on a group of young skateboarders who are marginalized even within their reservation community might suggest a contained or small-scale story, in fact the film engages with expansive historical ac-
accounts that challenge longstanding narratives of Apache-US relations in the nineteenth century. Understanding the way the film’s personal, lyric visuals exert transformative power in relation to broader discourses about genocide and cultural revitalization requires a methodology that frames the hermeneutic work of film analysis in the context of the social conditions and relations supporting image production. As Faye Ginsburg notes in her 2011 article on the state of the field, Indigenous films “demonstrate that a textual analysis of what we see on-screen is not sufficient if it does not also take into account the cultural and political labor of indigenous activists whose interventions have made support for this possible, revealing how contemporary states and their indigenous citizens negotiate diversity” (“Native Intelligence” 250). Indeed, privileging the voices and priorities of Indigenous artists and the politics of media production marks some of the most important contributions that scholarship on Indigenous media has made to the ongoing study of representation as a phenomenon spanning our world and our screens. In this essay I attend to the film itself—to the way 4wheelwarpony is “indigenizing the screen,” to quote Merata Mita—and, equally, to the way 4wheelwarpony is keyed to off-screen circumstances that link its production process to Craig’s work with young skaters and with tribal history (Mita, qtd. in Dowell 377). In the interview that accompanies this essay, “Just by Doing It, We Made It Appear,” Craig provides his own account of 4wheelwarpony and the closely related documentary projects We Shall Remain: Geronimo and Apache Scouts. I take up his film here as an exemplar of the generative dynamics underpinning much of contemporary Indigenous media, media that works to decolonize on-screen representational systems, catalyze cultural revitalization, activate political consciousness, and revise powerful historical narratives.

The twenty-first-century flowering of Indigenous filmmaking includes a new wave of short narrative and experimental films by young filmmakers, such as Taika Waititi’s Two Cars, One Night (2004), Kevin Lee Burton’s Nikamowin/Song (2007), Andrew Okpeaha MacLean’s Sikumii/On the Ice (2008), Sterlin Harjo’s Cepanvkuce Tuttucan/Three Little Boys (2009), Blackhorse Lowe’s Shimasani (2009), and Helen Haig-Brown’s ?E?tanx/The Cave (2009). Independent forms of media production have been a crucial factor in the development of Indigenous cinema, the “Fourth Cinema” that Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay asserts takes place “outside the national orthodoxy” and almost always outside of the industrial studio system (11). Prominent Native filmmakers have modeled autonomous film production in a number of ways: Spokane/Coeur d’Alene author Sherman Alexie, author and screenwriter for the independently produced Smoke Signals and writer and director of The Business of Fancydancing, tried working with studios and now emphatically advises young Native filmmakers to avoid the film industry, connecting independent, microbudget film production with Indigenous leaders and political autonomy: “Don’t be a Hangs Around the Fort. Be a Crazy Horse of filmmaking” (qtd. in Hearne, Smoke Signals 193). Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva keeps the copyright of all his films rather than selling the rights to distributors, allowing him to remain accountable to his community rather than investors or a distribution company. Craig, like Masayesva, is highly aware of this allegiance, stating that he knew he “was going to be held accountable” for his work on Apache tribal history and cultural knowledge in films like We Shall Remain: Geronimo (qtd. in
Badoni 61–62). In different ways Alexie, Masayesva, and Craig describe independent film production as a form of sovereignty, a way to maintain control and self-determination across the entire arc of film production, including social relations of production, aesthetic choices, copyright, and exhibition and distribution.

Craig’s 4wheelwarpony was originally produced as part of an installation at the Smithsonian/National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and Heard Museum joint exhibit Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World (2007) and was later screened at film festivals and the NMAI exhibition Ramp It Up: Skateboard Culture in Native America (2009). Its production was fed by Craig’s research and immersion in previous film projects, primarily the documentary We Shall Remain: Geronimo, which he directed for WGBH’s American Experience series, as well as the short film I Belong to This, for the PBS series Matters of Race, and informal skateboarding videos. Craig is a skater himself, as well as an artist and filmmaker, and during his twenties he worked for his tribe making public-service announcements and other media for a tribal Healthy Families community initiative while informally mentoring younger skaters. His current work includes both mainstream, one-hour documentary public broadcasting forms and edgier, gallery-oriented experimental films; 4wheelwarpony and I Belong to This, short films about his own life, his family, his tribe, and his skateboard group, are more personal in their politics and aesthetics. Craig describes the way 4wheelwarpony was integrated, “as a time capsule of a culture in motion,” into the museum exhibit, a small room with his skateboard decks and deck art on the walls: “The way this exhibit is set up . . . the screen is projected to the east because for us in our culture you would start each day in the morning before the sun came up with a morning prayer to greet the day to ask for good things to go your way” (qtd. in Badoni 57). Thus, while the film addresses a diverse museum-going public (and is now more widely available on Vimeo), it was initially designed to situate viewers within traditional Apache spatial and temporal relations.

In 4wheelwarpony the space of the screen aligns two historical periods: the Apache Wars in the late nineteenth century and the development of youth skateboard culture at Whiteriver, on the Fort Apache Reservation, starting in the early 1990s and spanning the turn of the twenty-first century. During the 1870s the Western Apache Scouts, a unit of the US Army from 1871 to 1947, helped to track and communicate with the groups of Chiricahua Apaches who, led by Geronimo, had fled the newly established federal reservations (see Barbone). The film’s temporal reach from 1871 to 2008 emphasizes continuity across a century of radical change, using the juxtaposition of historical and contemporary images to recognize skateboarding as a collective, intergenerational practice for Apache survival in the millennial American Southwest. Continuity and disruption are manifested in the film’s aesthetic emphasis on time and pacing, combining several forms of static art—still photography, stenciled skateboard graphics, and drawings—with forms of motion, including moving picture forms such as film and animation that create (sometimes deliberately choppy) illusions of movement from a series of still images. The tracking shots of skateboarders in motion and the split screens (as many as six) encompassing multiple historical timeframes convey a sense of fluid mobility and simultaneity that is in tension with the stasis of the rapidly edited still images. Uniting these shifts in pace from not-quite-stop-motion, to slow motion, to regular speed, are the sounds of skateboard wheels rolling and hitting pavement and ramps, along with occasional cheers or clapping, and a pensive instrumental soundtrack by Navajo composer Garrett Brennan Stewart.

Along with these experimental aesthetics Craig uses community testimony to assert the complexity of Apache history and political strategies over the simple oppositionality of cinematic versions of Apaches epitomized by the popular image of Geronimo. While directing We Shall Remain: Geronimo Craig studied tribal history—both written accounts and oral stories from community members—which gave him an opportunity to expand his own knowledge and teach young men their history, a history that, as Craig notes, “we are not given in schools . . . that’s not part of our curriculums” (qtd. in Badoni 61–62). In both Geronimo and 4wheelwarpony Craig counters the popular perception of Apache “machismo” as inaccurate and damaging: Apache Scouts “weren’t blood thirsty war machines . . . running around kicking ass” (qtd. in Badoni 64). Rather, as Georgina Badoni writes, they were “carriers of
the cultural knowledge necessary for survival, knowledge of such things as biology, stories, and prayers for specific times” (61–62).

Connecting contemporary Apache youth with ancestors and the work of the Scouts involves multiple historical threads. First, the film represents an intervention in frontier political history—both as it has been written into formal histories of the United States and as it has been represented in popular media images of the West. Second, it documents twenty years of skateboarding at Whiteriver, including several generations of youth fostering one another through what Craig calls “mini-tribal units” (Hearne with Craig 74). Third, it is a coming-of-age story that documents family history and personal development (what in European critical traditions might be called a Bildungsroman, or more accurately a Kunstlerroman, a story of an artist’s growth to maturity). The temporal depths of these background, middle-ground, and foreground frames of reference are brought together by the unit of community actors Craig worked with for the film—skateboarders who reenacted actions by their Apache Scout ancestors, while marking their own coming of age in ways that reinvented long-abandoned traditions for young men. Drawing on the performative power of heritage is a hallmark of Indigenous experimental art, according to Victor Masayesva, who argues that “the tribal person’s trans-cultural performances ... are at their most profound when inherited skills and ancestral knowledge dominate the stage” (238).

Like ceremonies and other kinds of rejuvenating expressive performances, skateboarding, and ancillary work such as building and maintaining skate parks, is a physical as well as representational activity. In its associations with youth and urban public space, skateboarding is a sign of the modern; Indigenous skateboarders, contemporary by their very definition as pavement-riders, counter the nineteenth-century “vanishing” Indians imagined in the Western (where they are confined to horses) and elevate Indigenous presence in the here and now of shared infrastructure. The material culture of skateboarding (the creation and decoration of decks, the construction of ramps) transmits visual and kinetic expression across multiple physical platforms. This key element of decks and skate parks—the platform—is also conceptually rich, denoting a “stage” (as emphasized by Masayesva) or other elevated space for perfor-
emotionalism (as Craig notes explicitly in describing yearly skate contests) and local, land-based activity, or reterritorialization. This territoriality represents one conjuncture of Apache sovereignty with DIY aesthetics, aesthetics that emerge from collective practices of creating and stewarding one's own (built) environment.

**DIY Aesthetics and Apache Sovereignty**

The sovereignist discourse in *4wheelwarpony* emerges from both Apache revisionist political history and reservation-based DIY production style, including visual strategies of reflexivity (“shooting back”) and crediting. Craig organizes the film’s political aesthetic in its early seconds using two archival photographs of the White Mountain Apache chief Alchesay (1853–1928), a sergeant of the Apache Indian Scouts who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his work during the Apache Wars. Alchesay’s gifted leadership epitomizes an alternative Apache political history to the popular culture narratives that focus almost exclusively on images of violent guerilla warfare and the figure of Geronimo. (In fact the distortions wrought by popular Geronimo iconography radically falsify the complex relations among the different bands during the 1880s, when Geronimo’s Chiricahua renegades raided White Mountain Apache camps.) Alchesay advocated for the needs of the community in the historical context of postapocalyptic, genocidal frontier conditions, choosing strategies of mediation to resist, accommodate, or otherwise navigate the transitions demanded of his people by the United States. He personally negotiated with presidents Cleveland, Roosevelt, and Harding, and Craig argues that his sophisticated leadership, including his work as a Scout, can be credited as one of the reasons why the White Mountain Apache were able to remain on their land even as the Chiricahua Apache were removed en masse first to Florida, then to Oklahoma. Craig also notes the performers’ genealogical connections with Alchesay: “One of the boys that is in *4wheelwarpony* is actually the great-great-great-grandson of Chief Alchesay, who was the last chief of the White Mountain Apache tribe . . .” (Hearne with Craig 88). The work of connecting young skateboarders with Scouts is achieved by making this genealogy visible through costumed reenactment, pho-

![“Kraig Craig” from *4wheelwarpony*. Copyright © 2008 Dustin Craig. Used with permission.](image-url)
tographic portraiture, and iconic juxtapositions of gun and camera, wheel and horse.

Early in the film, alongside one of the images of Alchesay (seated, with a rifle) and two images from skateboard films, is a black-and-white photograph of a young boy, perhaps five years old, aiming a slingshot at the screen. His direct look at the camera—targeting it, in fact, with the quintessential weapon of childhood—enacts the "shooting back" or reflexive relationship with representational history that is actualized more broadly by the film itself. At the same time the image alludes to cinematic editing patterns that work along oppositional lines of sight, such as shot/countershot, as well as the longstanding gun/camera tropes of the documentary and Western film genres. Media theorists have long associated image capture with death, linking the symbolic violence of visual media's primary hardware, the camera, with the capacity of guns to threaten, contain, or destroy their subjects by means of shooting (see Hearne, Native Recognition 194, 312). The appropriation of the gun/camera metaphor in *4wheelwarpony* is matched by symbols of mobility, the wheeled skateboard and the horse, that converge in the name "4wheelwarpony." These juxtapositions link ancestral practices with contemporary performers, lending power to the self-production of the skaters. Craig answers the long-standing colonial tropes of mainstream cinema with films that, as Masayesva writes of Indigenous aesthetics, "subvert the colonizers' indoctrination and champion Indigenous expression in the political landscape" (237). While invoking the cinematic association of Apaches with frontier violence—promulgated by Hollywood Westerns such as Fort Apache (1948), Apache (1954), Chato's Land (1972), and Ulaan's Raid (1972), among many others—this film presents self-aware subjects and alternative forms of mediation (gun/camera, wheel/horse) with which to engage the history of Apache representation. Addressing the dearth of Apache histories beyond Geronimo, Craig’s film imagines that Alchesay is no more a passive portrait subject than is the feisty, camera-savvy child who shares both his screen space and his tribal heritage.

By taking back the story of Alchesay, his tribe, and their descendants, Craig’s film claims both White Mountain Apache sovereignty and a more general ownership of the means of production that is also common to many kinds of DIY projects. The poetics of attribution in street aesthetics—tagging, graphic signatures—here assert Indigenous authority over their own stories and storytelling. While rural reservations differ in many ways from the urban scenes where punk, hip-hop, and skateboarding aesthetics originated, they share modes of DIY and autonomous artistic production developed in contexts of economic disenfranchisement. Ginsburg notes that Indigenous media’s “powerful forms of self-production” are “often working against the grain of a late-capitalist economy” (Native Intelligence” 244), although as skateboarding has professionalized, the earlier DIY ethic has given way to skaters' interest in manufactured commodities (like name-brand shoes). Skateboarding requires a built environment, repurposing the paved world in the interests of kinetic activity. In *4wheelwarpony* Craig describes the skate park as “our playground.” Since skateboards are designed for paved surfaces, skaters use found environments and also, especially outside of heavily paved urban spaces, construct their own environments, making their own skateboards, skate parks, videos, and images. Amateur skateboarding videos and homemade skate parks reveal the materiality of DIY in low-income, isolated reservation communities. Skateboarding, as an urban art adapted to reservations, channels the energy, adaptability, and creativity of DIY skate culture into a useful appropriation for Indigenous survivance—or perhaps, instead, it reveals how DIY has always been a valued Apache skill, with skating being its current manifestation.

Craig’s *4wheelwarpony* also foregrounds its roots in DIY cultural production through playful appropriation of consumer branding in the aesthetics of the corporate logo. The term “4wheelwarpony” is itself both the film title and the name of Craig’s skate company, a company that sponsors a Native skate team and has its own set of deck art insignia. (Craig's company is only one of several Native-owned skateboarding companies, such as Asdzaan Skateboards, owned by Jolene Yazzie, and Wounded Knee Skateboards, founded by Jim Murphy, which emphasizes teaching Lakota history through skateboard deck art.) The stenciled images on skateboards bring together the identificatory work of tribal affiliation, commercial brands, and street graffiti, creating a recognizable aesthetic marker for a defined group.

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If skateboard deck graphics typically combine the work of public DIY art and company logos, Craig’s deck art brings these elements together with Apache history through storytelling and crediting. For example, he mimics the Starbucks sign for his “Apache Coffee” graphic; the image alludes to a historical story about an Apache woman’s escape from Mexico after having been captured and of her relief at returning home and drinking some Apache coffee (see also Badoni 63–64). The harrowing climate of raiding, capture, and slavery during the nineteenth-century frontier wars is communicated by the sense of liberation, comfort, and good humor that must have come with being reunited with caring family, symbolized and actualized by drinking coffee together. Thus, the film engages Apache stories in stenciled form, showing how, as Angelica Lawson describes Native literatures, “key concepts from Native American oral tradition have continued into the present via tribally specific aesthetics and ethics.” In Lawson’s terms *4wheelwarpony* is both resistant and resilient, where “resistance” might be thought of as anticolonial and ‘resilience’ as procultural (196m1). In her thesis on Native skateboard art Georgina Badoni likens deck art to Native oral traditions in their transmission of cultural and historical knowledge within the tribe: “An effective storyteller transcends history. . . Native American skateboards act as the carrier of past and experience” (16). She argues that Craig “utilizes skateboard imagery as a recorder of White Mountain Apache history and stories and skateboard decks as a way to share and carry on culture” (64). Further, the “signature” or crediting aspect of skateboard deck art presents an opportunity to rectify the historical conflation of Native actors with their roles and the omission of Native names from film credits in mainstream films from the studio era. At the beginning of the film’s closing credits the title of the film and skate company is stenciled on the skateboards, so that the boards themselves function to name the film.

This moment also marks the first spoken language in the film, as one of the skaters/Scouts speaks before the credits scroll, naming the rest of the *4wheelwarpony* team, bringing the film’s more abstract identifiericatory imagery together with its photographic por-
traiture. Each performer holds a "4wheelwarpony" deck, repeating and recreditng their team/film/company name and collectively asserting ownership and copyright. These forms of spoken, photographic, and stenciled claiming—related to but distinct from branding and tagging—establish both team and tribal belonging.

Moving Images and Shared Screens
The film’s aesthetics cohere the DIY and generational elements of skateboarding in another way, through the successive waves of technologies manifested in the varied qualities of footage. Craig describes his filmmaking in terms of increasing levels of access to equipment that is itself also rapidly changing—from his pre-Internet reliance on skate zines to absorb the culture, to the rough VHS-to-VHS editing of his earliest films, to his pre-touch-screen attempt to create a version of augmented reality, "this complete interactive world of telling that story," in 4wheelwarpony's multiscreen technology. The changing camera lenses mark the changing moments of filming across time, since the earliest inexpensive wide-angle lens attachments gave images a fishbowl effect, to such an extent that the camera would actually "see" the parameters of its own image. The circular frame marking this technology became a point of reminiscence, as Craig notes: "skateboarders in my generation are very nostalgic for that look" (Craig, private communication).

Despite their static stencil art, skateboard decks become "moving pictures" when they roll; the activity of skateboarding invites elements of cinematic grammar such as camera movement (tracking and handheld shots, panning and tilting), conventional editing to follow human action, and relations of performance and spectatorship. Craig uses stills, slow-motion, and moving camera images to manipulate pace—the speed, slowness, and cessation of movement. The mobility of the camera mimics, as well as records, the easy, fluid, graceful movement of skateboards across paved surfaces, since the filmmaker is often also riding a skateboard. These emphatically kinetic elements of skate films support 4wheelwarpony's repudiation of the stasis implied by many Euro-American images of Indians, while subsuming the photographs into a personal visual narrative of decolonization. Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor conceptualizes the right to movement as a form of Indigenous sovereignty: “The sovereignty of motion means the ability and the vision to move in imagination and the substantive rights of motion in native communities” (182). Vizenor’s emphasis upon mobility—signifying imaginative and cultural change as well as physical movement—disarticulates Indigenous sovereignty from the modes of containment in both the historical reservation system and representational forms such as dioramas and ethnographic photography (what Vizenor calls “ethnographic surveillance” and “the portrait of dominance” [145]), which have attempted to freeze tribal cultures and individuals in one place or form.

In 4wheelwarpony Craig’s images are not simply recordings for preservation or maintenance; they actively reinvent Apache culture even as contemporary skaters mimic traditional appearance through costumed reenactment. The film’s multiple screens imagine time in terms of simultaneity, in contrast to the visual rhetoric of Indianness in popular culture and policy, which imagines a temporally unidirectional funnel toward assimilation, such as before-and-after pictures of boarding school students, or images that present traditionalism as a timeless state, such as Edward S. Curtis’s portraits. Craig’s masterful editing, using split screens and fast-paced streams of still photographs, adds simultaneity to sequence. If traditional celluloid film is an art built upon a bedrock of indexical images in rapid sequence, digital cinema is built upon the spatial crowding of pixels. Craig’s use of split-screen effects combines multiple digital images, embedding simultaneity within each screen frame and disrupting our sense of cinematic space, sequential order, and chronological time. A contrasting technique in the film, stop-motion still-image sequences, makes chronological progression hypervisible and available for critique. Through these techniques of heightened temporal consciousness Craig refuses to separate contemporary youth from their historical context (as boarding school before-and-after photographs attempted to do). The shared-screen relationship is especially important to the film’s interpretation of still and archival photography, embedding multiple images within a frame in order to connect them, rather than creating a timeline of before-and-after images that dissociate past from present. Describing the ways that Native artists use new media to take back the representational capacities of cinema for their own purposes, Faye Ginsburg writes
that "the production of new media forms is also a means of cultural invention that refracts and recombines elements from both the dominant and minority societies" ("Screen Memories" 283). This refraction and recombination are apparent in Craig's juxtaposition of archival and contemporary images and perhaps most powerfully in the strategy of reenactment (reenactments were initially done for We Shall Remain: Geronimo and then restaged and shot separately for 4wheelwarpony). Craig's articulation of Scouts with skateboarders includes the costuming itself; costumed Scouts riding skateboards or holding skateboards; alternating images of Scouts and skateboarders in full-screen shots; split screens juxtaposing archival images of Scouts and others from the Apache Wars period with skateboarders; graphic images of Scouts on skateboard decks; and dissolves or superimposition of Scout and skateboarder images.

In one early sequence several video images of skaters share the screen with a series of stills of a young boy wearing a Ramones t-shirt (a band that profoundly influenced the rise of punk rock from 1974 to 1996) and a sketch-to-painting development of a stylized Apache warrior with a hatchet. The latter images move in flashing, almost stop-motion progression as the child looks up and around and the sketch becomes, by stages, a finished picture; the staccato visual tempo is balanced by the fluidity of the skateboarders in motion in the other frames. In another sequence an archival photograph of boarding school students—possibly a turn-of-the-century class from the Carlisle School—is overlaid with the text "Never Forget," alongside a half-screen profile image of a skateboarder looking up, down, sideways. The frontal medium shot and side views suggest forms of portraiture such as ethnographic portraits; identificatory images such as ID, police, and passport shots; and images that introduce characters or identify actors, such as inserted stills in the opening credits of silent films or the avatar images of new media. The integration of skateboard graphics such as stencil art (derived from both graffiti and comic book styles), still and 2D, and design-oriented forms involves heavy use of typeface and fonts in bold colors moving across the screen in staccato flashes. This dynamic style announces the film's investment in movement and repetition through rapid repositioning of still images into brief suggestions of narrative, as when, late in the film, two Scouts point their guns at one another in alternating shots that evoke and triumphantly playfully diffuse the violence of the past.

The rapidly changing images and multiple screens give the film a sense of abundance, complexity, and formal excess, as each composite frame conveys multiple temporalities, modes of portraiture, and mobile footage of skate stunts, suggesting a larger story just beneath the surface of the image. Craig raids historical image archives and his own to assert the value of Apache families, skateboarding families, and his home community's cultural and historical knowledge. Those larger stories signaled by the images remind us that these communities are both unique and fragile, raising the stakes for visual representations to support positive action off screen.

Skateboarding and Intergenerational Nurture

Craig's 4wheelwarpony documents several generations of skaters, including Craig himself from the age of thirteen or fourteen in the late 1980s and his children; during our interview he estimated that the twenty years of skate footage assembled in the film depict "four generations of skateboarders that all came through" Whiteriver (Hearne with Craig 75). The film's aesthetics also suggest an emphasis on stages of development. For example, several series of still images show drawings and other graphics in various phases of completion, from sketch to finished painting. These sequences convey the importance of process rather than product and a sense of artistic striving—in a word becoming. And while many of the video clips focus on individual stunts, others show interactions between skaters—joking, cheering, watching, building, helping. Craig cultivates a sense of generational nurture between these cohorts of older skaters and very young skaters, perhaps because he worked most closely with them while he was a new father. The shared material culture of skating—supplying boards, sharing graphics, and building ramps—also manifests this welcoming of new skaters.

The youth culture that Craig advocates, which involves bringing up the younger generation and teaching them to take care of each other, is vitally important in the historical context of the genocidal violence of nineteenth-century US colonization; the twentieth-century assimilationist educational programs such as boarding schools, which removed children from traditional models and kin-
ship systems; and the present-day challenges of reservations that have statistically high rates of teen suicide and drug use. Connecting the contemporary dangers to youth of poverty and deculturating education with historical campaigns to eradicate Apaches from their homelands, Craig’s work contends that while Apache history can be overwhelming—he describes the feeling of “being over my head” while learning about “how brutal and terrible the history really is”—it also reveals both political and cultural resources for survival, such as the leadership of Alchesay and the men’s societies and ceremonies (Hearne with Craig 79).

The “playground” of the skate park, and the virtual space of the skate film that is a product of skate park relationships, is a setting that creates opportunities for positive action, peer support, and sharing in a space that is free of violence and substance abuse. Skateboarding, Craig asserts, “was a great sort of shield from all of that” (Craig, private communication), while the yearly skateboarding contests that he organized “were like ceremonies themselves” (Hearne with Craig 77). Anthropologist William Lempert describes Craig’s emphasis on the capacity of skateboarding to address “the high rates of depression, drugs, and suicide among the teenaged male youths on the Fort Apache reservation” (28). According to Craig, 4wheelwarpony is a very charged film for me on many levels. It represents a lot of pride but it’s laced with a lot of despair. Lots of those kids are dead. They’ve committed suicide. They’ve committed homicides. They’ve had their remains scraped off the highways from drunk driving related accidents. Some of them are survivors. Some of those kids are completely washed away by alcoholism and drug addiction. So you are seeing these young men in the prime of their lives. There is a resilience and a strength. (qtd. in Lempert 29)

Craig’s 4wheelwarpony allegorizes this emotional distress through an animated figure with a pumpkin head and a hole in his heart whose wounded spirit is healed by skateboarding. The short animation alludes to the story of a skater nicknamed Pumpkin, who was killed by a drunk driver while walking home from the skate park one night. Craig adopted the image of the pumpkin as one of the 4wheelwarpony team’s graphics after Pumpkin’s death, allowing the skate park family to heal and remember him.

In our interview Craig describes his relationship with the skaters in familial terms: “They became like my little brothers and little sisters. They became like cousins” (Hearne with Craig 77). In particular he notes that positive interventions stemmed from the creation of a protected “playground” and “mini-tribal unit” in the form of the skate park and yearly contest, as well as the engagement of skate youth in a return to tradition through cinematic reenactments. Craig had noticed growing up that there were no equivalents for men to the coming-of-age ceremony for young women, in which women wear traditional camp dresses and jewelry. During his research for We Shall Remain: Geronimo he found that there had once been ceremonies for young men “that had disappeared over time” and during the colonization of the reservation period. In our interview he describes how young men were mentored within Apache communities. How at the age of about twelve, when a boy’s voice starts to change, then you would be divided up from the girls, and you’d be mentored and trained to become a man. . . . And during this time [four to six years] you would be assessed by all the men in the community as to what your strengths were, what your weaknesses were, where you might be best suited, and how we could

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build on your strengths, your abilities. . . . So by the time you've entered into manhood as an adult, you were a specialist . . . of cultural knowledge, whether that meant tracking, hunting, song, going by the stars, herbs—all this incredible wealth of education. (81)

Developing a group of skateboarders as a unit of community actors to perform reenactments of their ancestors was electrifying. Craig was struck by the magic of their resemblance to the historical record of the Scouts: "This is exactly what they looked like. This is exactly how they're described, as being completely fit, good natured and friendly, love to laugh and joke, you know, willing—just ready for adventure. . . . [T]hat's how army officers who were there wrote about them. . . . So for me it was just incredibly beautiful and powerful. It was like a time machine" (84). By generating an occasion for honoring the young men through traditional costume, the film projects created an equivalent valuation for them and their heritage in the present; "for them to be the center of everything that was taking place. . . . We were there to film their history. We were there to depict their culture. Basically, we were pronouncing to them and the whole world that you and where you come from are significant" (84). Thus the film production itself created a space and a model to counter the effects of cultural and economic disenfranchisement, the destructive sense of there being "nothing there" for young men, by reinstating some of the developmental affirmations of traditional coming-of-age ceremonies and intergenerational mentoring. Craig's research into traditional forms of Apache mentoring enabled him to "see the parallels in how we were being skateboarders in Whiteriver. . . . This was not kids trying to not be Indian. This was Apaches—young Apache men—becoming young Apaches in a way completely unique to us, I think, but at the same time still related to the way skateboard culture around the world provides that same environment" (80).

Because there is very little text or speaking in the film, Craig's poem "This is Our Playground," which scrolls during the Pumpkin animation sequence, functions as its primary text, and like the film it is in poetic form. A playground is both a physical place and an indication of gathering; it is a place for children and indicative of community nurturing and provision for youth development. The poem's closing line, "this is our playground," claims for Apache
skaters a sense of joy and humor, as opposed to the stoic Apache fighters of popular cinema. The "playground" of the skate park, and its connection to meaningful, historically specific deck graphics and reenactment practices, can function as what anthropologist Keith Basso calls a "spatial anchor" for moral action—a familiar strategy in Apache place-based systems of storytelling and moral instruction—by allowing the past to inform your understanding of the present, thereby restoring "psychological balance" (91–92). The shielding space of the skate park and its platforms or "stages" for performative expression parallel the territory of the screen in Craig’s film (what Michelle Raheja calls "virtual reservations" [43]), making a place for teens’ unfolding identities.

At the level of production, reenactments and the skate park in 4wheelwarpony connect aesthetics with action, representation with social change and cultural revival. Craig uses film production to explore the depth of the Apache holocaust in relation to current life on the reservation. At the same time he reimagines Apache masculinity through training, renewed ceremony, and coming-of-age rituals, deploying the DIY culture of skateboarding in service of tribal sovereignty and traditional Apache intergenerational support for youth. Expanding the healing function of the skate park to its representation on screen, 4wheelwarpony develops a historical and contemporary recognition of Apache masculinity as nurturing, adaptive, knowledgeable, and resilient.

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Joanna Hearne
The following excerpts are taken from a three-hour Skype conversation between Dustinn Craig, in Mesa, Arizona, and Joanna Hearne, in Columbia, Missouri, on January 24, 2013. It has been edited for both length and readability.

**On Becoming a Filmmaker**

JOANNA HEARNE: How did you become a filmmaker? I know you were a skateboarder first.

DUSTIN CRAIG: The cool thing about skateboarding is it’s very conducive to all kinds of creative types. As a teenager, growing up, I looked at skateboard magazines. Videos weren’t as readily available then. It was pre-Internet. It was cool to do things yourself, that was kind of the culture of skateboarding then—it was still kind of a very punk rock, do-it-yourself ethic. So I think I was just a by-product of that. I was always the kind of kid who was tinkering, doing things like that, playing with my dad’s tools. One day my father brought home a video camera, a big VHS camcorder, from work. We just thought it was the coolest thing ever. So naturally I wanted to film me and my friends skateboarding.

So we’d have these big VHS tapes. You’d have two hours per tape, and pretty soon they started stacking up. This is probably like 1988, ’87, around there. And that was kind of the extent of it—we would film each other and do little skits and goof around but had no way of really editing the material. But while visiting one of my relatives
up on the Navajo Nation, I bumped into some skateboarders there. So we skated with some of the locals there and then went over to their house, and they wanted to show me a skate video that they had made. I thought it was going to be like the kind of tapes that I had—just these long, endless, you know—

**HEARNÉ:** Unedited.

**CRAIG:** Yeah. So they popped it in, and it was edited, and it had a music soundtrack. No titles, no nothing, but that really showed me that it was possible. Immediately, I was like, “How did you do this?” So they—you know, poor kids like myself—they said, “Oh, you just get two VCRs, and you make it just like you would a mix tape.” So we'd have two VCRs stacked on top of each other. In the bottom you’d hit record and then pause, record, pause.

**HEARNÉ:** I've done it.

**CRAIG:** Yeah. And so that began the initial process of editing. But it also, you know—if you're going to commit to that kind of editing, you also have to be very organized. So it all kind of happened very organically as a means to an end. No one else was going to make a skate video in my town, and I happened to have the access to a video camera, and we were able to have two VCRs. And so that was kind of the beginning of it. Once I was able to actually edit down a skate video, add some music, show friends and family, I think that immediate reaction that they got was very similar to my immediate reaction when I first saw these kids' skateboard video. I was amazed!

But in the process of filming with this video camera, I was also sort of intrigued with the footage that I was getting. I had these questions like, “Well, how come my footage doesn’t look like a movie?” And I didn’t know, you know, different formats. I didn’t know there was 35mm film, and so on and so forth. But these things were the questions that entered into my head very early—wondering, “How come I can’t make my footage look that good?” That was always the challenge, trying to make something look really cool with very little gear.

**HEARNÉ:** It's a production-value problem.

**CRAIG:** Yeah, basically. So in that process of putting shots together and filming, it also made me very aware of framing, why I was filming. All of a sudden I started filming, not just as like, “We're just going to film what happens,” but it actually allowed me to start thinking, “Well, I have a purpose when I go film.” And that change developed into directing: “All right, today we’re going to do this. And we’re going to get these tricks.” It did happen very naturally, and then later on, in high school, I got access to video production equipment by taking video production classes, and it just kind of took off from there. But the whole time I was always making skateboard videos with my friends. The joy and the happiness that everyone experienced was a part of these films because you could show it to people. You had an audience that could react and interact with you, and that always made it worth it, and it was always sort of the main motivation for doing and making more.

**HEARNÉ:** There’s a big gap there between being interested in it as a high school student and having this as your career.

**CRAIG:** Even the title, “filmmaker,” was a long time coming because...in some deeply recessed area of my brain I just felt that whatever I was doing was somehow less than what was out there. That was something I had to learn to really deprogram, being from a reservation community. I also think of this as a byproduct of the reservation schooling system in general. This was something that I think I finally was able to come to terms with, maybe, as I got closer to my thirties.

**HEARNÉ:** Was there a particular film or project where you crossed over that barrier: “Okay, I do this professionally”?

**CRAIG:** Yeah. I got married very young, at nineteen. My wife was eighteen, and we had our first son in 1995. I had finished my freshman year at ASU [Arizona State University], and I—again, I was taking art classes and still making skateboard videos—I had skate friends from the city and from the reservation, and my wife and I moved to Tucson. All of the while I had this—I inherited the VHS camcorder, the over-the-shoulder camcorder. It was like a parting gift that I took from the family because I was the one who used it the most. It also doubled as our VCR, because we were just a young married couple, not a lot of money. So it was dual purpose. But I was gathering all this footage. And within a year we moved back to the White Mountain Apache Reservation. I got a job there for
this grant-funded program called Healthy Nations, and it was like
destiny, because the program was utilizing print media, radio, and
video to transmit this really positive campaign about parent-child
communications and all of this mental health stuff. And so already
having a lot of experience, I was able to just fit right in and get hired
and immediately started making more and more projects, all based
in the community.

So that gave me a space—basically an edit bay and cameras and
equipment to just start honing my abilities. And also traveling to
conferences for these kinds of programs helped with giving me a
community to show my work to. So we'd make promotional vid-
eos and PSAs [public service announcements] and whatnot, and
we were also doing some training. We were doing film and video
classes that were free and open to the community, and I was teach-
ing some of those already. And so it was this natural progression.
But even then, again, I was still infected by that concept that I was
good for there, but somewhere out in the great beyond were the
real professionals.

HEARNE: You talked about your dad bringing home a camera that
you could use, and that that access was really important for you in
getting to make these videos. Then your first calling card film, I Be-
long to This, was about your family, and 4wheelwarpony has so many
images of family. It has images of you and your kids, as well as other
kids who are skateboarders. So in ways that are humorous and ways
that are serious it's a film about a community that's also about your
family. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that generational
emphasis in your work.

CRAIG: When it comes to 4wheelwarpony, that really is a portrait of
family. And it's a very special family because it's that family that you
develop at a very young age. As skateboarders in this small town
you grow up together. And you sort of get fostered and mentored by
other skateboarders, and so you build your own little kind of mini-
tribal units. Along the way younger kids are joining the ranks. So
in 4wheelwarpony you'll see footage that goes as far back as 1987, of
me, thirteen or fourteen years old—I'm in there. And that's about
the time of some of our earliest documenting of skateboarding in
Whiteriver. When I moved back as a young, married man and got
my first job, I was also still skateboarding, and a lot of the younger
boys in the community hadn't seen skateboarding. It had kind of
died down in the town. But I was just heavily into skateboarding at
that time, and so I was out there, skateboarding by myself, and be-
cause I had access to all of the equipment, I was still documenting.
So 4wheelwarpony really is this very intimate compilation of over
twenty years of footage, maybe four generations of skateboarders
that all came through.

And a lot of it, the bulk of that material, was gathered when I
was living there for those three years, working for Healthy Nations,
because as a byproduct of one of the events they planned, in 1996,
a youth event. And one of my coworkers was like, "Hey, Dustinn.
You should do a skateboarding contest." They had a small budget
to buy wood. So I started with this—planning to do this contest,
and I didn't think very many people would come. But I let all of my
friends know, up on Navajo Nation, all of the surrounding border
towns, all of the skateboarders within Whiteriver. I reached out to
some of my friends back in Tucson that I had made skateboarding
and just put the word out. And this is, again, 1996, the very
early days of the Internet, so it was literally passing around Xeroxed
flyers and driving out, posting them up, and word of mouth. And
they came. I was able to build all of these skateboard ramps, like a
street course for our competition, and I was able to solicit a bunch
of donations from the skateboard companies themselves. And they
came, and it was an incredible success. We had all of the skateboard
community from the entire White Mountains come to Whiteriver.
But also I had lots of friends from Tucson and from up on Navajo
Nation. So it became the first annual. But it was nice because the
community really got to see skateboarding as a big thing that was
connected to the outside, and it went beyond just these skate rats
in their town.

I think they got to see the sense of community. It was very his-
toric in the sense that this was the first time that you had non-
Native kids coming into our town to participate in an event that
we local kids were putting on for ourselves. Because other times,
when people come to the reservation, it's either to proselytize and
convert, you know—these church efforts and church groups come
in—or maybe it's community service or required events like school
sports. No one’s ever coming across the border to have a good time and be with friends. It did show the youth in our community that we’re just as valid as everyone else out there. And look, we’re making this event happen. We’re making this event happen.

HEARNE: People are coming to us.

CRAIG: Exactly. They’re coming to us because we’re setting the standard.

But I had all of these ramps now—where would they go? For a time they were stored in this warehouse, but we would be able to sneak in and go skate. Eventually there was too much competition over that space, and so I ended up just taking all of the ramps and putting them on a basketball court next to this youth center that our program was connected to. It became the unofficial skate park. But having the ramps out all year round really created something that hadn’t been in Whiteriver before, which was a real place. The one thing that really surprised me at this skateboard contest was how many White Mountain Apache skate kids all came out. Like all of the little surrounding communities. Kids I’d never seen before were out there. And once we had our little skate park, it allowed a place for all of those kids to come and to be. So that instantly created this family environment. Now we were at the skate park. Now we were seeing everybody, on a nearly daily basis, and getting to know one another. I was twenty and pretty close to the top of my game, skateboarding-wise, and so all of these young skateboarders also looked up to me as well, as a positive role model, like a big brother. And that, too, really made me aware of the influence that I had as a young man, as a young father. It made me very cognizant that my actions did affect others in a good way. So again there you have skateboarding feeding and giving me all of these life lessons that I don’t think I would have gotten in any other way, but that gave me such a sense of purpose, that I was significant, that I was making the lives of the people in my community better through sharing and all of these great, positive, fun activities. And so this became an annual event, and it would just get bigger and get better, and more and more people would come. It was a really beautiful time, those three years that I was living there.

From nineteen to twenty-three I was there, and in those three years I really got to know so many of the skateboard kids and the skateboard youth there. They became like my little brothers and little sisters. They became like cousins. And in that time too there were some sad times. We had a kid whose name was Pumpkin. And he was going home after skating at the skate park one night. The lights would turn off at ten during the summer, so that everyone would just kind of go home. And so he was going home one night—he got run over by a drunk driver.

HEARNE: Oh.

CRAIG: And, you know, he was a really great kid. Everybody liked him. He was a good skateboarder. But events like that also allowed the family, if we want to call it that, to pull together and be there for one another, to be there for his family. So again all of this very profound life experience was happening in those three years being there. A lot of the material that’s in 4wheelwarpony comes from that era. It’s a very special time period for all of us, that experience.

I’m hoping that someday I’ll be able to make this film. And I want to interview a lot of those young men. They can all recount each of those contests—what happened one year, who won when, who came from where. They were like ceremonies themselves, that’s how impactful they were, and that’s really what they were. They were like our annual ceremonies.

HEARNE: Did you do the animation [for 4wheelwarpony] as well? It’s a guy with a pumpkin head.

CRAIG: Yeah.

HEARNE: Is that Pumpkin?

CRAIG: Yeah. I think consciously, [it was] the image he was drawing that I made. It was on a fliper for a Halloween skateboard competition that we did, in Whiteriver. And the kids really liked it. I liked it. And it’s actually one of our core graphics for 4wheel, this pumpkin. And so I think consciously it wasn’t him, but it’s like this unconscious tribute to him. And so it kind of has become him. That film of the young guy, the pumpkin head with a hole in his chest, is just this whole story of being incomplete until he found a skateboard.

HEARNE: You’ve done this amazing thing, which is to become a professional filmmaker, and that’s not something that everyone’s been able to do, coming out of skateboarding.

Joanna Hearne
CRAIG: Sometimes I feel a little bit funny about that. You know, it's like I landed on the moon. And that's how big it feels.

On We Shall Remain: Geronimo and 4wheelwarpony

CRAIG: Working on the Geronimo film was also a very profound experience for me because that marked the beginning of my delving into Apache history in a very academic way—utilizing a lot of the ethnographic and anthropological books out there and really starting to get an understanding of what actually took place here in the Southwest and how my community was affected as a result of that.

Within that year all of this culture and cultural images and whatnot became relevant in a way that they had never been before. Now they were real. They were probably the most important elements to my working on that film, because gaining trust in these other Apache communities, talking about a topic that no one really wants to talk about—all of a sudden me knowing my culture meant a lot to the other Apache people that I was talking to. Everything that I did in the way that I went out in the community and even prepared throughout was all incorporating cultural concepts and strategies. I grew up on the reservation; I was surrounded by my culture and community and to a certain extent maybe took a lot of it for granted. And all of a sudden I moved to Boston in the East Coast, and I recognized that “Oh, shit. I can’t make a bad film here. There’s a lot riding on this.” Also the personal aspect of “This is not the story of my community—not the White Mountain community, but these Apache communities are just as precious to me”—especially in traveling, getting to know people there. I took it very, very seriously. And also I knew even then that I was the only filmmaker in that whole series that was that close to their story. I was going to make this film, and then I was going to go move back and live in this community.

HEARNE: Right.

CRAIG: Whereas everyone else gets to, you know, come on board, make a film, [never] interact with these Indians ever again. And so the stakes were high when it came to me. I went through that year—it was probably the most sad and angst-ridden, frustrated year of my life, just going face to face with very privileged, liberal racist naiveté. You know? Like “Oh, we’re helping you.” You know? “It’s a good thing we’re making this series. If it wasn’t for us and our grand wisdom and money, you wouldn’t be here.” To go through that for a whole year was not fun. And also to be delving into this very traumatic, horrible, sad history—and to hear it be just discussed around the table by people completely removed from my culture and my communities and the Southwest.

So I had a very different experience when it came to that series and how it all came about because I was on board at least a year and a half before I even started working on the Geronimo project. One of the short films that I made was about my great-grandfather and his very loose connection to the Chiricahua prisoners of war. It became the film that would open up every foundation meeting. Before anything was said, we’d show that film. And people would watch it, and maybe people would be brought to tears, and they’d recognize that “Wow. This is history. This is how history still resonates in the lives of people today.” I went into that, the process of meeting all of these other Apaches and really just being over my head when it comes to how brutal and terrible the history really is.

Geronimo didn’t broadcast until 2009, but it was completed in 2007. We were the very first production team to begin production—the very first to complete production. And the other four films were still in the pipeline and still being made and all of that. So [over] the next two years the rest of the series was completely put together.

The museum[s] [the National Museum of the American Indian and the Heard Museum] asked me to participate in this [Remix] project. But now all of the cultural research and history research had given me this new perspective on how I looked at home and my own community and Apache culture and the differences in Apache cultures. In that sense, because I was more informed and educated on all levels, it allowed my hometown and my hometown culture to become that much more precious and meaningful, being able to recognize that “Wow, these young men were White Mountain Apaches, this is a White Mountain Apache skate band, and this is our little tribe.” Recognizing that in the world of skateboarding we were this unique little group unto ourselves, and it was very, very cool. Also recognizing that the level of talent—just the level of talent of skateboarding there in that little town was also incredible.

Joanna Hearne
On Reenactments

CRAG: Another cool thing was for the Geronimo film, the We Shall Remain film, we did reenactments—very limited reenactments.

HEARNE: I was going to ask you about those and the carryover. I think it’s really important.

CRAG: In doing research on Apache Scouts, I recognized that lots of these Apache Scouts were in their late teens, early twenties. Young men, just in the prime of their lives and going out, doing this incredibly dangerous work. They’re tracking down very powerful, formidable Apaches. But at the same time you’re going into a world where anyone’s going to shoot you on sight, just because you are an Apache. The territories of Arizona and New Mexico were crawling, swarming with citizen mobs, mercenaries, bounty hunters, criminals—just the worst of the worst were going out to Arizona and New Mexico. So they [the Apache Scouts] were going out into an environment, putting their necks on the line for the greater good of all of their territory, but [they] still could be killed at any time by anyone. That too allowed me to really come to admire their plight and what they did.

But what I really enjoyed in learning about the culture was learning about how young men were mentored within Apache communities. How at the age of about twelve, when a boy’s voice starts to change, then you would be divided up from the girls, and you’d be mentored and trained to become a man—so you were kind of entering into the realm of men—and slowly become taught as you grew for the next four to six years of your life. And during this time you would be assessed by all the men in the community as to what your strengths were, what your weaknesses were, where you might be best suited, and how we could build on your strengths, your abilities, making you the best you could be. So by the time you’ve entered into manhood as an adult, you were a specialist, like a PhD holder of cultural knowledge, whether that meant tracking, hunting, song, going by the stars, herbs—all this incredible wealth of education.

And I could see distant parallels within how we would allow in young kids, within our little skate community there in Whiteriver. You had those of us who were at the top of the chain who were the

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best ability-wise, you know. I was up there, being one of the oldest. So the kids looked to me to set the example. And I did. I tried to be very endearing and accepting of everyone. I'd make friends with the little guys that would have cheap, generic skateboards, and we'd all be doing the hand-me-down thing. We'd whip out spare parts; we'd put this kid a board together. I was basically teaching these kids how to be as well. Just seeing how some of these kids would come into the community, how they'd start to demonstrate talent and build their own little reputation and slowly rise in the ranks among all the little skate clan, was really neat. That's what I also saw reflected in these old anthropology books describing how young men came up within Apache society.

For the Geronimo film, *We Shall Remain*, one of the things that I'm most proud of is those reenactments. We have two main reenactments there. We have little boys running at the beginning, and then we have this war dance of Chiricahua Indians. Then we had the Scouts who captured Geronimo. So I was actually able to cast White Mountain Apaches as our Scouts, and they were also able to cast Chiricahua descendants to come in and to depict Chiricahua for the first time.

HEARNE: Your ancestors.

CRAIG: Yes, yes! I don’t think very many people know that. It was such a great tool, I thought, for promotions, but that’s kind of over the heads of people out east I guess. Once I learned the age of these Scouts and what they were—looking at the old period photos, everybody’s fit and lean—I was like, “Yeah, these are skateboarders. These are totally skateboarders.” Because in thinking about skateboarding as an activity, it weeds out kids very quickly. You know, skateboarding has an instant appeal—like “Oh, that’s cool. It looks neat”—until you try it. Then you recognize, “Wow, this is very difficult.” So you start trying, and some kids start learning and gaining some ability, and then that first big injury happens. Boom. They go down. They go down hard. And at that point in time lots of kids give it up because no one likes to get hurt. But those kids that can push through, heal, come back—they come back more experienced and a little bit more hardened but also with a greater respect for how dangerous the activity is. So it’s this interesting process where the better you become, the more dangerous it gets, and the better you become, you kind of have to be performing at that level in order for it to be enjoyable. You can’t just lay low. It’s a very aggressive activity, but it’s not one where you have a coach or a team. It’s very individualistic, just like Apache culture from the time period of the 1880s.

HEARNE: It’s expressive.

CRAIG: Yes! And so that’s what I saw. I was able to call up my skate buddies from Whiteriver—they were all in their early twenties at the time—and cast them as White Mountain Apache Scouts. And when I brought them out—we were out in, I think, Douglas, Arizona. It’s way down, close to the Mexico-New Mexico border. So we’re shooting out there and behind the Chiricahua Mountains, in the areas where lots of this stuff actually took place. Initially I was like “Yeah, it would be cool to dress up the guys and see them as Scouts.” We did the reenactments toward the very end of our production. We brought in these Apache boys and saw them. They were all kind of shy and awkward, putting on wigs, getting dressed up. These reenactments took place over three and a half days. It was the biggest shoot that we had and the biggest project that I had directed. Big, full grip trucks and pyro technicians and paramedics and over a hundred people—a hundred to do these little productions. So we’re burning. I don’t know how much a day, but more than people make in a year, that’s how much we’d burn up on just a day to shoot. It was the biggest thing that I had done, and it was kind of neat that that’s what they got to come see me do.

But at the same time I was really just happy that they were there, and we were happy to hang out. We got them all dressed, and initially they were shy, a little bit awkward, feeling, “Oh, I’m dressed funny. I’ve got this wig.” And I was so busy, I couldn’t be with them as much as I’d hoped. But as the day got on, they got used to their outfits and then eventually forgot because they had been in them so long. Then they were just themselves. There was this point in time where I was looking at them, just joking around and being natural, and it was like, “Holy shit.” These are Apaches! Real White Mountain Apaches. This is exactly what they looked like. This is exactly how they’re described, as being completely fit, good natured and friendly, love to laugh and joke, you know, willing—just ready.
for adventure. Just looking for new life experience—and that’s how army officers who were there wrote about them.

**HEARNE:** Ah, interesting.

**CRAIG:** It was. So for me it was just incredibly beautiful and powerful. It was like a time machine. These boys that I’d known my whole life, seeing them grow up from like nine years old up until their twenties, I dress them up, and I see them. But also to see their own pride and recognizing “Wow, look at me! I’m an Apache!”—to make that real and tangible and for them to be the center of everything that was taking place. We were there to film them. You know? We were there to film their history. We were there to depict their culture. Basically, we were pronouncing to them and the whole world that you and where you come from are significant. It blows my mind.

So we had all these pictures: the boys goofing around and playing. And I had my own video camera on set, and I’d catch these candid moments of them walking around and all this stuff. When I came back and started working on the remix, I had all this footage, and seeing the boys dressed up is just so poignant and powerful for me, that I was like, “I have to incorporate this.” So that’s kind of how I started developing *awheelwarpony*. Because also in that time period of working on the *Geronimo* film, I was also creating art, because I was becoming inspired by all the new cultural information I was learning and that other Apaches were sharing with me. So my art now was becoming more meaningful as well, and that’s where a lot of the Apache graphics on *awheelwarpony* skateboards come from. That’s what they’re inspired by, is the history and the culture. So that’s what I wanted to do, was emphasize “This is what I’m learning, and this is the culture that made me into the man that I am.” And yes, it is skateboard culture, but it’s a unique skateboard culture because it exists only in this one little place in Whiteriver. So that really was the driving force for wanting to create *awheelwarpony*.

You know, nobody had seen our own boys dressed up the way we used to dress up. And that was always a big burning question for [people] like myself, and I’m pretty sure any young man, like when you go home to the tribal community, at least there in White Mountain and the other Apache communities, you can go to cultural events. The main one that happens each summer is the coming-of-age ceremony for young women. I’d participated in those my whole life, and you see women in their camp dresses and basically traditional dress: moccasins, traditional jewelry. And then the men are just in Wranglers, cowboy boots, and a cowboy hat. As a boy I was like “Well, what do we wear?” And then even recognizing that “Well, the girl is honored and cherished with this beautiful grand ceremony. What about us boys? Are we not of value?”

One of the neat things was that, again, just this cultural research and study that I was doing, I also learned that [at the] same time—when the boy’s voice changes is the same time that the girl has her menstrual cycle, that’s kind of what they’re equivalent to—that the men would actually perform a very similar ceremony for young boys to initiate and bring them into the culture of men. And that had disappeared over time. But it was awesome to recognize that there was that balance and equity within the culture, pre-reservation. That yes, our young men were in fact highly prized and valued and considered just as sacred as young women. Because they were vital components for the continuation of the entire community, and there was a lot riding on their shoulders, both the men and women. Teaching and mentoring and educating young people was taken very, very seriously. So that’s also what I really enjoyed; we got to see our young men dressed up. And seeing community members react, “Wow! They look amazing! They look so beautiful.” It was something that had really not been done. We called it out of our series and made it tangible. Just by doing it, we made it appear. We made it a part of this reality today.

And so now these boys, they love when there’s an opportunity to dress up like that. And the push that a few of us are trying to make is, maybe we can go and dress like that at a traditional ceremony. Those are the discussions that are taking place within the Apache community now: “Well, yes! What do we say to our young men when we don’t have anything for them?” On one end we say, “Yes, culture and language are important, but then what do we have for you?” People, just within the larger Native community, just really recognized something special in those photographs. You cannot deny the unspoken power of having White Mountain Apaches portray White Mountain Apaches.

Joanna Hearne
HEARNE: It’s huge.

CRAIG: That was one thing too that I think a lot of the community really appreciated was the fact that “Yeah, this is what we looked like. This is what we looked like.” Because you watch movies that have Apaches in them, and they’re not Apaches. We all know that and recognize that.

HEARNE: Ira Chandler, or whoever. No, I know. I’ve watched them.

CRAIG: Yeah. Just seeing the images has been very transformative, and it’s helped a great deal for some of the young men who got to experience that.

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On Apache Scouts: An Untold Story

CRAIG: The rhetoric of Arizona in the time period [of the 1870s] is just completely, absolutely, overtly racist and hostile toward Apaches especially but just Indians in general. Because that time period really—it does represent the last of the Indian Wars. The last part of the country. They’re the only impediment to fulfilling America’s manifest destiny. Everyone knows it is the end game too, so the violence and brutality is also unlike what happened before. You add on top of that a lot of the soldiers and men coming out west were veterans of the Civil War, where they’re witnessing this wholesale slaughter of humans.

HEARNE: They’re traumatized already.

CRAIG: Yeah. So it’s just a terrible time for Indians in the Southwest. From 1850 on to [the] 1890s was just—it is the end times, you know. I think they really recognized that that’s what was taking place. Like if someone was a devout Christian, and they’re witnessing the Book of Revelations take place right outside their door. It’s happening.

I’m actually developing—I have a new project in the works that will be on PBS hopefully within two years from now, that we have gotten support for, and it’s on Apache Scouts.

HEARNE: I saw it on Vision Maker Media—I remember seeing that coming down the pike.

CRAIG: That’s kind of exciting because this story is going to be told from just the White Mountain perspective. Because the White Mountain Apaches are distinguished from the other Apache tribes in that we were the very first to enlist as Apache Scouts. I’m really presenting it as a political strategy, as a result of recognizing that this old world was coming to an end. So this is really a forward-thinking strategy which was the last hope of taking a stake and making a claim in the new world. That’s really what all of my research has taught me. But the writings in academia on Apache peoples are completely Chiricahua-centric. Because of the iconography of Geronimo and others like him, none of the Western Apache leaders have really been written about, despite the fact that they, too, were every bit as formidable, if not more formidable, than all of these other Chiricahua leaders that have volumes and volumes of books constantly being written and rewritten.

HEARNE: And a million Hollywood movies.

CRAIG: Yeah, but it’s slow going because I’m actually doing the research as I’m making the film. Because there’s no book on who they were and what they did. A lot of it relies on trying to find families who are connected—that still have oral stories—but also making a lot of educated speculation about what was happening. But as a result of that the White Mountain Apache tribe is still on their aboriginal territory, and that is a victory story that isn’t told.

The reality is that pretty much the majority of the entire Apache campaign, the successes, can be attributed to Apache Scouts and their tactics. But most of these officers who were in charge at the time were coming from the East, you know, straight out of West Point. They’re writing to their superiors to try and create a career for themselves. So they’re not going to be writing in the context of “Wow, these brilliant Apache men showed me the way and saved my life.” It’s always like “I led the expedition. We were successful in killing fifteen hostiles. Blah blah blah.” And that’s it. There’s never any mention of the Apache Scouts, but they really were the single most significant factor in bringing the war to a close a lot quicker and in the process saving thousands of lives by preventing further war. But when it comes to the Geronimo mythology and all of the lore surrounding him, they’re always cast as the turncoat traitors—“Why are you hunting down the freedom fighter?”—when the freedom fighter’s not really a freedom fighter. He’s more of a thug, human trafficker, gunrunner. He’s working in the underworld and
destabilizing the period for everyone. And that’s why people are out to bring him down.

That’s also the sad part of our contemporary histories. The movies, cinemas, and comic books have really kind of replaced what your grandparents were saying in the '60s and before. Because you could bring up that name—back then I’ve heard people would speak very harshly about him. But now, because of the celebrity status, it’s kind of just been adopted. Wave the flag of Geronimo, and that summarizes all of your pride. There’s a lot of misinformation out there, even within our own communities. So talking about the Scouts—it’s too is a very loaded subject. Hollywood renditions are always neat, and they’re over in succinct time, and they have a convenient polarity: good guys, bad guys. It’s as simple as that, and there’s no gray.

One of the boys that is in 4wheelwarpony is actually the great-great-grandson of Chief Alchesay, who was the last chief of the White Mountain Apache tribe and who was like the right-hand man of General Crook. He was actually one of the very first Apache Scouts to enlist. He enlisted at about nineteen or twenty years and embarked on the very first implementation of utilizing the Scouts against the Tonto Apaches. So this was the Tonto Basin campaign. And this was 1872. This young man, Alchesay, emerged from that as a Medal of Honor winner on Crook’s recommendation, along with about nine other Apaches. Then he would go on to become chief. He was there at the end when they shipped Geronimo away. He led the tribe into the 1900s, and he was always an advocate for the tribe. He was friends with presidents. He’d write letters to them, and they would answer. He was really an incredible character, and the fact that he’s absent from history is amazing to me.

But at least now I recognize that having this position allows me to try and utilize it to help enlighten and share a lot of what I’ve learned about my culture and my history and the history of Native America and the United States and all of this conquest. It’s to try and also slip that in and to make the young people aware of that on some level. Because I’m one of them, it’s sort of like I’m vouched for, and then that allows me to sort of, maybe if they’re not asking questions, I can say, “So, do you know what the red headband means?” “Well, you know those four crosses on the logo? You know what that stands for?” And so then it can become a lesson.

It’s a Good Day to Bike

Indigenous Futures in Ramona Emerson’s Opal

SUSAN BERNARDIN

Death is the endgame of televisual Westerns: its very repetitiveness an anxious recognition of the unfinished business of Indigenous presence in this settler nation. Indians, as Michelle Rhee notes in Reservation Reelism, “are ascribed the value of absence through assimilation and disappearance and the value of excess through the compulsion in Hollywood media to return continually to the scene of Indian-white contact” (15). In his 1993 novel Green Grass, Running Water Thomas King repeatedly exposes the compulsion of the Western to disappear Native people even as its myriad stagings in popular culture, government policy, and national mythology might seem to indicate the opposite. Blackfoot characters in the novel variously reckon with the Western’s tenacious screen life and cultural life force: from Portland, the ephemeral Hollywood extra forced to wear a rubber nose to look more like the Indian the director had in mind, to Eli, the English professor who devours Western “romances,” to Latisha and a suite of other characters, both Native and non-Native, who watch the same Western on TV.

These characters’ close encounters with the Western cinematic archive resonate across Indigenous communities in the United States and Canada. For writers such as Thomas King and filmmakers such as Ramona Emerson the act of watching Indians on TV and in movie theaters appears as a “rite of passage” to their coming of age and to awareness of their “place” as Indigenous peoples in these two settler nations. In her study Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western Joanna Hearne highlights cinematic scenes of “textually embedded” performances of Native spectatorship to underscore “media production and consumption as acts of commu-