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An Aesthetic of Authenticity: The Use of Turquoise in American (Counter)Culture

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An Aesthetic of Authenticity: The Use of Turquoise in American (Counter)Culture

Turquoise is a distinctive part of the material culture of the Indigenous tribes of the American Southwest, including the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, and Pueblo peoples. The stone, particularly its color, is situated within complex systems of culture and meaning for each tribe, but the physical nature of material culture makes such pieces accessible for outsiders to borrow, buy, or steal. The aesthetic of the southwestern Indigenous tribe, traced in this paper through the use of turquoise, has been drawn upon by non-Native Westerners pursuing authenticity in their American lives. My findings suggest that true authenticity is marked by authentic engagement, and as aestheticization moves toward fetishization, the contextual cultural meaning is lost, replaced by superficial commercial value. I conclude that those seeking authenticity through Indigenous cultures should consider matching their aesthetic interests with actual engagement that seeks to achieve mutually beneficial ends.

In most every culture, jewelry and adornment act as essential pieces of material culture. Wearing jewelry displays to the world how we see ourselves, our relations to the people around us, our place in the societal or cosmic order. Before we can open our mouths, our jewelry speaks for us. Given the cultural and rhetorical importance of jewelry, it is no surprise that there exists huge variation, ranging from headwear to belts to ankle cuffs and toe rings. Home to more than six hundred Indigenous tribes, the land and the people of North America have yielded a wide array of jewelry types, styles, and motifs. The Wampanoag of the northeast make wampum jewelry out of quahog clams, and many tribes throughout the region make jewelry using porcupine quills; Great Plains tribes such as the Lakota, Dakota, and Cheyene are known for their beadwork; the Muscogee and neighboring southeastern tribes make broad gorget pendants out of shells, wood, metal, or other materials; the formline art characteristic of the Pacific Northwest is often carved onto pendants or cuffs by the Tlingit, Haida, and others. These represent only a small sample of the beauty and diversity of the material culture on the continent. However, common Western conceptions and scholarly sources alike focus almost singularly on

the southwestern corner of the continent and the silver and turquoise jewelry of the Hopi, Zuni, Navajo, and Pueblo peoples. Few pieces of Indigenous material culture have captured the attention of Euro-Americans quite like turquoise has, prompting a century of non-Native consumption and use of the stone in its beautiful, blue-green glory. While turquoise, silver, and the jewelry lapidarists and silversmiths create from them are doubtlessly beautiful, the question remains as to why these pieces have dominated Euro-American conceptions of "Native American Jewelry" over many of the equally technically impressive and visually stunning crafts of tribes across the continent.

Turquoise: Orientalist Origins

Turquoise is a rare and highly valued gemstone, natural to only a few of the most arid regions but highly valued across the globe for its beauty and symbolic meaning. The word "turquoise" derives from the French, meaning "Turkish," which refers to the gemstone's entry into Europe through Turkey. The stone has a chemical composition of $\text{CuAl}_6(\text{PO}_4)_4(\text{OH})_8 \cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$; it is formed exclusively in dry regions, where copper-rich water seeps through channels in the ground and reacts with phosphorus and aluminum to form a collection of microscopic crystals ("Turquoise Description"). These crystals can range in color from dull to vibrant blue and green hues to which it gives its name, often with black or white matrices decorating the surface of the stone, made by the residue of the host material within which the turquoise formed. Due to the niche environmental circumstances needed to form turquoise, it is among the rarer gems, found primarily in mines in China, Iran, Egypt, and the southwestern United States. In the United States, turquoise deposits can be found primarily in Arizona, New Mexico, California, Colorado, and Nevada. In spite of its rarity, there is evidence of the widespread usage of

turquoise by Indigenous peoples across the continent, from the mosaic ornamentations of the Aztec, Toltec, Maya, Mixtec, Tarascan cultures of Mesoamerica to the jewelry and cabochon decorations of the Pueblo, Hopi, Zuni, and Navajo cultures of the southwestern desert regions of the United States (Thibodeau et. al). Each culture attributes individual importance to the stone, but some symbolic value appears to be shared across cultures and even across continents. Indeed, in North Africa and Southwestern Asia as well as on the American continent, turquoise is commonly valued for its color. Blue rarely occurs in nature and is thus difficult to replicate with dye, making any blue item valuable in trade. The color is especially important for those living in the arid deserts where turquoise forms, as it symbolizes life-giving water (Bahadur). To this end, turquoise is associated with spiritual protection as well as physical sustenance—ancient Egyptians used the stone in funerary rites, Pueblo peoples believe that the color wards off witches, and the Navajo wear it for protection as well. Globally, many cultures have developed complex systems of meaning regarding turquoise as it factors into rituals and religious ceremonies as well as daily life.

Turquoise's eastern origin and its cultural significance to the people of the Central and East Asian regions led Westerners to attribute to the stone an Orientalist association that primed Euro-American settlers' future interpretations of Indigenous turquoise jewelry. The location of turquoise mines in Persia and Egypt, as well as the stone's entry into Europe through Turkey, situated turquoise firmly in "the Orient," which Edward Said explains is a "European invention...a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences," all of which are decidedly "Other" (qtd. in Burt 39). Turquoise, as an important and symbolic part of the culture of the region, was incorporated into this "Other"ed identity, its deep meanings flattened to fit the West's stereotype of Eastern spiritual mysticism. Said goes on

to explain that "the Orient had helped define Europe (or the West) as its controlling image, idea, personality, experience" (Said qtd. in Burt 39). In the case of the Eastern "Orient," attributing primitive mysticism and backwards beliefs to the people of the Middle and Near East allowed Western Europeans to reify themselves as a civilized, advanced, enlightened society. When European colonists began to settle themselves across the Atlantic, in the Americas, the Indigenous tribes and peoples became the new Other—"Indians," as they were originally thought to be. The history of shifting views and stereotypes of Native peoples represents a constant re-establishment of the Other ultimately intent on identifying the hegemonic American culture. This Othering of Indigenous people was doubtlessly facilitated by the ease with which Euro-Americans could apply the Orientalist stereotypes they had formed of Asians, Middle Easterners, and North Africans onto Indigenous Americans. Colonial ideas of the inferiority of the non-Western Other intensified through the ethnographic study of Indigenous tribes and the development of cultural evolutionary theory (Burt Ch. 4). Turquoise, a small but vibrant piece of material culture with its characteristic blue-green color, became as emblematic of Indigenous Otherness as it was of Eastern Otherness in Europe, representing a pagan mysticism that seemed primitive and unevolved to Western onlookers. The stone's cultural significance, particularly in the Pueblo, Hopi, Zuni, and Navajo tribes of the American Southwest, contributed to the Western idea of Indigenous people as the Other against which Euro-Americans could contrast themselves, and later project themselves, in the process of constructing their own identities.

The American Southwest: An Unmined Cultural Resource

Prior to the twentieth century, the American Southwest was largely unknown to Anglo-Americans, colonized mostly by Spanish settlers. Anglo Americans traced their ancestry back to

the more temperate British island, and they had settled largely on the lush east coasts of the New World. Thus, the desert was frighteningly unfamiliar to most Americans, reminiscent of the biblical wrath of an Old Testament God. "The desert was a landscape of 'brimstone, and salt, and burning,'" writes David W. Teague, quoting Deuteronomy, "'that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath'" (Deuteronomy 29:23 qtd. in Teague Ch. 1). This sentiment is part of a brader trend, connecting the wilderness with that which is "'deserted,' 'savage,' 'desolate,' 'barren'—in short, a 'waste,' the word's nearest synonym," as William Cronon explains in "The Trouble with Wilderness." For those whom the conception of life was lush and green, fed by consistent rainfall and rivers that ran from the Atlantic Ocean, the red and yellow sands of the southwestern deserts appeared barren and lifeless. "The desert itself hindered the nation's achievement of its Manifest Destiny," writes Teague, "because most Anglo Americans had no idea of how to settle it" (ibid). Physical and aesthetic barriers kept Anglo Americans from moving into the deserts of the Southwest for centuries. In 1837, Washington Irving declared that the desert may "'ever remain an irreclaimable wilderness, intervening between the abodes of civilization, and affording a last refuge to the Indian. Here, roving tribes of hunters, living in tents or lodges, and following the migrations of the game, may lead a life of savage independence, where there is nothing to tempt the cupidity of the white man'" (qtd. in Teague Ch. 1). By way of neglect, the desert was temporarily preserved for the Indigenous peoples that lived there, as it represented the sole part of the country's landscape that white settlers could not wring dry. However, the loss of the frontier prompted white Americans to turn to the desert as one of the only unexplored areas of the continent.

For European settlers, the desert's greatest resource was not material. The first colonists, Spanish missionaries, "saw the land as a field on which to spread their religious culture," converting the Indigenous peoples of Mexico and Southwestern America to Catholicism (Teague Ch. 2). The beginning of the twentieth century ushered in a bout of frontier anxiety that left Anglo Americans scrambling for a new source of identity. American identity was founded in large part on a pioneering spirit and the promise of the frontier. After hundreds of years of violent intrusion and invasive settlement, the country had been settled from coast to coast, with many midwestern and Pacific territories gaining statehood in the second half of the nineteenth century. Of the continental territories, only Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona remained unclaimed by the turn of the century. The latter two were desert land originally part of Mexico, populated mostly by Indigenous tribes and the Spanish missionaries. After a series of treaties placed the land under American ownership, Anglo settlers began to travel to the deserts of the Southwest in order to scope out the land for its potential wealth. Among these explorers were a collection of "imaginative men" (Frederic Remington qtd. in Teague Ch. 2), literary and visual artists who "began in earnest to direct their creative energy to invent new ways of conceiving of North American deserts. Dime novel writers, as well as literary authors like Mark Twain (*Roughing It*), gave new life to the arid landscape by reimagining it as an open frontier upon which one may reinvent themselves. Similarly, several nineteenth-century artists took inspiration from the desert landscape and the people that lived on it, with painters like Frederic Remington portraying the shrubby "chaparral and colorful dust swirling around horses' hooves and stark mountains looming over the shoulders of cowboys" (Teague Ch. 2). Americans found aesthetic value in the desert, "important primarily as a wide-open backdrop for human undertakings...incidental to cowboys and Indians and wildlife" (ibid). That Indigenous people

bridged the gap between white pioneers and desert wildlife is hardly accidental; Native peoples were part of the landscape, secondary characters even when featured on their own land. Ben Burt writes, "Western imaging, particularly painting and photography, has a long and continuing tradition of portraying subject peoples—whether governed and exploited from Europe or dispossessed by colonial settlement—as if they were survivals from an earlier age who have been overtaken by the process of civilization," celebrating the imperial conquest of the land and the subjugation of its people as a part of the colonial process (Burt 206). Photography continues to be recognized as a tool of colonialism: many tribes, including the Hopi, ban photography on their reservations and especially around their sacred sites; others, like the Zuni and Navajo, require a photography permit (Gilbert).

Many of the most famous portrayals of American Indigenous people, including those among the tribes of the Southwest, came from photographer Edward S. Curtis. Curtis spent more than two decades creating *The North American Indian*, a forty-volume compilation of photographs capturing the lives of Indigenous individuals whom he considered to be "yet in a primitive condition" (Curtis qtd. in Egan 59). His photographs, Shannon Egan argues, served various rhetorical purposes in the construction of American identity, especially during the nation's nativist movement following World War I. As the United States claimed new influence as a dominant world power, white America began to seek to define itself outside of its European origin. Within this context, Curtis's photographs, which carefully framed Native peoples "as ancient relics fixed in a permanent, ahistorical past," established Indigeneity as the "new, emphatically American antiquity" (Egan 64). Thus, Indigenous art, culture, and tradition grew to be understood as Anglo-American heritage, replacing the Greco-Roman aesthetic that bound the burgeoning nation too tightly to its Old World roots. Particularly, Curtis employed a "blurred

focus" and the primitivist abstraction of Indigenous designs and motifs to capture an image of Indigeneity onto which white Americans could easily impress themselves (59). As assimilationist policies corrupted Americans' stereotypical ideas regarding the pure, pre-colonial authenticity of Indigenous tribes, Curtis shifted his focus further south and west, and began advocating for the preservation of southwestern tribal cultures (such as religious dances of the Pueblo people) as the remains of all that was "quintessentially 'Indian'" (75). The American Southwest was, for Indigenous aesthetes, a rich wellspring of "native" Americanness, a New World heritage entirely divorced from Europe. Americans began to develop romantic stereotypes of the Southwest as the remaining source of authentic Indigeneity in the modern era, and the cultural art and artifacts of the tribes of the region stood as symbols of such authenticity for white Americans to appropriate and incorporate into their national and individual identities.

The literary and artistic mythology of the desert combined with the development of railroad infrastructure in the late 1800s brought an increase of Anglo tourists to the deserts of the American Southwest. The railroad carried imperialist intrusion across the country at high speeds, "accelerate[ing] the violent dispossession of Native American lands and the expansion of capitalism thereafter," cutting through the land and bringing with it a convoy of Eastern elites looking to taste the American wilderness from the comfort of a luxury train car (Blackhawk 564). Anxious to experience "native" American authenticity for themselves, Euro-Americans were brought to the region by the tourism services. Most famously, the Harvey Company offered its "Indian Detour" as "the newest way to see oldest America," advertising living history spectacles and the novel opportunity to experience first-hand Indigenous authenticity (qtd. in Oliphant 97). The "Detour" was unique in that drivers encouraged tourists to ask to "stop [the train] at any time to take pictures, explore, or purchase souvenirs from Native artists" along the

established route (Oliphant 100). This aided exploration of "authenticity" was actually a constructed experience based on the romantic stereotypes developed by authors and artists decades prior, "an ethnographic adventure in which the region existed largely for the pleasure of white visitors, with non-Anglo communities serving as entertainment with little or no control over their representations" (102). White Anglos directed the experience of the Southwest for tourists on the train as well as off; Oliphant notes that the Detour drivers were always men dressed as stereotypical white cowboys, while the couriers were women wearing stereotypically "Navajo" clothing, including turquoise jewelry (115). Turquoise, with all the symbolic mysticism and meaning attached to it, became emblematic of Indigenous authenticity, used to integrate the white workers of the Harvey Company into the romanticized landscape. Tourists then turned to Indigenous artisans and souvenir craftsmen to produce for them pieces of this authenticity to purchase, often in the form of turquoise jewelry. This desire birthed an international market fraught with debates regarding the authenticity of turquoise pieces at chemical, cultural, and commercial levels. What non-Native consumers expected of and from their turquoise pieces paradoxically changed the way the traditional craft was made and marketed.

From the outset, Anglo Americans' understanding of the untouched authenticity of the southwestern Indigenous tribes was flawed. Prior to the twentieth-century cultural tourism boom, Spanish settlers had occupied the land that is now Mexico and the southwestern United States for four hundred years. Although the Spanish presence was inarguably oppressively colonial, doing both physical and cultural harm to the Indigenous population, the relationship between the two groups was more transactional than were those between the Eastern Indigenous peoples and the British, Dutch, and French settlers (Oliphant 99-100). As a result, the overarching culture of the Southwest upon Anglo arrival reflected Old World, Mexican, and American Indigenous

influences—hardly the example of pre-contact, anti-European authenticity that Anglo Americans sought. Material evidence for this cultural mixing can be found in the turquoise and silver jewelry that became emblematic of the region.

Turquoise and Indigenous Cultural Significance

Turquoise has a long history of cultural significance in southwestern North America and Mesoamerica. Precontact archaeological records include several turquoise pieces, many of which contain mineral deposits that can be traced back to mines in present-day New Mexico, near Chaco Canyon (Lidchi 72). Traded between Southwestern and Mesoamerican peoples, turquoise featured prominently on ceremonial weapons, armor, accessories, and jewelry "worn or wielded by rulers, priests, or other high-status individuals" (Thibodeau et al. 1). It was not until the mid-nineteenth century, however, that turquoise began to be combined with silver to make jewelry such as is commonly seen today. This transition was the result of the forced resettlement of Navajo people onto reservations near U.S. army outlets. There, they learned and honed silversmithing techniques that they used to make jewelry, becoming a "signature craft for Navajo and Pueblo peoples" (Lidchi 72). Government Indian schools began to incorporate jewelry-making into the curriculums for their Native students in an effort to preserve Indigenous crafts in an increasingly modernized, Westernized space (Baxter 235). Thus, the "traditional" jewelry which Anglo tourists saw as a hallmark of untouched Indigenous authenticity was the product of cultural contact and exchange.

Turquoise and the Tourist Market

As the tourist market expanded, the production of turquoise jewelry continued to transform in order to fit the demands of white Americans. Many of the pieces, though "collected as a reflection of native taste in decoration...already reveal the influence of Euro-American design" (Baxter 235). Common motifs such as thunderbirds, arrows, sun symbols, and kachina figures were typically incorporated into commercial jewelry in accordance with the demand of tourists; these images appealed Euro-Americans because they "satisfied their ideas about tribal image, historical representation, or aesthetic impact," reifying romantic and spiritual stereotypes surrounding Indigenous life (235-36). Cultural significance was often ignored or grossly misappropriated, due in no small part to the efforts of the Pueblos, Hopi, and Zuni to keep "their most sacred motifs away from prying non-Indian chroniclers" (235). Economic pressures dictated what and how turquoise jewelry was made: Euro-American standards of authenticity caused silversmiths to begin "signing" their work with hallmarks, but pieces began to be "made smaller, with cheap materials and little attention to the effectiveness of the item's design" (236). Gladys Reichard's *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism* offers a "'piece by piece' scrutiny" of the "manifold symbolic associations" woven into Navajo ways of life, both the ceremonial and the everyday, exhaustively describing the meaning inherent in the smallest elements of Navajo culture, including turquoise (Wyman 525). Catering to Euro-American tourists, Indigenous artists crafted these consumer pieces without the attention to symbolic detail and design that they naturally incorporated into pieces made for Native use. Later, Euro-American demand sparked the creation of new types of jewelry, including smaller earrings, choker necklaces, bolo ties, and concha belts (Baxter 238). While not "authentic" to the Navajo, Pueblo, Zuni, or Hopi cultures, or the traditional jewelry-making practices of these tribes, these motifs, methods, and products

were valued by Anglo-Americans as genuine pieces of "native" America. As Paula Baxter writes, "collector-oriented writing was most concerned with the mechanics of Indian jewelry creation—the what, how, and when—but less so with where, and never with why" (240). Important to tourists, anthropologists, and hobbyist collectors was that pieces were made by Native hands from Native resources.

Authenticating Legislation

As the production of Southwestern turquoise jewelry increased to meet national and international demand, anxieties regarding authenticity grew into a legal movement to protect America's Native cultural resource. As worries that Native authenticity was deteriorating as modernization set in, the U.S. government established the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB) in 1935 with the intent of legitimizing the Indigenous arts and crafts market. In 1990, the Board passed the Indian Arts and Crafts Act, a federal law prohibiting the misrepresentation of consumer goods as being Native-made. Problems with the Act were evident from the outset, particularly concerning the Board's definition of Indigeneity. The Board specifies that to be Native or "Indian" means "any individual who is a member of an Indian tribe, or for the purposes of this section is certified as an Indian artisan by an Indian tribe," and defines an "Indian tribe" as any Indian tribe, band, nation, Alaska Native village, or other organized group or community which is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians," or "any Indian group that has been formally recognized as an Indian tribe by a State legislature or by a State commission or similar organization legislatively vested with State tribal recognition authority." The IACA requires that those selling under a government trademark of certified Indigenous origin to be

enrolled members of government recognized tribes. Problematically, not all Native American tribes are federally recognized, and for myriad reasons not all Indigenous individuals are enrolled members of tribes. The U.S. government's paternalist designation of who is "allowed" to identify as "Indian" reduces cultural heritage and lived experience to a marketable brand only usable by those that can prove their authenticity against a colonial system of measure.

The IACA is not only colonial in definition but also in execution, privileging the desires of non-Native consumers over the protections of Indigenous people themselves. Though the ostensible goal of this regulated market was to economically support Native Americans, it is widely understood that the 1935 formation of the IACB and the 1990 passage of the IACA were meant to serve primarily as consumer protections, "shoring up consumer confidence in the market by stemming the flow of fakes and ensuring that the only genuine and authentic goods are sold as Indian" (Hapiuk 1028). The IACB defines the act as a "truth-in-advertising law," meant to protect customers from fraudulent products. Authenticity is preserved for the sake of the consumer. With their purchase, these non-Native consumers attempt to own not only a cultural product but a piece of culture itself. The craft itself becomes almost insignificant in comparison with the importance of the Native-made trademark. Meanwhile, as Jennie D. Woltz points out in her analysis of the IACA, "Since the Act still permits the sale of fake goods as long as sellers do not hold such wares out as Indian-made, for undiscriminating consumers who are ambivalent as to the authenticity of their purchases, the initiative of the Act may be for naught, as fake goods will still compete with authentic Indian goods in the eyes of such consumers because of their attractively lower price points" (447). Thus, whether the consumer seeks Indigenous authenticity or simply an Indigenous aesthetic, the IACA protects their consumption. While the law claims to protect and preserve Indigenous rights to their culture, it does little more than establish a

trademark to reassure concerned customers without actually challenging appropriative crafts or designs.

The real impact of the IACA has been felt not by fraudulent producers claiming Indigenous origin, but rather by the Indigenous people the law intended to help. Only a few cases have been won on behalf of Native tribes under this act. Notably, one producer was taken to court after he convinced a village in the Philippines to change its name to Zuni so that he might produce and sell imitation Native crafts branded "Made in Zuni"—which implied that the goods were made by the Zuni tribe in Zuni, New Mexico (Hapiuk 1044). More often, the act bred anxiety among unenrolled Indigenous individuals, discouraging them from identifying themselves or their art as a part or product of their culture and heritage. Hapiuk's "Of Kitch and Kachinas" recalls the example of the Museum of the Five Civilized Tribes in Muskogee, Oklahoma: the museum closed its doors on December 1, 1990, two days after the IACA was passed, for fear of being shut down and fined by the government. new law. "While the museum was certain that 'real' Indians had created the art it displayed," Hapiuk writes, "it was uncertain whether these artists would be deemed 'Indian' under the terms of the IACA" (1011). While the Act encouraged non-Native producers to find loopholes in the law—adopting suggestively Native imagery and taglines while hiding the true origin of the product in small print or on easily removable stickers—Native artisans and artists must jump through hoops just to identify themselves on their product packaging or storefront. In execution, the law does little to help Native producers, instead focusing on legitimizing the market for conscientious non-Native consumers.

More localized authentication efforts have similarly infringed on Native cultural autonomy and economic power. At the Portal of the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, New

Mexico, individuals from the Pueblo, Navajo, Hopi, and Zuni tribes sell their wares to tourists in the plaza. This economic outlet is especially important for these tribes—in 1990, 85% of Zuni people and 37% of Hopi people claimed art and craftwork as being their primary or secondary source of income (Woltz 456). To this end, in 1978 the Museum of New Mexico passed an act that limited sales at the Portal to "authentic Indian arts and crafts" only, meaning "any product which is Indian handcrafted and not made by machine or from unnatural materials, except stabilized or treated turquoise" (qtd. in Evans-Pritchard 292). Like the IACA, this ruling allegedly intended to preserve "Indian tradition and culture"; also like the IACA, the Museum's regulations revealed the incongruity between Western standards of authenticity and the shifting realities of Native culture and tradition. For example, the Museum's rules prohibit local, non-Native artisans from selling at the portal, therefore excluding Hispanic crafters whose cultural heritage is woven into Southwestern art; meanwhile, any individual enrolled in a tribe anywhere in North America could sell their wares at the Portal, regardless of their ties to the region (Evans-Pritchard 291-92). Additionally, the "handmade" specification of the Museum's regulation prevented even "authentic" Natives from using modern methods or machines to create their crafts—even the use of a pottery wheel negates authentic status, one artist complained to Deirdre Evans-Pritchard (294). The regulations on sales at the Portal, passed two decades before the IACA, function similarly in that they exist mainly to assure tourists and consumers that they are getting an authentically Indigenous experience. As Evans-Pritchard concludes, "the Portal market is now much more 'authentic'—as the museum and general public see it—than it ever was tradition"(294). As external forces attempt to preserve authentic Indigeneity (for non-Native Americans), they have inadvertently applied inauthentic standards to consumer crafts.

Appropriating an Aesthetic of Authenticity

While some national sports teams continue to represent themselves with caricatures of Native Americans, white American culture has become more self-assured over the course of the last century, relying less on a basis of Indigenous authenticity. Once the United States had established itself as a legitimate power on the world stage, the nation no longer needed the Indigenous counterculture—America became the culture. However, search engine results for Native American jewelry yield overwhelming results for turquoise jewelry, guaranteed to have been made by Native craftsmen. Clearly, the desert, its people, and turquoise continue to capture the minds of Americans. The identity crisis now appears to be happening at an individual level. From the hippie culture of the 1960s and the New Age movement of the 1980s to the current twenty-first century reaction to late-stage capitalism and consumerism, the Native American aesthetic, typified by imagery and artifacts of the American Southwest, is adopted by those looking to define themselves as against the dominant culture. Michael Parke-Taylor asserts that "Native Americans represented the perfect symbol of those marginalized and persecuted in contemporary American society": regardless of what group headed the counterculture movement, Native Americans provided the paradigm which they strove to achieve (1107).

The process of appropriating Zuni, Hopi, Navajo, Pueblo, and other Indigenous cultures and incorporating them into the counterculture aesthetics is one of fetishization. Aspects of these cultures—spiritual dances and ceremonies, daily tribal customs and practices, and the brightly colored gemstones with which they often adorned themselves—clearly appealed to generations of counterculture Americans searching for something sufficiently "Other" to define themselves within a hegemonic American culture that left them feeling lost, angry, and misunderstood. These alienated individuals sought to mark what they saw as their moral and spiritual difference

from dominant society with the pieces of a culture that they believed to be more authentically true to life than their current lives. What American counterculture actors throughout history have failed to realize is that by appropriating these cultural aspects to alter their Euro-American existences, they incorporate these fetishized pieces of culture into the Western framework, thus stripping them of the authenticity that their aesthetic use originally promised. Richard A. Rogers explains in his essay regarding the fetishization of Kokopelli, a Pueblo fertility figure, that in the process of commodifying culture, "meanings are attached to the commodity. These meanings are the (illusory) ends to which the commodity itself becomes the means of attainment, transforming it into a fetish. These meanings are reifications: Their artificiality must be obscured, collapsed into the object, enhancing the commodity's value as fetish and mystifying the relations and exploitations involved in its production" (Rogers 243-44). Since the American national consciousness's first contact with the desert and its peoples at the turn of the twentieth century, the existence, appearance, and particularly the turquoise adornment of these peoples have been fetishized to the point of abstraction, allowing Euro-Americans to contain their understandings of these cultures within objects, comprising costumes that they can throw on and cast off as they please.

During the Vietnam War, disaffected youths, mostly white and middle-class, rebelled against the dominant conservative culture by becoming hippies, joining a countercultural movement borrowed heavily from Euro-Americans' conceptions of Native cultures. Michael Parke-Taylor argues that these aesthetic adoptions were inspired in large part by the acts of political resistance being performed during the 1970s by Indigenous groups advocating for cultural autonomy, fishing and land rights, and tribal autonomy and self-governance (1107). Participating in these Indigenous movements as well as orchestrating their own, hippies attended

protests and sit-ins while wearing their anti-Western ensemble of long hair, loose clothing, and layers of beaded jewelry. Both the actions and the aesthetic of the hippie movement were grounded in Native cultures. Janis Joplin, iconic for setting trends in hippie fashion, exemplified this look in her 1970 photoshoot with David Gahr. As was characteristic of the hippie style, Joplin's hair and clothing are loose, she wears an ornately beaded belt, and strands of gemstones cover her neck and arms. In establishing themselves as outside of the American mainstream, hippies like Joplin appropriated aspects of Indigeneity. Ironically, the hippies' anti-American, anti-imperialist movement defined itself in part with the same acts of appropriation through which the hegemonic American identity was formed. While Gahr's photos are in black and white, many of the necklaces and bracelets Joplin wears appear to incorporate turquoise stones, signaling once again back to the desert and the romantic ideas of simplicity, spirituality, and the naturalness of life that resides there.

While the hippies' counterculture movement repeated some of the appropriative actions of hegemonic American culture, their actual engagement with Indigenous issues and activism benefitted the Indigenous communities from which they borrowed, lending a degree of "authenticity" to their aesthetic. Sherry L. Smith, in an interview with Adrian Jawort posted on the *Indian Country Today's* website, details the shift from active engagement to more appropriative exploitation. Drawing from the research she conducted for her book, *Hippies, Indians and the Fight for Red Power*, Smith explains that some Native activists saw hippies as "politically useful" to their causes, both for the increased numbers represented by their physical presence as well as for the cultural attention that their whiteness garnered (Smith). College students and famous white celebrities like Marlon Brando helped to bring public awareness to Indigenous issues, and their allyship proved valuable to the "Red Power" movements—though

Smith acknowledges that many members of Native communities remained distrustful of the hippies and "what they represented." It was not until the engagement became less politically active in the late 1970s that Smith found "the idea that whites were there to steal the culture" began to gain traction in Native activist spaces. While the impetus for their engagement may have been based on stereotypical ideas of Indigenous Americans as "people who lived simply, lived off the land, and lived lives of deep spirituality" (Smith), their engagement with the Indigenous cultures they borrowed from was tangible and meaningful. Exchange, rather than exploitation, characterized this intercultural relationship, though still staged within the settler-colonial framework that privileged the bodies and voices of the white hippies. The hippie movement's general involvement with Indigenous communities was in many ways an authentic engagement.

Beginning in the 1970s the New Age movement developed in part as a response to the alienation felt by those living under capitalism. Lisa Aldred describes "a significant number of white affluent suburban and urban middle-aged baby-boomers complain[ing] of feeling uprooted from cultural traditions, community belonging, and spiritual meaning" (329). They, as did their nationalist American predecessors, turned to the seemingly blank slate of the desert as space onto which they may reinvent themselves. Repeating the trends of the past century, New Agers seek to adopt Native identity and spirituality through purchase: attending workshops, buying books, and collecting sacred objects. Aldred argues that "non-Indians feel that their own lives are increasingly 'unreal' and 'inauthentic,' so they imagine a preindustrial, pre-European America where things were 'real' and 'authentic,' not representations but originals" (343). New Age entrepreneurs capitalized on this American desire by indiscriminately appropriating material aspects of Indigenous cultures—bundles of sage, feathers, pipes, and jewelry—and selling these

pieces to those seeking meaning in their alienated American life. The perpetrators of this appropriation, derisively dubbed "plastic shamans" by Indigenous objectors, took advantage of Americans' alienation and offered up as a solution the stereotypes of deep, mystical meaning attributed to Indigenous cultures. While alleging themselves to be spiritual middlemen, these plastic shamans actually act as unauthorized vendors of Indigeneity, commodifying aspects of Native life, culture, and tradition while depriving New Agers of the authentic engagement with community, culture, and spirituality that hippies found through their activism. Instead, New Agers were only able to decorate their isolated spaces with pieces that promised authentic meaning and value, still separated from others by the commerciality of most New Age culture.

Unable to solve their own ails, New Agers rely on the mystical spiritualism that they ascribe to non-Western cultures to reground their identities in the real. Practitioners of New Age alternative medicine and spiritual healing combine stolen bits of Native traditions and Asian "Eastern" medicine, focusing primarily on herbs, oils, and stones. Within this framework, turquoise plays an important role as a chakra stone (a concept taken from early Hinduism), responsible for moderating the throat chakra and solving a range of problems including respiratory, immune, and digestive issues, rheumatism, anxiety, bad luck, and spiritual imbalance ("Turquoise Meaning..."). These claims, presented by *Tiny Rituals*, an online New Age store, are grounded in a cursory understanding of Navajo, Zuni, ancient Egyptian, Persian, and Hindu beliefs, as well as the Chinese principles of Feng Shui. "In our more modern world," the curator of the *Tiny Rituals* website writes, "Turquoise is synonymous with Native American culture," referring not to specific tribes or even the broader region but instead a monolithic pan-Indian stereotype represented by the stone. By drawing from these scattered cultural values regarding turquoise and generalizing them into a single sweeping mystical meaning, a New Ager can

confidently use the stone as a "spirit guide" and cure-all "tonic for the spirit." Thus, complex and deeply significant aspects of Native and other non-Western cultures are worn like costume jewelry, allowing consumers to assert to themselves and to others that they are participating in an authentic cultural tradition while actually engaging at a shallow, commercial level, purchasing culture and spirituality for a few dollars through an online store.

In the twenty-first century era of late-stage capitalism, entire industries have been birthed from the desire to appear effortless, natural, and free, continuing to draw on Southwestern Indigenous aesthetics as they do so. Ever increasing isolation and alienation, such as prompted many to seek meaning in the New Age spirituality of the late twentieth century, has inspired a wave of nostalgia to trend across the West. In many ways, nostalgia for the counterculture movements of the past functions in contemporary culture very similarly to stereotypes of primitive and simple Indigenous life: as yearnings for America's "more authentic" past. The opportunity to engage meaningfully with life—as "authentic" Indigenous tribes are understood to, as the hippies of the sixties and the New Agers of the seventies did or tried to do—is denied to most working and middle class Americans. Corporate culture has become dominant, encouraging people to sell their lives to their careers and then pay the money they earn back into the system. Such a cultural system leaves little room for any authentic "realness": no sense of individuality or community, no physical or spiritual connection to the natural world, no intrinsic meaning to life. Young millennial social media users, as generations of Americans before them, respond to the inauthenticity of their lives by once again appropriating the aesthetic of Indigeneity, particularly the stereotypical, romantic view of the southwestern desert tribes.

The American tradition of appropriating the desert Native aesthetic continues to be carried out in the tags of image-heavy platforms and craft-sharing websites such as Pinterest and

Etsy. With over 450 million active users, Pinterest allows individuals to curate mosaic "boards" centered around a particular topic, theme, or aesthetic. On the site, hundreds of boards and thousands of posts are tagged with some variation of "southwest," picturesque desert scenes scattered between countless pieces of home decor decorated with cacti, coyotes, Kokopelli figures, and geometric diamond patterns described as "Navajo-inspired," "ethnic," or "tribal." Tellingly, another tag commonly used in conjunction with "southwest" is "boho": short for "bohemian," the term has been used to refer to the Romani people who migrated from northwest India to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Similar to the romanticization of Native southwestern tribes, the nomadic lifestyle of the Romani has become synonymous with "principles or ideas such as spontaneity, sporadic employment, lack of income, continuous improvisation, by living from hand to mouth and by trying to enjoy life from day to day instead of subordinating to fixed (work) schedules" (Eikhof and Haunschild 236). While a gross oversimplification of Romani culture and their continued struggles, the coupling of "boho" and "southwest" aesthetic tags speaks to the continued role of the American Southwest as a modern counterculture identity. Stereotypes about the culture and lifestyle of the Pueblo, Zuni, Hopi, and Navajo peoples lead to them being seen as "primitive," tribes of "noble savages [that] live in a highly desirable state of purity and harmony," not unlike popular conceptions of the Romani (Rogers 236). This idea is perhaps best captured in a Pinterest board created by user Sue Fraunberger called "Hippies, Gypsies, & Turquoise," whose pins include pictures of dreamcatchers, turquoise-laden white women, and a "gypsy proverb" reading, "we are all wanderers on this earth. Our hearts are full of wonder, and our souls are deep with dreams" (Sue Fraunberger). The aesthetic to which Romani and southwestern Native Americans, the desert,

and turquoise have become part and parcel is appropriated by those who explicitly wish to be free spirits living simple, natural lives of deep spirituality and intense meaning.

The ubiquity of the association between Indigenous people in the American Southwest and "primitive" living is known and appropriated on a surprisingly global scale. Craft sales site Etsy yields over 240,000 results for the search "Native American," including graphic t-shirts, framed art and photographs, musical instruments, jewelry, among other culturally significant objects such as sweetgrass and dreamcatchers. One of the top results comes from a seller named iKalindi, who makes "Native American style" beaded jewelry (Polskaya). iKalindi's designs as well as the color palette she uses draw on the desert aesthetic—geometric patterns created with earth-toned beads, also incorporating the characteristic turquoise-blue color into almost all of her pieces. iKalindi's profile states that she makes "Jewelry for Wild and Free Souls," a value that is apparently given to her pieces by their "Native American style" and "boho." Most interestingly, iKalindi is operated out of Tomsk, Russia by a woman named Kalindi Polskaya. Kalindi and her three fellow "shop members" are Russian, neither Native nor non-Native Americans, yet able to capitalize off of the aesthetic of southwestern American Indigenous authenticity with more than 1,700 sales to date. While Kalindi claims, "I do not invent many of my jewelry - they came to me from the spiritual world," the inspiration behind her designs is evident and expressly stated in every product description. Further, due to the national boundaries of the IACA, Kalindi and other artists may freely label their products as being authentically "Native American" to markets outside the U.S. By doing nothing more than artfully arranging carefully chosen colored beads, iKalindi effectively appropriates an aesthetic and identity she has no cultural or geographical basis for. The fetishization of Indigeneity has completely divorced the names and designs from their cultural sources, exploiting "Navajo-inspired" designs and references to Hopi and Zuni

peoples to market products while the source cultures struggle to preserve their cultural autonomy and economic vitality.

The history of American appropriation of the southwestern desert tribes' aesthetic follows a path of fetishization. The tourist economy of the early twentieth-century, though driven by fetishistic, colonial depictions in literature and photographs, did foster in-person interactions between Anglo Americans and southwestern Indigenous peoples, which led to a romanticized appreciation for the people and their cultures. While appropriating various Indigenous cultural practices, motifs, and images to serve their own counterculture aesthetic, the hippies of the sixties did exhibit "a genuine engagement with contemporary Native American issues" (Parke-Taylor 1108). By the time the New Age movement began to trend across the country, however, white people had moved from engagement to erasure, "Plastic Medicine People" and "Shake and Bake Shamans" claiming that their mentorship under "'authentic Native American medicine people'" enabled them to appropriate and share different tribes' religious beliefs and customs with their followers and fellow practitioners (Aldred 331). In the modern era, the objectification of Native peoples has become absolute: similar to the way that state names, car models, sports mascots, and company logos have been divorced from their Native contexts to serve America's cultural construction, so have severed pieces of Native cultures, specifically those of the southwestern tribes, been fetishized for the purposes of American counterculture movements. Turquoise, as the stone becomes rarer to find, is represented by colored dye on fabric or lacquer on fingernails, the rare and valuable desert stone abstracted into small splashes of color meant to harken back to the desert that provided the foundation for America's cultural identity.

Reclaiming Authenticity

Authenticity has been defined, then corrupted and co-opted by non-Natives, reshaped to fit whatever movement is the moment, yet actual Indigenous art and craft production continues to be held up to intense scrutiny. White American conceptions of Native culture impose fixed, static definitions of "authenticity" onto the fluid and changing cultures of Indigenous creators, narrowing the scope of art they are permitted to make while maintaining their authenticity in the public view¹. In her case study of a Santa Fe-based Indigenous art exhibit that debuted in Venice, Italy, Nancy M. Mithlo argues that "rationalizing arts commerce as a means of self-esteem or cultural centers as a tool of social empowerment is no longer justifiable as an effective means of self-expression. In essence, tribal endeavors that seek to gain acceptance through the traditional arts channels, the market or the museum, are reacting to the ignorance of others, not engaging in a proactive stance of self-determination or legitimacy" (Mithlo 231). She references the exhibit's fears of a Disney copyright strike over a factual retelling of *Pocahontas* and the Western dismissal of a communally-made artwork that refused to name a single author, concluding that as long as Native art continues to be evaluated through a non-Native lens, authentic expression will be suppressed. Instead, contemporary Native artists are expected to fulfill ethnographic expectations of Indigeneity "uncontaminated" by Western influences, remitting white Americans

¹ Whether issues of authenticity are at all a useful discussion within the discourse of Indigenous cultural rights is debatable. As I discuss in "Turquoise and Indigenous Cultural Significance" and "Negotiating the Third Space," expectations of cultural purity and static primitivism continue to be imposed on Indigenous peoples by white Westerners. Non-Native "Pretendians" use DNA tests to claim distant Native ancestry (recently and notably Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren), while issues of blood quantum and federal tribal enrollment prevent many individuals with more "legitimate" tribal relations from doing the same (TallBear). Who is "allowed" to claim authentic Indigeneity is a difficult and complex issue rooted in a colonial system which demands to label and categorize its people. Indigenous intercommunity discourse is beyond the scope of this paper; I comment only on the narrow definition of what it means to be "authentically Native" which is colonially imposed by non-Native Westerners.

of their ancestral history of colonial violence. At the same time, this demand for a static Indigenous authenticity relegated to the past allows for present day Euro-Americans to claim those cultures as their own heritage. Meanwhile, authenticity to Indigenous people has always been and continues to be more complex and fluid than can be understood within the Western framework.

Turquoise holds a unique position in the conflict over authenticity due to the rarity of the true stone. In 2014, The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Sante Fe, New Mexico hosted an exhibit, "Turquoise, Water, Sky: The Stone and Its Meaning," featuring several modern pieces of turquoise adornment as well as archeologically recovered pendants and cabochons. In a YouTube video published by the museum as part of a series meant to accompany the exhibit, "Turquoise: Real or Fake?", Maxine McBrinn compares two archaeological pendants: one made of true turquoise, the other, a piece of wood painted with malachite paint to achieve the blue-green color of the real stone. "Turquoise is important in the Southwest because of its color, not because of its chemical composition," McBrinn explains, noting that the rarity of the stone prompted some to seek out alternatives. She goes on to show several other examples of artificial turquoise pieces made out of glass, plastic, and "lower quality" stones, explaining that each "fake" would have been considered sufficient for Indigenous use because of their blue coloration. Thus, Indigenous authenticity completely subverts Western standards of authenticity. The scarcity of turquoise necessitates this exception: even the Museum of New Mexico's strict regulations regarding authenticity in cultural craft sales offers a caveat that allows for the use of "stabilized or treated turquoise," referring to lower-quality turquoise that has been enforced with plastic to enhance the stone's hardness and color. The chemical "realness" of the stone matters

less to the Indigenous evaluation of its authentic value than does the utility of the stone's color for ornamental and spiritual use.

The Turquoise Ledge, the memoir of Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko, further demonstrates the fluidity of authentic turquoise use outside of the commercial sphere. Silko's memoir follows her thoughts during several walks through the arroyo near her home, where she often finds small turquoise stones and pebbles strewn about the ground. However, in her first chapter she notes, "in my research I learned the turquoise stones I'd found were technically not turquoise by chrysocolla which is a minor copper ore...turquoise, malachite, and chrysocolla are often found with one another so they all were called 'turquoise' in the old days" (Silko 6). Carrying on this tradition, she refers to every blue stone she finds as turquoise, marvelling at her "infrequent" and "wonderful" discoveries of the stones (188). She references the meanings that the local Indigenous peoples have for the stone, linking it to the Nahua Star Beings and Tlaloc, God of the Rain (229, 144). Silko also lists several uses of turquoise: historically, the stone was ground into paint to "adorn those chosen to be made into 'jewels' for Tlaloc" (260); in more contemporary times, Laguna and Hispanic villagers painted their doors and window frames turquoise to ward off witches, and wore bright blue stamps from Bull Durham tobacco bags on their foreheads to ease headache pains (192). Both Silko's own treatment of turquoise as well as her accounts of her neighbors show that authenticity cannot be found in chemical composition. Rather, individual attitudes and cultural contexts give turquoise its authentic meaning, a value which is determined as much by the symbolic color as by the stone itself. Authentically Indigenous use and value of turquoise subverts Western understandings and attempts at appropriative use of the stone. The history of the Euro-American obsession with Indigenous turquoise represents a clear belief that adopting aspects of material culture will allow individuals

to appropriate cultural authenticity as well; meanwhile, actual Indigenous perspectives show that authenticity depends entirely on cultural context. Aesthetics can be appropriated, but authenticity cannot.

Although natural turquoise grows increasingly rare, demands for the use of real, "authentic" turquoise continue to proliferate, including within the Indigenous commodity craft market. Dozens of online articles and YouTube videos claim to teach consumers how to recognize genuine turquoise from fakes. Evidence of this trend can be found in the comment section of the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture's video. Of the eighty-three comments on the museum's video, many viewers express frustration that McBrinn has not taught them how to identify fake turquoise from the chemically real stone. Several commented that the five-minute video was a "waste of time" and "not helpful," with one user criticizing McBrinn as being one of the many anthropologists "act[ing] as apologists for what is obviously an industry that doesn't have any real turquoise left to sell" (boo bun). User Tessa Thurman's reply captures the prevailing attitude of the commenters, writing, "value is great, but if you WANT natural turquoise because you value BOTH the composition of turquoise AND the color/meaning then you want to drop your hard earned money on REAL turquoise, not some fake narrative about color/meaning/value on a fake/faux stone that is INTENTIONALLY being sold to you as real turquoise." Though she alleges an interest in the "color/meaning" of turquoise, Thurman ultimately sees cultural value and the symbolism of color as a "fake narrative" meant to pass off fake (i.e. "inauthentic") turquoise as real. This delegation of a few dozen YouTube viewers unironically reproduces Western arguments regarding the authenticity of Indigenous culture and craft, imposing non-Native values onto pieces of Native material culture.

Negotiating the Third Space

Despite the centuries of cultural violence experienced by Indigenous peoples around the world, it would be faulty and reductive to assume that authentic culture has been corrupted or destroyed by outside influences. Expecting cultural purity reproduces colonial stereotypes and fetishizations of the "noble savage," frozen in time and doomed to disappear with the advancement of Western society. Moreover, Doreen Martinez notes the derisive idea of "Native bling: turquoise, feathers, long dark hair, and silver badges of authenticity worn and embraced because of acceptable visible truth of lineage and history for the wearer and possibly others," and argues against it as "another example of intellectual imperialism, because there is a failure and embedded inferior premise that negates a consciousness, possible pride, and/or...involvement of Native peoples in these acts of authenticity for consumption" (566). Post-colonial scholars argue for a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous tribes as participants in, rather than victims of, cultural tourism: actors operating in the frontier "'zone of trickster,'" negotiating their representations and the consumption of their culture by outsiders (Owens qtd. in Martinez 550). History shows that Western settler-colonialists demand access to all, and will take that which is not readily given to them. By actively participating in cultural tourism and the material culture market, Indigenous people present a version of authenticity that pacifies Western appetites while preserving the privacy of sacred beliefs, customs, and traditions. David Howes references the Hopi, with their long history of cultural exploitation by Euro-Americans "playing Indian," as an example of this negotiation, explaining that "the Hopi have no objection to the commercialization of certain limited aspects of their culture. However, the point remains that such commodification must not encroach upon the sacred" (155). Indigenous peoples in the American Southwest and across the continent control the construction of their representations

within the Western framework by creating a frontier "third space" and presenting an acceptable version of authenticity.

As a piece of easily accessible and freely shared culture, turquoise provides an exemplary model for third space negotiation. While Hopi, Zuni, Navajo, and Pueblo peoples place great cultural value and spiritual meaning on the stone and its color, these same tribes have sold turquoise jewelry and crafts to non-Native consumers for over a century. When natural turquoise became rare and difficult to mine, Native lapidarists used alternative materials for their own ceremonial pieces, and drew matrices onto lower quality turquoise to appear more authentic to discerning Euro-American consumers (McBrinn). To those with genuine appreciation for Indigenous authenticity, these "fake" pieces are true to Native cultures, as they retain the blue color that gives the stone its meaning. Instead, most members of the dominant culture aim not just to appreciate but appropriate cultural authenticity for their own purposes, failing to realize that in doing so they remove the stone from the context that gave it its authenticity and imbue it with their own stereotypical impressions of mysticism and romantic naturalism. Richard A. Rogers's analysis of hegemonic readings of prehistoric Pueblo rock art can be applied to outside understandings of any aspect of material culture; he writes: "dissemination is applied when no reply is presumed to be possible, when the reading of traces is all there is. But reply is possible. The reply—involving interaction with living Native peoples and all the implications thereof—is precisely what the disseminatory rhetoric licenses visitors to avoid, and along with that comes the denial of authentic subjectivity and indigenous authority" (Rogers 62). True authenticity comes from authentic engagement; fetishistic commercialism will only ever be just that.

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